

Report: Mass Firings in Spokane and Beyond: How Gutting the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Harms Workers

This report is part of a series detailing the harm President Trump and Elon Musk's reckless and devastating attacks on the federal workforce are causing on the ground in Washington state. The Trump administration's mass firings and harmful actions have real consequences for Washington's residents, their communities, and for the entire United States.

This report focuses on the mass firings of employees at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), effectively shuttering the NIOSH Spokane Research Laboratory. These Reductions in Force (RIFs) will lead to increased health and safety risks for firefighters, miners, agricultural workers, commercial fishermen, and so many others. No one should have to worry about whether they will come home safe from their job or not come home at all – NIOSH is vital to keeping workers safe.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) is Dedicated to Keeping Workers Safe Across America

NIOSH is the only government agency statutorily authorized to conduct workplace health and safety research.¹ In April 2025, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. terminated about 900 of NIOSH's approximately 1,100 employees, effectively shuttering the agency.² Among these firings, the Trump administration eliminated 90 scientific positions at the Spokane Research Laboratory.³ In addition to NIOSH's Spokane location, the agency also conducts research at campuses in Cincinnati, Ohio; Morgantown, West Virginia; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.⁴ Due to recent outcry over these firings, the Trump administration has recently agreed to bring back around 300 NIOSH workers, but primarily in West Virginia and Ohio, leaving the Spokane Research Laboratory's programming and research work shuttered.

By firing and then only bringing back a small portion of NIOSH workers, and almost none from Spokane, the Trump administration is jeopardizing decades of progress in improving worker health and safety. Over the course of NIOSH's history, worker deaths, injuries, and illnesses in America have gone down—on average, from about 38 worker deaths a day in 1970 to 15 a day in 2023, and from 10.9 incidents of worker injury and illness per 100 workers in 1972 to 2.4 per 100 in 2023.⁵ However, workplace hazards still kill and disable approximately 125,000 workers

¹ Howard J. NIOSH: a short history. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2020; 110(5): 629-630. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2019.305478 Accessed May 12, 2025

² Tirrel M. 'A huge impact on worker safety': Protection for miners, firefighters in jeopardy after CDC cuts. *CNN*, April 6, 2025. <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/06/health/cdc-niosh-cuts-safety/index.html> Accessed May 1, 2025; Arkansas Democrat-Gazette staff. Agency to protect workers decimated: employee safety at risk after cuts. April 6, 2025. <https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2025/apr/06/agency-to-protect-workers-decimated/> Accessed May 1, 2025.

³ Hanlon J. Spokane mining safety lab loses staff as part of 10,000 federal health job cuts: 'I don't believe the administration understands the work being done at these sites'. *The Spokesman-Review*. April 1, 2025. <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2025/apr/01/spokane-mining-safety-lab-closes-as-part-of-10000-/> Accessed May 1, 2025.

⁴ National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. About Spokane Mining Research Division. Research Programs. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/research-programs/index.html> Accessed May 2, 2025.

⁵ U.S. Department of Labor. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Commonly Used Statistics. <https://www.osha.gov/data/commonstats> Accessed May 8, 2025.

each year—5,190 from traumatic injuries and an estimated 120,000 from occupational diseases.⁶ Workplace injuries and illnesses cost businesses between \$174 billion and \$348 billion a year, which is still likely an underestimate given underreporting of workplace injuries.⁶

Kyle Zimmer, recently retired from International Union of Operating Engineers Local 478 and current Chair of the Mine Safety Health Research Advisory Committee stated, *“Losing these researchers will result in the loss of safety for every worker in the United States. This research turns into standards that become guidelines that every safety professional uses throughout the country in every industry, from health care, to auto body shops, to mining and firefighting. Once your workforce really understands what you are doing, that is when you get results and changes in workplace safety culture.”*

NIOSH’s \$362.8 million budget represents only 0.2% of the discretionary portion of the HHS budget.⁷ NIOSH’s lifesaving research has also saved more than \$1 billion annually. For example, NIOSH research supporting improved protective equipment for firefighters is associated with an estimated \$71 million in annual savings in medical and productivity losses.⁸ NIOSH work produces a tremendous return on investment, and the Trump administration’s firings have huge costs both for worker safety and the nation.

Tristan Victoroff, a union steward and epidemiologist in the NIOSH Western States Divisions, pointed out: *“The 900 people fired from NIOSH are scientists, mainly. We are industrial safety scientists, epidemiologists, engineers.... The goal is to work with industry to protect workers’ health and safety and find solutions to the problems. We do research and development. It’s not duplicative. [The Occupational Safety and Health Administration] doesn’t do this. They don’t have the capacity or the mandate. All of these cuts are supposedly to save costs. What costs are we going to tolerate? What are the costs of increased workers’ compensation claims? What are the costs of disabling injuries and chronic diseases from workplace exposures? What is the cost to a family of losing a parent to a workplace accident?”*

The NIOSH Spokane Research Laboratory is Critical to Keeping Workers Safe

NIOSH was created by Congress to address and prevent work-related injury and illness and was created in the same statute that authorized the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in the Department of Labor.⁹ While OSHA sets and enforces safety standards, NIOSH is required to conduct or fund research, experiments, and demonstrations on occupational safety and health; produce criteria identifying toxic substances including setting exposure levels that are safe for various periods of employment, and publish annually a list of all known toxic substances and the concentrations at which such toxicity is known to occur; disseminate information about

⁶Reindel R, Fletcher MK. Death on the Job, the Toll of Neglect: a National and State-by-State Profile of Worker Safety and Health in the United States. 32nd Edition, *AFL-CIO*, April 2023. <https://aflcio.org/reports/death-job-toll-neglect-2023> Accessed May 1, 2025.

⁷ Safety + Health. Senate budget bill features modest increases for safety agencies in FY 2025. <https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/25742-senate-budget-bill-features-modest-increases-for-safety-agencies-in-fy-2025> Accessed April 22, 2025.

⁸ Miller BM, Metz D, Smith TD, Lastunen J, Landree E, Nelson CD. Understanding the Economic Benefit Associated with Research and Services at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health: An Approach and Three Case Studies. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2256.html Accessed April 22, 2025.

⁹ U.S. Department of Labor. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/oshact/section_1 Accessed April 22, 2025.

occupational safety to employers and employees; conduct education programs about occupational safety; and contract with state personnel to provide compliance assistance for employers.

In Washington state, NIOSH conducts research to understand and promote safe job conditions and develop science-based products and interventions that support worker health, safety, and well-being, prevent future occupational injuries and deaths, and train new generations of health and safety professionals. This work is done through the Spokane Research Laboratory (which houses the Spokane Mining Research Division and the Western States Division) and the Region 10 Northwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety Education and Research Center.

Tristan Victoroff, a union steward and epidemiologist in the NIOSH Western States Divisions, explained: *“The NIOSH Spokane Research Laboratory in Washington State is the only NIOSH facility west of the Mississippi. Its two divisions— the Western States Division and the Spokane Mining Research Division — conduct safety research for natural resource industries across the western U.S. and Alaska, including commercial fishing, wildland firefighting, oil and gas extraction, and mining. They’re working directly with naval shipyards to assess exposures from new technology for corrosion control. They track commercial fishing deaths nationwide. They have major research efforts in high wall safety, rockfall and slope stability, and seismic monitoring using advanced fiber optic technology, to name just a few examples. This work is not duplicative, and it’s not wasteful. If we’re expanding domestic energy, mineral, and seafood production, we need to protect the people doing that work. These workers deserve to come home safe and be healthy enough to work again tomorrow. Cutting this research does not keep us competitive — it puts workers in danger.”*

The Spokane Mining Research Division Keeps Washington Miners Safe on the Job

The **Spokane Mining Research Division (SMRD)**¹⁰ is part of the **NIOSH Mining Program**,¹¹ which aims to eliminate mining fatalities and injuries. Since 1990, total injuries in mining have significantly decreased, reflecting safer practices industry-wide, strongly linked to NIOSH’s research and prevention programs. SMRD partners with labor, mining associations, equipment manufacturers, and mine operators to study worker health and safety problems in the field. Washington’s mining industry is vital to the state’s economy, supporting 18,845 jobs, directly and indirectly, and providing \$4.07 billion in economic benefits to the state.¹²

SMRD also conducts laboratory research at the Spokane, WA facility, where highly specialized scientists in unique laboratories develop products and interventions that offer solutions to mining challenges.¹⁰ Scientists in Spokane have been doing innovative laboratory work to:

- Simulate ground stresses to test rock samples to determine the strength of the environment and whether bolts, steel, mesh or shotcrete are needed to support the mining efforts and keep workers safe on the job.¹⁰

¹⁰ NIOSH. About Spokane Mining Research Division. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/divisions-offices/spokane-mining.html> Accessed May 2, 2025.

¹¹ NIOSH Research Programs. Mining Program. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/research-programs/portfolio/mining.html> Accessed May 27, 2025.

¹² National Mining Association. Map: Economic Impact of Mining. Washington. <https://nma.org/map/washington/> Accessed May 14, 2025.

- Simulate mining conditions and tasks to study health effects, such as heat and stress;
- Examine field samples to understand miners' exposure to respiratory and other health hazards; and more.¹⁰

Dr. Art Miller, a research engineer who retired from SMRD after 34 years, explains: *“No one else in the world is doing this time-sensitive, cutting-edge research that will make workers safer. We conduct research in a lot of different ways. Our lab is a unique environment of cutting-edge technology and brain power aimed at improving worker health and safety. Discontinuing our work would be a huge loss to the future health and safety of workers. Workplace safety is dynamic, and our work is never going to be done. NIOSH is small relative to the federal government but it’s a well-run entity. Why would we want to get rid of something like that?”*

Spokane Research Laboratory’s SMRD also runs the **Miner Health Program**, created in 2016 to collaborate with the mining community to improve workers’ physical and mental health.¹³ Prevention of opioid misuse is just one of many examples of the collaborative work being produced by the Miner Health Program. The mining industry has been hit particularly hard by drug overdoses.¹⁴ Work-related pain and injury increase workers’ chances of being prescribed an opioid and subsequent risks of worker prescription opioid misuse, long-term opioid use, and opioid use disorder (OUD). These overdoses and especially deaths related to opioid use have had a significant impact on mine workers, their families, and communities. This program is now archived on the CDC website, indicating that this program is no longer operating.¹⁵

In Fall 2024, Spokane’s SMRD experts launched a new guide, *Implementing Effective Workplace Solutions to Prevent Opioid Use Disorder: A Resource Guide for the Mining Industry*.¹⁶ This guide provides a model for planning and implementing prevention efforts to normalize conversations about OUD, reduce stigma, and break down barriers to treatment and recovery. Losing this Miner Health Program focused on preventing OUD will lead to increased overdoses and preventable deaths in the mining community.

The impact of the Trump administration’s cuts to NIOSH are already being felt in the mining industry. NIOSH is the only federal agency that can test and supply approved and certified respirators and personal dust monitors to keep miners safe on the job. The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) at the U.S. Department of Labor announced a temporary enforcement pause of mine operators’ respiratory protection programs.¹⁷ Given that NIOSH’s

¹³ NIOSH. Miner Health Program. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/mining/about/minerhealth.html> Accessed May 2, 2025.

¹⁴ Industrial Safety and Hygiene News. Preventing opioid use disorder in the mining industry: NIOSH, MSHA release workplace solutions guide. October 30, 2024. <https://www.ishn.com/articles/114461-preventing-opioid-use-disorder-in-the-mining-industry-niosh-msha-release-workplace-solutions-guide#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20mining%20industry%20has%20been,and%20health%20managers%20can%20implement> Accessed May 27, 2025.

¹⁵ CDC archive. Preventing Opioid Use Disorder in the Mining Industry: NIOSH and MSHA Release New Resource Guide to Implement Effective Workplace Solutions. <https://archive.cdc.gov/#/details?url=https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/newsroom/updates/upd-10-30-24.html> Accessed May 2, 2025.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Labor. Mine Safety and Health Administration. Implementing Effective Workplace Solutions to Prevent Opioid Use Disorder: A Resource Guide for the Mining Industry. <https://www.msha.gov/opioid-resource-guide> Accessed April 16, 2025.

¹⁷ Mine Safety and Health Administration, Department of Labor, Notice to Stakeholders: Temporary Enforcement Pause: Silica Rule. April 8, 2025. <https://www.msha.gov/notice-stakeholders> Accessed April 22, 2025.

National Personal Protective Technology Laboratory has been effectively eliminated,¹⁸ the “Lowering Miners’ Exposure to Respirable Crystalline Silica and Improving Respiratory Protection,” (“Silica Rule”), is now paused until at least August 2025.¹⁷ Without NIOSH, the Silica Rule cannot go into effect and workers will continue to be exposed to extremely harmful silica dust that results in the debilitating and often fatal condition of silicosis.

These respirators are not just used in mining; they are used across industries. As explained by Tristan Victoroff, union steward and epidemiologist in the NIOSH Western States Divisions: *“There will be no NIOSH-certified respirators, if there’s no NIOSH. NIOSH certifies all the respiratory protection equipment used in healthcare — and not just the N95 masks we’ve all become familiar with in recent years. That includes reusable respirators that filter oils and vapors... even supplied air systems. NIOSH is the **only** organization in the country equipped to perform all the required testing — more than 150 test procedures — to certify respirators that protect firefighters, miners, shipyard workers — anyone who needs respiratory protection on the job. In fact, any employer in general industry — from construction to manufacturing — if they have an OSHA-approved respiratory protection program, they must use NIOSH-certified equipment. Only NIOSH can certify that equipment to meet those standards. Rebuilding these labs somewhere else would take years, and there’s no guarantee we could replicate the expertise and facilities we currently have at NIOSH. NIOSH also monitors products on the market to spot counterfeits. Without that oversight, fake and substandard products will increasingly flood the market. That’s not theoretical. NIOSH recently found that every counterfeit product it purchased off the open market failed to meet established standards. These products were not fully protective. Workers using those products on the job could be exposed to dangerous particulates or chemicals. If these labs shut down, it will put workers at risk and stifle innovation in protective technology. Workers won’t know which products they can trust. The NIOSH certification is essential.”*

The Western States Division of NIOSH Conducts Critical Research Focusing on Hazards in the Western States

Workers in the Western U.S. face hazards and issues unique to their industries and environment, including commercial fishing, agriculture, and firefighting. Many of these occupations include climate extremes, working at altitude, long distance commutes, remote locations, and wildland forest fires. NIOSH’s Western States Division (WSD) employs a diverse group of public health and safety scientists with expertise in industrial hygiene, epidemiology, engineering, occupational medicine and health communication, working together to reduce and eliminate workplace injuries, illnesses, and fatalities.¹⁹ WSD is headquartered at the Spokane Research Laboratory, but also has staff at offices in Denver, Colorado, and Anchorage, Alaska. WSD in Spokane is focused on health and safety research for several industries, including commercial fishing, firefighting and wildfires, maritime, and emergency medical services.

¹⁸ I. Karbal. Federal cuts threaten to close Pennsylvania lab that certifies N95s and other respirators in June. *Pennsylvania Capital-Star*. April 17, 2025. <https://penncapital-star.com/health-care/federal-cuts-threaten-to-close-pennsylvania-lab-that-certifies-n95s-and-other-respirators-in-june/> Accessed May 27, 2025.

¹⁹ NIOSH. About Western States Division. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/divisions-offices/western-states.html> Accessed May 2, 2025.

Commercial Fishing. NIOSH's work has decreased the number of fatalities in the commercial fishing industry in Washington, which is recognized as one of the most hazardous work settings. Many operations are characterized by strenuous labor, long work hours, harsh weather, and moving decks with hazardous machinery and equipment.²⁰ This industry generates nearly \$46 billion and more than 170,000 jobs.²¹ The annual number of fatalities has declined over the past two decades because of the prevention work carried out by NIOSH.²² For 30 years, WSD has operated the Commercial Fishing Safety Program, working in Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and the Gulf Coast in Southeastern states to keep fishermen safe from vessel disasters, falls overboard, onboard hazards, and more.²³ WSD operates and maintains the Commercial Fishing Incident Database, which tracks commercial fishing fatalities and provides statistics by region, fishery, type of vessel, and type of incident.²⁴ This is the only national source for details of commercial fishing fatalities; neither the Bureau of Labor Statistics nor the U.S. Coast Guard report this type of information. Collecting this data is crucial for reducing the number of injuries and fatalities among the nation's fishermen. Through NIOSH-funded research, WSD has developed solutions to prevent winch entanglements on commercial fishing boats, reducing loss of limb accidents. This critical research has come to a standstill with the Administration putting these scientists on administrative leave and scheduling them to be fired as of June 2, 2025.

Outdoor Workers and Wildfires. Washington is one of the five states with the highest average annual burned acreage in the U.S., and the state is home to over 8,500 firefighters.^{25, 26} Washington's firefighters put themselves at enormous risk to keep Washington residents safe. Wildfire smoke is also dangerous to outdoor workers like the state's 8,280 farmworkers whose jobs have been made safer through the work of NIOSH.²⁷ For example, NIOSH scientists were instrumental in developing Washington's Wildfire Smoke Rule, put in place January 15, 2024, which protects the health of workers who are exposed to the small particles contained in wildfire smoke.²⁸ NIOSH recently developed a comprehensive hazard assessment on exposure to wildland fire smoke among outdoor workers. If NIOSH is eliminated, this document might never be finalized, and necessary revisions to the Washington Wildfire Smoke Rule may not happen, threatening firefighters, farmworkers, and other outdoor workers.

²⁰ University of Washington. Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center. Commercial Fishing and Processing Injury Prevention. <https://deohs.washington.edu/pnash/node/647> Accessed May 15, 2025

²¹ Workboat. Washington State maritime industries near \$46 billion in annual revenue. <https://www.workboat.com/coastal-inland-waterways/washington-state-maritime-industries-near-46-billion-in-annual-revenue#:~:text=The%20freezer%20trawler%20vessel%20Blue,annual%20Dequivalent%20jobs%20in%202022>. Accessed May 14, 2025

²² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Commercial Fishing Safety: West Coast. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fishing/data-research/regional-summaries/west-coast.html> Accessed May 15, 2025

²³ NIOSH. Commercial Fishing. About Commercial Fishing Safety. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fishing/about/index.html> Accessed May 2, 2025.

²⁴ NIOSH. Commercial Fishing. Commercial Fishing Safety in the United States. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/fishing/data-research/regional-summaries/index.html> Accessed May 27, 2025.

²⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics. May 2022 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates: Washington. https://www.bls.gov/oes/2022/may/oes_wa.htm Accessed May 27, 2025.

²⁶ Washington State Department of Natural Resources. Fighting Fire. <https://www.dnr.wa.gov/FightingFire> Accessed May 14, 2025.

²⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, Farmworkers and Laborers, Crop, Nursery, and Greenhouse. <https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes452092.htm> Accessed May 27, 2025.

²⁸ Washington State Department of Labor & Industries. Wildfire Smoke. <https://www.lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-topics/topics/wildfire-smoke> Accessed May 1, 2025.

NIOSH Provides Valuable Resources to Employers to Help Them Keep Workers Safe

NIOSH's Health Hazard Evaluation (HHE) Program has provided 11 technical assistance evaluations to businesses and industry in Washington over the last 20 years. The HHE program was established with the passage of the 1970 Occupational Safety and Health Act.²⁹ The HHE program includes evaluations of occupational exposure to illicit drugs in toxicology laboratories,³⁰ health effects in commercial airline employees associated with new, mandatory uniforms,³¹ transmission of tuberculosis to zoo employees working with Asian elephants,³² and respiratory effects following acute exposure to chlorine gas at a metal recycling facility.³³ These evaluations and publications are at no cost to industry or the public, and recommendations from these reports are used to establish health and safety protocols throughout the state.

WSD conducts research to evaluate toxic exposures associated with removal and application of marine coatings on vessels at the U.S. Navy's Trident Retrofit Facility near Bangor, WA,³⁴ and at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard,³⁵ as part of the Center for Maritime Safety and Health Studies.³⁶ Moreover, WSD evaluates exposures from rehabilitation of hydroelectric turbines, such as the Little Goose Dam on the Snake River in Southeast Washington.³⁷ A timely WSD project involves assessing mental and physical health issues in emergency medical service (EMS) responders in Tribal communities in the Puget Sound area.³⁸ The Trump administration RIFs have effectively shut down each of these programs.

NIOSH Trains the Next Generation of Occupational and Safety Health Professionals

Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 to require funding for research, information, education, and training in the field of occupational safety and health.³⁹ NIOSH funds 18 Education and Research Centers (ERCs), which provide high-quality interdisciplinary

²⁹ U.S. Department of Labor. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. OSH Act of 1970. <https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/oshact/completeoshact> Accessed May 15, 2025

³⁰ NIOSH (2023). Evaluation of occupational exposures to illicit drugs in forensic laboratories. By Li JF, Shi D, Neu DT, Chiu S, Charles M. Cincinnati, OH: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Health Hazard Evaluation Report 2021-0115-3388, <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/hhe/reports/pdfs/2021-0115-3388.pdf> Accessed April 15, 2025.

³¹ NIOSH (2023). Evaluation of symptoms among above-wing uniformed airline employees. By Feldmann KD, Chiu S, Broadwater K, Shi DS, O'Connor C. Cincinnati, OH: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Health Hazard Evaluation Report 2022-0061-3393, <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/hhe/reports/pdfs/2022-0061-3393.pdf> Accessed April 15, 2025.

³² NIOSH (2017). Health hazard evaluation report: evaluation of a chlorine gas release at a metal recycling facility. By Harvey RR, Boylstein RJ. Morgantown, WV: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, NIOSH HHE Report No. 2015-0151-3281.

³³ NIOSH (2017). Health hazard evaluation report: evaluation of a chlorine gas release at a metal recycling facility. By Harvey RR, Boylstein RJ. Morgantown, WV: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, NIOSH HHE Report No. 2015-0151-3281.

³⁴ Naval Sea Systems Command. Trident Refit Facility Bangor. <https://www.navsea.navy.mil/Home/TRFB/> Accessed May 2, 2025.

³⁵ Naval Sea Systems Command. Puget Sound Naval Shipyard & Intermediate Maintenance Facility. <https://www.navsea.navy.mil/Home/Shipyards/PSNS-IMF/> Accessed May 2, 2025.

³⁶ NIOSH. Center for Maritime Safety and Health Studies. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/centers/maritime.html> Accessed May 2, 2025.

³⁷ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Little Goose Lock and Dam. <https://www.nww.usace.army.mil/Locations/District-Locks-and-Dams/Little-Goose-Lock-and-Dam/> Accessed May 2, 2025.

³⁸ NIOSH. American Indian and Alaska Native Worker Initiative. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/aian/about/> Accessed May 2, 2025.

³⁹ U.S. Department of Labor. Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Public Law 91-596. https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/oshact/section_1 Accessed May 14, 2025

graduate and post-graduate training in occupational safety and health disciplines.⁴⁰ The Northwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety Education and Research (NWCOS) at the University of Washington is an ERC, housed in the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, bringing together faculty from the UW Schools of Public Health, Nursing and Medicine.⁴¹ The program, funded continuously since 1977, has an annual budget of \$1.8 million and serves four states (Washington, Alaska, Idaho, and Oregon), preparing students for careers in occupational medicine, nursing, health services research, industrial hygiene and more. Funding supports an average of 20 graduate students per year, and continuing education for an average of 1,000 occupational health and safety professionals per year.

As Lawrence Sloan, Chief Executive Officer of the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA), a membership organization for occupational and environmental health and safety professionals says, *“NIOSH’s work is foundational in protecting American workers. Without adequate support for these programs, achieving the goal of a healthier American workforce will be challenging. Specifically, for AIHA, our members will be disadvantaged by the inability to leverage research on various worker populations to advance our understanding of the profession. Additionally, the absence of funding for Education & Research Centers (ERCs) will significantly impact our pipeline of future talent and hinder the funding of academic research studies that benefit the American worker.”*

NIOSH engineers have worked with Gonzaga University's Mechanical Engineering Department to guide student senior design projects for the past 15 years. Many of these projects were entered into national American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) competitions, with several teams winning awards and presenting at national ASME conventions.⁴² This collaboration has led to increased scientists seeking positions supporting mining safety and health, both in Spokane and around the country, creating a pipeline of the next generation of professionals ensuring workplace safety and health.

NIOSH Protects Firefighters in Washington State and Nationwide

As a nationally-based program, the NIOSH **Center for Firefighter Safety, Health, and Well-Being** supports all 50 states to protect firefighters and to identify and prevent new and emerging hazards in the fire service earlier and faster.⁴³ NIOSH-funded research has:

1. Increased our understanding of the 200-plus carcinogenic chemicals involved in byproducts of combustion, leading to better respiratory protection standards;
2. Identified the presence of PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as “forever chemicals,” in firefighter foam and turnout gear and how these impact cancer risk levels;

⁴⁰ NIOSH Extramural Research and Training. Education and Research Centers. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/extramural-programs/php/about/ercs.html> Accessed May 27, 2025.

⁴¹ University of Washington, Northwest Center for Occupational Health and Safety. <https://deohs.washington.edu/nwcohs/training-programs> Accessed April 15, 2025.

⁴² Gonzaga University. Gonzaga Mechanical Engineering Students Receive National Award for the Second Year in a Row. May 31, 2017. <https://www.gonzaga.edu/news-events/stories/2017/5/31/cede-safety-award-2017> Accessed May 2, 2025.

⁴³ NIOSH Center for Firefighter Safety, Health, and Well-being. <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/centers/firefighter-safety-and-health.html> Accessed May 2, 2025.

3. Created and provided for continuous enrollment in the **National Firefighter Registry for Cancer**, the largest effort ever undertaken to understand and reduce the risk of cancer among U.S. firefighters;⁴⁴ and
4. Provided for the development of the **Firefighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program**, which conducts independent investigations of firefighter line-of-duty deaths and recommends prevention methods.⁴⁵

After being shutdown in April 2025, the registration portal of the National Firefighter Registry for Cancer is now operational,⁴⁶ following the questioning of HHS Secretary Kennedy by members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee on May 14, 2025.⁴⁷

Spokane Firefighters Union Local 29 is very worried about the cuts to NIOSH and has called for the continuation of NIOSH-funded research, specifically the study on how high heat affects firefighters' cognitive abilities, using the highly technical and sophisticated labs in the SMRD.⁴⁸ Much of this research is conducted in partnership with Washington State University, where researchers have expertise in the impacts of sleep, fatigue, circadian rhythm, and heat on the ability to be safe at work. These grants to WSU were some of the first to be terminated by HHS.

Conclusion: The Time is Now to Return NIOSH Spokane Scientists to their Jobs

NIOSH Spokane Research Laboratory scientists were set to be fired on June 2, 2025, but on May 22, 2025, a U.S. District Court judge ordered a preliminary injunction prohibiting the Trump administration from carrying out its RIFs.⁴⁹ However, if the RIFs legally continue, President Trump and HHS Secretary Kennedy will eliminate the NIOSH Spokane office. Without the Congressionally-mandated occupational health and safety research conducted by NIOSH scientists, Washington workers, as well as workers across the country, in commercial fishing, mining, firefighting, manufacturing, and other industries will experience preventable and potentially fatal injuries. Through NIOSH-funded research, Spokane Research Laboratory scientists promote evidence-based safety protocols that are implemented through strong industry collaborations that create productive workplaces that contribute to Washington's and America's economic prosperity. President Trump and HHS Secretary Kennedy need to bring back the Spokane Research Laboratory scientists now and fully fund NIOSH research to maintain the promise of healthier and safer workplaces, communities, and families.

⁴⁴ NIOSH National Firefighter Registry (NFR) for Cancer.

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/firefighters/registry/index.html#:~:text=About%20the%20NFR%20for%20Cancer,link%20between%20firefighting%20and%20cancer>. Accessed May 2, 2025.

⁴⁵ NIOSH Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program. <https://wwwn.cdc.gov/NIOSH-fire-fighter-face/> Accessed May 2, 2025.

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