

Faces of the Profession



**Shelley
Wheeling-Park**

Faces of the Profession is intended to introduce you to some of the many industrial hygienists making a difference to workers and the community around the world. This month we hear from Shelley Wheeling-Park, director of environmental health and safety and regional safety officer for Kaiser Permanente in Honolulu.

Wheeling-Park, a CIH, CSP and CHMM, has a master's of public health in environmental and occupational health sciences from the University of Hawai'i.

Wheeling-Park is past president of the AIHA Hawai'i Section. She attended the inaugural AIHA Future Leaders Institute and is a co-chair of the Health Care Working Group.

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You joined the ranks of management at your company relatively recently. What have you learned from this transition?

I'm a hands-on person, so it has been difficult for me to let go of the day-to-day operations because I really enjoy working closely with staff while developing programs.

Also, in my previous position, I provided input into the development and operation of the department. Now I'm accountable for the outcome of the development and operation of the department. That's a big change. I realized that to have a successful department, you need to have a structure and a successful staff. If your staff is not successful, the department will not be successful. My priority is to set up my staff for success by providing them with the skills and resources to optimize their performance while creating clear expectations and a vision for the department.

What skills have been most valuable to you in your work as director of EHS?

There are three leadership values that I aspire to maintain. First is honesty and integrity. All of my decisions are based on what is the right and ethical thing to do. Second is leading by example. I try to "walk the talk" by doing what I say I will do, and I never ask someone to do something that I would not do. Finally, it's communication. It does not matter what position you are in, if you are unable to communicate with people you will not be an effective leader.

I would highly encourage members to attend a leadership workshop. Kaiser Permanente invests considerable resources in its staff by providing leadership seminars because everyone is a leader. I also was privileged to attend the first AIH Future Leaders Institute. Common themes that have emerged from these leadership workshops include conflict resolution and consensus building; understanding the dynamics and development of teams; developing strategic and decision-making skills; and understanding your needs, tendencies, strengths and opportunities and how to leverage these attributes and build rapport with others by identifying your unique leadership style.

What special challenges are involved in industrial hygiene work in Hawai'i?

There is limited manufacturing "industry" in Hawai'i, so we do not receive the type of exposure to industrial issues that many of our counterparts on the mainland might encounter. However, we do have construction, military, hospitality, refineries, utilities, maritime transportation, airline, health care and education. Although I am not aware of any unique exposures in these industries, there is one commonality that affects each of these industries: We are on an island.

Working in Hawai'i, you are surrounded by water, which impacts access to resources in a timely manner. This is something that we have to take into account during disaster planning. In a major disaster, all modes of transportation may be affected, making it challenging to obtain or replenish supplies from the mainland. For example, during 9/11 airlines and shipping channels were closed. If we needed something that wasn't already on-island, we were not able to get it. Fortunately, our Healthcare Association of Hawai'i has been working with the health care facilities to ensure that we have adequate supplies stockpiled on-island for when we need them.

Kaiser Permanente also has clinics on Oahu, Maui and the Big Island. If there was an emergency such as a chemical spill on another island, it can be frustrating to wait for the next available flight, especially responding to a spill when time is of the essence. If you have to take samples and send them to the mainland, it takes two business days – there is no overnight shipping.

It's a challenge in our local section, too. We have health and safety professionals scattered around all the islands, but not all of them have the resources to fly to a meeting.

Despite these challenges, it is all worth it. What can I say? I'm able to surf, swim and hike year-round in an absolutely beautiful environment.