October 18 - 20, 2007: 404.767.9000; reservation deadline August 20, 2007. Atlanta Airport (Group Name: Mississippi State University), Learning, Local Action - Atlanta, GA. Register online: http://www ncchca.org


From the Director:

Amidst news stories of the dangers of imported food products, I am amazed that we often forget the incredible ability of the American farmer, forester, and fisher to produce products that can feed, clothe and shelter us. North Carolina is the ninth largest state in terms of agricultural export value, estimated to be more than $2 billion. Most who choose a life of working in agriculture do not make much money, take financial risks daily, and don’t take the time to consider that their occupation is the second most dangerous one in the US, first in NC. Most are invisible to consumers and their work is romanticized or belittled. The NOA and the SCAC are committed to addressing the safety and health of agricultural workers through supporting projects and programs to prevent injury and illness among members of the agricultural community and their families. We want everyone in our state to recognize the significant contribution agriculture makes in our national economy. Next time you drive by that beautiful field of corn, cotton, hay or sweet potatoes or watch the shrimp boats pull into port or visit the NC Grade of Forestry or smell your fresh Christmas tree … take a minute and thank an agricultural worker or producer. What would your life be like without them? What can you and your community do to help them do their work safely?

The Public Service Announcement (PSA) is called “The Sorrow Just Doesn’t End” and its message is somber: (mother’s voice) “… we saw our son killed when he was just 16. The tractor flipped upside down. Our boy died under the tractor before we could get to him … We wish we’d known that a ROPS and seat belt could have saved his life.”

ROPS, short for rollover protective system, is a roll bar or reinforced tractor cab and seatbelt system. It is designed to save lives by holding the tractor driver inside a protective zone in rollovers. Since 1985, tractors have been manufactured with ROPS, but many older tractors without them are still commonly used.

The mother’s tragic story was one of 12 tractor safety messages that North Carolina Agromedicine Institute and Southern Coastal Agromedicine Center researchers tested at four focus groups across the state last fall.

Reactions among participants were mixed. “In the Blink of an Eye”, a PSA counting down the seconds for a tractor driver to react to an overturn drew mixed reviews. “That one really grabbed my attention,” said one farmer. “It was too confusing; I didn’t like it,” said another.

Focus group participants included farmers, family members, farm equipment dealers and others from Western North Carolina who gathered at the Ashe County Cooperative Extension Center to share views as well as Robeson County farmers who took time out from the county agricultural fair to talk with researchers. Other focus groups convened Gold Star Growers from Eastern North Carolina’s Pasquotank and Pitt Counties. Cooperative Extension and the NC Department of Labor’s Agricultural Health and Safety Bureau helped gain participation from farmers.

Many PSAs invoked memories of friends and neighbors lost to similar tragedies.

“That hit home,” said one young farmer. A farm wife shared: “The one about the boy was over the top -- just too much.” The problem of tragic farm fatalities isn’t new. And that’s the problem.

Safety programs and ROPS retrofit incentives have helped, but too many deaths and serious injuries are devastating farm families all over the United States. In fact, Dr. Kristen Borre, Director of the NC Agromedicine Institute and Southern Coastal Agromedicine Center, says “Data for 2000 to 2004 from a recent Institute study indicate that tractor deaths are increasing in North Carolina.”

Those facts have researchers scratching their heads, asking: “What would encourage farmers to install ROPS on their tractors and influence family members and employees to use the seat belt?”

The focus group project is part of the National Tractor Safety Initiative, supported by...
Your help is needed. The North Carolina Division of Public Health, Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Branch, wants to learn more about how pesticides affect our workers and citizens in North Carolina. By reporting pesticide-related health complaints, you can help protect the health of North Carolinians.

A new N.C. mandatory reporting law requires doctors, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners to report suspected or confirmed cases of acute pesticide-related illness and injury to Public Health as part of the new Acute Pesticide Illness and Injury Surveillance Program. Nurses and other support staff, under direction of the treating provider, can also report.

Reporting is easy. Call the state poison control center, 24/7, at 1.800.222.1222 and pick option 5. No paperwork is involved. Poison control specialists have been trained to ask questions that will fulfill reporting requirements. Advice regarding recognition and treatment of pesticide illness is also available from staff at the poison center. The other option is to fax or call in a report to Public Health. Individual patient information is confidential; Public Health does not release patient names without their consent. Only aggregate information, without identities, is shared with the public and outside agencies.

Reporting is important and will improve patient care. Public Health is studying this issue because pesticide use is widespread and improper use can result in mild to severe health effects. Doctors, farmerworkers, and farmerfamily members are especially at risk. Reporting ensures that incidents are recorded and the information collected is used to direct prevention efforts. When Public Health learns about a patient, that person is offered advice and resources. Investigations are conducted to identify factors contributing to hazardous exposures. Information is then analyzed and recommendations about safe handling practices are made. Findings will be shared with stakeholders who train farmworkers, train pesticide applicators, provide care, enforce pesticide laws, form state policy, and conduct research on state and federal levels.

Reporting starts with recognition and management of pesticide-related illness, and this can be challenging. Eastern Area Health Education Center (EAHEC) offers an on-line course, with free continuing education credits, that provides instruction on pesticides and diagnosis and treatment of pesticide poisoning. Many case studies are included. Northwest EAHEC offers a similar course at a reasonable fee of $20 for continuing education credits. For those providers that may see workers and citizens at risk for hazardous occupational and environmental exposures, it is important to be aware of the types of pesticides most responsible for exposures, determinants of exposure, common health effects, the need for taking an occupational and environmental history to help with diagnosis, and basic treatment measures. These courses can help.

Small groups of workers rotated every 30 minutes through stations that demonstrated farm machinery hazards, pesticide protective equipment, fire prevention, and tree shearing safety. Bilingual instructors and interpreters provided the training in Spanish.

A flatbed truck, normally used to haul trees to market, served as a platform for two large group sessions, one on preventive health and another on chain saw safety.

A grant from the NC Agromedicine Institute and Southern Coastal Agromedicine Center provided Spanish interpretation services, bilingual first aid kits, safety equipment, and evaluation.

Dr. Omur Cinar Elci was named medical director of the NC Agromedicine Institute and Southern Coastal Agromedicine Center in fall 2006. Elci is an associate professor in the newly formed Master of Public Health program in the Department of Family Medicine at ECU’s Brody School of Medicine.

He brings a wealth of experience to his new role. After earning doctoral degrees in medicine and public health at universities in his home country of Turkey, he moved to the United States and completed post-doctoral research training in occupational epidemiology at the National Institutes of Health.

Elci has 20 years of public health research and practice experience. He worked for...