

The 11th IOHA International Scientific Conference



Prof. Gurumurthy Ramachandran was the Chair of the International Scientific Committee of the 11th IOHA International Scientific Conference

The International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA) organises a scientific conference every three years. The 11th IOHA International Scientific Conference took place from 24 to 26 September, 2018 in Washington, D.C., in the USA. The Conference is a truly special occurrence and is held at venues across the globe, drawing an international audience of multidisciplinary professionals with a focus on worker health protection and exposure control. The theme for the 2018 Conference was 'Bringing Better Health to Workers Worldwide'. The Conference attracted more than 500 participants from 36 countries, with close to 200 speakers from 25 countries.

An International Scientific Committee (ISC), chaired by Prof. Gurumurthy Ramachandran (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Maryland, USA), was established to assist with reviewing proposals and had a tough task selecting submissions from the more than 100 that were received, for what turned out to be a tightly-packed schedule of high-value offerings. Main features were:

- 11 professional development courses (PDCs) that attracted over 250 participants;
- 57 educational sessions – all with an international focus, and highly ranked by participants post-conference; and
- the 8th Control Banding Workshop.

The Conference was officially opened by the outgoing IOHA President (2017-2018), Ms Andrea Hiddinga, followed by plenary speaker, Ms Nancy Leppink, the Chief of the Labour Administration, Labour Inspection and Occupational Safety and Health branch of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Ms Leppink's keynote address summarised the ILO's history, affirmed the organisation's continued relevance, and argued that the prosperity associated with globalisation has done little to protect the world's most vulnerable workers. Ms Leppink further stated that the ILO is also attempting to address changes wrought by modern technology, giving rise to the 'gig economy' and creating a class



IOHA Collaboration Award recipients, L to R: Mr Peter-John 'Jakes' Jacobs (IOHA President and WHWB member), Dr Seshananda Sanjel (Kathmandu University School of Medical Science), Mr Homraj Acharya (Global Fairness Initiative), and Dr Steven Thygerson (Brigham Young University and WHWB member)

of workers largely beyond the reach of occupational health and safety protection and services.

Other sessions highlighted the latest developments in occupational hygiene, and included sessions on real-time sampling to aid decision-making and provide actionable data, exposure modelling, the use of robots for exposure characterisation, new sampling techniques, hazard characterisation, and sophisticated epidemiological studies. Other presenters told of managing projects in a country with an Ebola outbreak and providing relief and assistance after a hurricane disaster in Puerto Rico, highlighting the crucial role played by the occupational hygiene discipline in first responses. There was also a panel discussion on global health challenges.

The volunteer non-profit international organisation – Workplace Health Without Borders (WHWB) – presented a session on 24 September, where WHWB Board member Ms Lydia Renton and fellow WHWB members mentioned that more than two billion workers lack basic access to the expertise and services of occupational safety, health and hygiene professionals. They highlighted strategies and opportunities for volunteers to engage in projects that will help support occupational hygiene efforts around the world, especially in economically developing countries, and in vulnerable worker populations.

The Conference provided the perfect platform to present the IOHA Collaboration and Lifetime Achievement Awards. The Collaboration Award honours collaboration between an occupational/industrial hygiene organisation and other countries or organisations, to share ideas and technologies to improve the calibre of occupational/industrial hygiene worldwide. Nominated by the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA), the Brick Kiln Committee of WHWB and 'Global Fairness Initiative' (GFI)

were voted the winners for achieving outstanding results through collaboration, leading to better global understanding of brick kiln hazards. They worked together to establish a dedicated centre at Kathmandu University in Nepal to collect data on sampling, analysis, medical information, extent of child labour, and hazardous exposures in brick kilns. Through this international database, researchers around the world will be able to coordinate information on health and safety issues in brick kilns better. The Centre will provide valuable insights into working conditions and child labour in brick kilns, effective exposure measurement techniques, and solutions for controlling exposure and protecting worker health.

The Lifetime Achievement Award honours individuals who have made significant contributions to the promotion and development of occupational hygiene practices that improve the health and welfare of workforces around the globe. To be eligible, award candidates must have been working in the field of occupational hygiene for at least 15 years, and must still be active in the field. The award criteria include a substantial contribution to basic science, the establishment of occupational hygiene programmes, the promotion of the quality of occupational hygiene services, and/or a contribution to the harmonisation of occupational hygiene practice. Furthermore, the awardee's accomplishments are required

to exemplify IOHA's objectives. The recipient of this award was Mr Roger Alesbury (MSc, Dip OH, CFFOH) of the Occupational Hygiene Training Association (OHTA), who shared his hard-earned wisdom, and stressed that the key to creating lasting, positive change is persistence in the face of obstacles. Another key message from his presentation was '...the need to engage and communicate with employers about the need for quality health protection and the role of occupational hygiene training. By listening to employer concerns, training and development programmes can be tailor-made to suit local needs'.

If there is only one international conference dedicated to the occupational hygiene discipline that you can or would like to attend, the IOHA International Scientific Conference needs to be 'the one'. With early planning, you can turn this into a reality. The 12th IOHA International Scientific Conference will be held in Daegu, South Korea, from 16 to 22 October 2020. See you there!

Report by:

*Peter-John 'Jakes' Jacobs
IOHA President (2018-2019)*

*SAIOH Council Member 2019: International Liaison Portfolio
e-mail: pjjacobs@sedulitas.co.za*



IOHA Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, Mr Roger Alesbury



The panel discussion on global health challenges was a well-attended session



The theme of the 12th IOHA International Scientific Conference, to be held in South Korea in 2020, will be 'Bridging Gaps in Occupational Hygiene Development, Opening New Horizons'

All photographs courtesy of IOHA

Visit www.occhealth.co.za to see more photographs from this event.