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**Worker Health and Safety Watchdogs Address First Responder Opioid Exposure Crisis**

*The American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) Convenes First Responders and Government Leaders*

*PHILADELPHIA, Pa.* (May 23, 2018) - The American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) hosted a press conference at the AIHce EXP 2018 conference on May 22, 2018 to highlight the opioid exposure crisis threatening the safety of the nation’s first responders.

“As worker health and safety advocates we must call attention to the serious exposure risks facing those on the front lines of the opioid crisis – our first responders,” said AIHA CEO Lawrence D. Sloan, CAE. “The best way to protect first responders from opioid exposures is through training – potentially life-saving training. We are calling on leaders at the local, state and national levels to not only invest in developing these critical tools and training, but to also provide the funding to protect those who step into harm’s way to protect us.”

“It’s important to understand how little of this substance can cause fatality. Exposures of two to three milligrams – that’s equivalent to a few grains of salt – can cause fatalities,” said AIHA Board Member Donna S. Heidel, CIH, FAIHA. “These opioids can enter the bodies of first responders when first responders are exposed to drug aerosols – that’s dust in the environment – or when they are able to touch victim’s clothing that may be contaminated.”

First responders can also be exposed when skin contacts contaminated surfaces, when eyes are touched with contaminated fingers or gloves, or when contaminated food and beverages are ingested. EMTs, firefighters, police officers, hospital workers, crime lab analysts, funeral directors, customs and border protection agents, postal and package delivery workers and volunteers that work with these professions are all at risk of opioid exposure on the job.

“We have to be very cautious when we work in a lab setting – these are unauthorized labs where folks are taking synthetic opioids and packaging them for distribution. Those can be very hazardous environments and require a high degree of teamwork between law enforcement and fire and EMS,” said Philadelphia Fire Commissioner Adam K. Thiel. “Going forward we know that the folks in the supply chain are going to continue to innovate, and as they innovate and as they change the nature of what we’re dealing with the hazards might change. So this is something where we have to continue to evolve along with the threat.”

“They [opioids] pose a challenge to our first responders and to anyone who may come into contact with those drugs, but it’s not an insurmountable challenge,” said the Associate Director of the White House’s Office of National Drug Control Policy, Kemp Chester. “The important thing is that we share best practices and information and that we rely upon the experts, that we use evidence-based and science-based procedures and that we deal with this threat in a realistic fashion.”

**About AIHA®**

Founded in 1939, the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) is the premier association of occupational and environmental health and safety professionals. AIHA’s 8,500 members play a crucial role on the front line of worker health and safety every day. Members represent a cross-section of industry, private business, labor, government and academia. Learn more at [www.aiha.org](http://www.aiha.org).