

YUMA PACIFIC – SOUTHWEST SECTION (AIHA YPSW)
47th Annual Meeting (2nd Virtual Meeting Due to COVID-19 restrictions)
“Adaptation of Science, Risk and Culture in the New World”
January 20-21, 2022

Recap of the 1st day presented at the beginning of the 2nd day by Fred Boelter, YPSW President 2021

Before beginning the second day of our meeting, allow me to share a brief recap of yesterday beginning with a Proem to Summarize the First Day: *Contemplative, Reflective, Visionary*.

Last year at this time, in many ways, hope for an end to the pandemic was on the horizon and palpable. Record breaking public health science came to the rescue. At this time last year, I had already received my first dose of Moderna and for sure fully expected an in-person meeting in 2022, but here we are even after 2nd and 3rd doses, virtually once again for the second time in our 47 year history as an AIHA Section. I suppose, hope is perpetually always on the horizon for many in the United States and around the world. I trust we can all be together 5 months from now in Nashville for the AIHce. We shall see.

An article just a few weeks ago in the LA Times on December 26, 2021 was entitled: Instead of unity and immunity: a year of stupidity and insanity on an unimaginable scale. I share a number of sentiments about 2021 expressed in that December 26th article. Maybe you do as well. (www.latimes.com/business/story/2021-12-26/farewell-to-2021-the-stupidest-year-in-american-history).

Yesterday we heard terrific, brilliant, and insightful presentations grounded in what we have and have not learned over the past year as well as visions for the future of work, the pandemic, and our profession. We also had, as is typical of the YPSW experience, a probative, respectful, and thoughtful Q&A.

A few quick takeaways from yesterday:

Dr. Howard explored the endemic risk as one of perception of what society will find acceptable (not unacceptable is the definition of safe). Public health initiatives are prospectively perceived and received as an overreaction and retroactively perceived and viewed as not enough. There is no silver bullet and there will always be residual risk.

Michael Brandt noted that great plans, regardless of how great, need to be resilient and adaptable. I am reminded of the 2006 TED Prize lecture on Eradicating Smallpox by Dr. Larry Brilliant. When you have seen one pandemic, you have only seen one pandemic. No two are alike, but the key to control is early detection and early response. (www.bing.com/videos/search?q=2006+TED+Prize+lecture).

Dr. Piacentino underscored the importance of mastering the art of risk communication and storytelling. Data matters to us, but technical advising is a poor tool. If there was not already a Dr. Brilliant, the presentation by Dr. Piacentino was surely a TED Prize quality lecture. Honest, genuine, from the heart.

Frank Hearl once again demonstrated why he was this year’s Clayton Award recipient. A call to action to help assess the TSCA/OSHA interface challenge of defining and characterizing “unreasonable risk”.

Mark Ames noted the Supreme Court needs to be compellingly convinced that public health and workplace risk is real, identifiable, and that significant risk reduction can and will result from regulations. One of our challenges is identifying the place of work and whether the employer controls that place.

Larry Sloan also called us to action. The demands for our skills and capabilities are expanding into ever wider swim lanes. We as subject matter experts and AIHA members, not just AIHA HQ staff, must step up to police the misinformation, disinformation, attacks and abusive language that may be posted on Catalyst and other social media. As Dr. Piacentino suggested, we must become skilled at communication regardless of how knowledgeable, irrational, thoughtful, biased, angry, well-intentioned, or opinionated we or our audience might be. It has never been easy communicating with humans nor easy simply being human.

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Recap of the 2nd day

The second day’s theme boiled down to the following... We are a profession that emerged during the industrial revolution some 200 years ago as a special case that grew out of the public health discipline. Increasingly, our “workplace focus” is indistinguishable from a “public focus”. It is not about the width of our swim lane, it is about the size of the pool. Healthier Workplaces, A Healthier World is our call to action.

Thomas Grumbles BGC update. Considerable work has gone into developing a Code of Ethics across all the member organizations of BGC. Also a virtually proctored testing program has been successfully developed in response to COVID-19 restrictions that hampered in-person testing. The focus of planning was assuring the integrity of virtual testing results.

Frank Mortl ACGIH update. ACGIH has had a number of successful years and continues developing TLVs as well as training and education programs.

John Mulhausen AIHA President emphasized Accelerating Advancements in Our Science, Practice, and Standards of Care. An ambitious effort to define the science, improve judgments, and improve decision-making outcomes. There is a Standards of Care Advisory Group focusing on building out a summary of risk-critical practices.

A.J. Faas “Follow the Science? Towards Agentive Relations with Hazards and Reciprocal Knowledge Production”. This anthropology oriented presentation might have been a headscratcher for some through an exposure assessment lens, but it was terrific through a human, cultural, and risk perspective lens. Learn to see strange things as familiar and familiar things as strange. Following the science does not lead to good governance in everyday life. All knowledge is socially produced. “Natural disasters” (force majeure?) is a misnomer and use of the term absolves society of the resulting consequences. The disasters from something “natural” are the result of poor planning and decisions by politicians and humans. Cultures throughout history have learned to live with, adapt to, and recover from natural events. The worst disasters today occur among low socioeconomic groups who are preyed upon, displaced, and marginalized. The key to management of “natural disasters” is to learn from historical cultures “convivir” or co-existence with, for example, ‘The Volcano’ that can both take life and renew life. What life on earth, like it or not, doesn’t benefit from co-existence. Our profession could benefit from learning how to craft compelling futures out of the values of others “not like us” rather than simply impose our values on others.

Gavin Huntley-Fenner “Re-examining the Cognitive Science of Risk in the COVID-19 Pandemic Era”. Uncertainty drove short-term behavior, but longer term misinformation continues to affect us. Unfortunately, what has been revealed is that numerous topics that don’t normally have a politicized valence can be weaponized.

Group Discussion on the Grand Challenges (GC) for the Profession, Chris Laszcz-Davis, Thomas Grumbles, & Larry Sloan. Possible GC themes from a November 2021 AIHA Focus Group include Climate Change, Remote Work, Precarious Work Situations, Ending Preventable Diseases, Ending Disparities, Equal Workplace Protections. The GC task force is currently working on aligning a number of the 17 UN sustainability goals with the AIHA community. Visit the AIHA GC Landing Page.

(NOTE: This recap of our 2022 YPSW 2-day meeting is a summary of takeaways by Fred Boelter (current past-President) and do not represent a consensus of all takeaways from our 2-days of robust, terrific and wide-ranging presentations, many of which were recorded. Let me know your thoughts on the 47th YPSW meeting, future topics, and ways to improve our communication skills. boelterinc@gmail.com, 312-560-9113)