

Respected occupational safety and health boss out

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Dr. John Howard's last day as director of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health was July 14.

NIOSH, a division of the Center for Disease Control (CDC), U.S. Health and Human Services, conducts research and makes recommendations on preventing work-related illnesses, injuries and deaths.

After six years as director, Howard was well respected and had widespread support from organized labor,

various job safety and health associations, even the Chamber of Commerce.

Lacking any stated performance reason for the ouster, lawmakers and others who work with NIOSH told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution they believe that politics or personal animosity are at the root of the cause.

Reportedly, Howard was an outspoken critic of how the agency was funded, and he strongly objected to a 2004 plan by CDC Director Julie Ger-

berding to restructure the agency.

"Having guts is a dangerous character trait in D.C. politics," noted the American Industrial Hygiene Association. "Especially in the Bush Administration, which circles the wagons in

crises and emphasizes loyalty to the party line."

William Kojola, an industrial hygienist with the AFL-CIO, told the Bureau of National Affairs that CDC's failure to renew his contract is a loss

for NIOSH.

"It's a pitiful decision that was a payback for John's defending NIOSH and standing up strongly for worker safety and health," Kojola said.

...State of the unions

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"You're going to have a huge wave of people retiring in the next decade — union leaders, activists, people with experience and institutional memory who have guided the union movement," Bussel said. "So there's going to be a real leadership vacuum that's going to need to be filled."

And union workers seem to have lost the ability to strike: 2007 continued a downward trend in the number

and length of major work stoppages — defined as strikes or lockouts involving more than 1,000 workers. Just 21 work stoppages of that size occurred last year, nationwide — and just 12 in the private sector. The 21 strikes involved 189,000 workers and lasted on average 10.5 days. Thus, American workers spent less than five thousandths of 1 percent of their work hours on strike. That's about one hundredth the level that existed when strike activity peaked in 1959.



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