

# Cooperative Approaches to Safety

Michael B. Blayney, Ph.D.

Director, Environmental Health & Safety

by James Burger

**A**s I entered Mike Blayney's office on a brisk April morning, he was working on a training module entitled "Safety and Environment in the Arts". The program, which focuses on the risks and hazards inherent in craft shops and studio arts, addresses issues ranging from air quality, ergonomics, and chemical materials to work-space, fire, and machine safety. The project is a collaborative effort involving the College's Studio Art faculty, its students, and the Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS). Blayney, says Colleen Randall, Chair, Studio Art, "has been instrumental in educating the Studio Art faculty and students about the issues of safety and environment in the arts as well as supporting our efforts to make our studio classrooms as safe as possible for everyone."

Dartmouth's Director of Environmental Health and Safety, he came to the College in 1995, after spending five years as Occupational Safety and Health Specialist and Safety Training Officer at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland. While there, he led the division's training-related activities, coordinated staff development, managed special projects for the Branch Chief, and provided assistance to a range of government and non-government personnel.

## *The Environmental Health & Safety Team*



Photo: James Burger

Since he began at Dartmouth, Blayney says, "I've always felt that there has been an institutional commitment to the EHS program. We've developed effective programs that reflect the culture of the institution, the needs of individuals, and the differences among departments." He sees the many areas of the College as individual "business units", each with field-specific as well as general safety requirements. In his view, "the academic experience is largely a risk-taking activity and while we want to develop institutional measures of risk, we want to create an environment that is in compliance but not a burden."

EHS maintains a cooperative relationship with the local community, particularly the water and fire departments. Blayney presently serves as Vice President of the Hanover Water Works, with responsibility for planning improvements in the distribution system, construction of a filtration plant, company restructuring, and developing solutions to waste water issues.

He has also been working closely with Drs. Jos van den Eijnde, of Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, on issues related to laboratory safety. In May of 2002, they presented before the World Congress on Safety and Health at Work, in Vienna, Austria, and they are currently seeking funding for the development and delivery of an internationally standardized laboratory safety training program for biomedical scientists around the world. Blayney observes that "biomedical science is a culture of its own, with common technologies that make it independent of language. And the Dutch approach regulation differently from the U.S. They focus much more on social involvement rather than on legal requirements."

*Continued on next page*

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When asked what drew him to the fields of safety and the environment, he replies that “I’ve always had an interest. As a Boy Scout, my first merit badge was in Safety.” A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Blayney received his Ph.D. in Industrial, Technological and Occupational Education from the University of Maryland at College Park; an M.S. in Science Education from Syracuse University; and a B.A. in Biology from Hampshire College.

EHS is one of the core participants in HR’s recently expanded orientation program for new employees. Blayney’s lively orientation presentation provides an overview of his department’s services as well as work place safety information. He’s enthusiastic about the opportunity to communicate with employees who have just started at Dartmouth, believing that “the optimal time to interact is when people are new.” His studies have shown that the longer their time of service, the more difficult it is for individuals to change their work place behavior. Blayney notes that 25–30% of work injuries are related to materials handling or ergonomics, and he’s been working with Procurement Services, who have provided assistance in standardizing the College’s desks, chairs, and other office furniture.

Blayney’s use of the Web as a training tool is primarily a pragmatic one. “There are so many regulations that our intent is to develop a standardized curriculum,” he explains. “There is a lack of commercially available safety training material, and we need to address the extensive mandatory regulatory training. The Web is a medium that lends itself to the timeliness and transferability of information.”

He’s extremely proud of his staff and their dedication to professional development. Two are in graduate school, four have certifications in Safety and Health, and one has just begun undergraduate studies. “They’ve done this for themselves,” Blayney says admiringly, “and their professional credentials reflect well on Dartmouth.”

“What we do is ‘applied environmentalism’. The old paradigms of safety aren’t valid any longer—they were reactive and punitive. Our approach is to learn from mistakes as well as from successes. EHS is uniquely positioned to see all aspects, interacting with the community and providing helpful services to the College. We’ve accomplished a lot through our cooperative efforts, and it’s very rewarding to make a difference. I love my work!”