REPORT ON THE ICOH MID-TERM MEETING: ANGERS, FRANCE, 15–17 MAY 2023

Founded in 1906 in Milan, Italy, as the Permanent Commission on Occupational Health, today the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) is the world’s leading international scientific society in the field of occupational health, with a membership of approximately 2 000 professionals from 105 countries (www.icohweb.org). ICOH’s main objective is to foster the scientific progress, knowledge, and development of occupational health and safety in all its aspects. The flagship of the ICOH activities is the triennial World Congress on Occupational Health, usually attended by approximately 2 000 to 3 000 participants. ICOH has 38 Scientific Committees (SCs) and various Working Groups (WGs) and Task Groups (TGs), most of which hold their own symposia, conferences, and workshops, produce scientific monographs, and review abstracts that are submitted to the international congresses. Mid-term meetings are held in the periods between the ICOH congresses, and these are attended by the ICOH Officers, Board members, and the Chairs or Secretaries of the SCs and WGs, with the aim of discussing the ongoing activities of ICOH, and the progress made in terms of the ICOH work plan for the specific triennium.

The ICOH mid-term meeting for the current triennium (2022–2024) was held in hybrid mode from 15 to 17 May 2023, in Angers, France. For the first time, selected ICOH National Secretaries (NSs) were invited to participate (one from each region), including Prof. Daan Kocks, ICOH NS for South Africa (and representative of the African region) and Chair of the South African Society of Occupational Medicine (SASOM), who participated virtually and presented his NS report on the second day of the meeting. Claudina Nogueira, ICOH Vice President for SCs and ExCo member of SASOM, attended in person. Another South African occupational safety and health (OSH) professional, Dr Karen Michell, now based in the UK, attended in person in her capacity of Chair of the ICOH SC on Accident Prevention. The meeting was held at the Angers Congress Centre and graciously hosted by the University of Angers, with the very kind support of Prof. Alexis Descatha (ICOH Board member) in terms of organisational and logistics arrangements on the ground. The ICOH Officers meeting took place on 14 May 2023, in the same venue.

Angers and Anjou – the Loire Valley’s best kept secrets…

Just 90 minutes from Paris by high-speed train and 90 minutes from the Atlantic Ocean, the region of Anjou is one of France’s hidden gems and a must-visit location in the Loire Valley, famous for its winelands. In Anjou, the wild and impetuous Loire River, classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site, and many other rivers – Maine, Mayenne, Oudon, Sarthe and Thouet – criss-cross the region, offering visitors a myriad of cruising, sailing, boating, and canoeing opportunities. The region is also known as the ‘Valley of the Kings’ with more than 1 200 châteaux (castles) and manors, most of which are still used as homes. Anjou is the third winemaking region in France – the main grape varieties being Cabernet Franc for red wines and Chenin for white wines. With six routes traversing majestic vineyards and quaint villages, and covering around 90 km, the region produces close to 180 million bottles of wine annually, 17% of which are exported – mainly to Germany, Belgium, and America.

The city of Angers is the capital of Anjou and lies along the Maine River, 8 km above the latter’s junction with the Loire River. The city’s massive, moated Château d’Angers, with 17 towers from 40 to 58 metres high, was built in 1230 on the site of earlier castles, and is the largest fortress in the Loire Valley. The Château is home to the late 14th-century Apocalypse series of tapestries known as Tenture d’Apocalypse, the most important medieval tapestry in the world (104 m long) that has survived many centuries. The tapestries were woven by Nicolas Bataille for Louis I, the Duke of Anjou. The Chant du Monde (Song of the World), a contemporary version of the tapestries designed by Jean Lurçat, is displayed in the 12th-century Hôpital Saint Jean (St. John’s Hospital), known today as the Jean Lurçat and Contemporary Wall Hangings Museum (established in 1986).

Despite the damage of past wars, particularly World War II, Angers is still rich in medieval architecture. The 12th- to 13th-century Cathedral of Saint Maurice retains its original stained glass. The 15th-century Barrault House contains the public library, an art museum, and the complete works of the sculptor Pierre Jean David d’Angers, who was born in the city. The prefecture is in the former Saint Aubin Abbey, dating back to the 11th-century, which has Roman arcades. Angers has evolved around the Château, creating such appealing living conditions that today the city is recognised as the leading French city “où il fait bon vivre”, or where it is good to live.

The many parks, gardens, and greenery throughout the city play a special role in creating this pleasant atmosphere. Based in Angers, the Community Plant Variety Office is a European organisation with the main mission of managing the intellectual property rights associated with valid plant varieties throughout the European Union. This is a way of supporting and guaranteeing the profitability of investments in plant research and innovation on a larger scale. Angers is the largest horticultural centre in Europe and the largest producer of hydrangeas in the world, exporting 80% of its production; the hydrangeas from Angers are famous for being robust, hardy, and developing branches with many buds. The region’s Terra Botanica hosts over 300 000 visitors annually and introduces them to 275 000 plants and flowers from all continents – 27 acres of gardens, water features, and greenhouses, and 40 theme park attractions. It is the world’s first ‘edutainment’ park to be themed on plants and gardens.
The historic centre of Angers, known as Cité, is like a journey back in time. Excellent gastronomy in one of the many local eateries is a definite highlight of the Angers experience.

Quernons d’Ardoise, a favourite local sweet, is a small square of nougatine (caramelised hazelnuts and almonds) wrapped in blue chocolate; and Cointreau, the orange-flavoured triple-sec liqueur, is produced exclusively in Angers. Exhibitions and events are held throughout the year all over Angers, which has a very active cultural centre. Woven into this dynamic mix are nearly 40 000 students; the city is a centre of learning, boasting two renowned universities and several specialised institutions.

Angers – the place for humans and plants, turned out to be the perfect venue to host the 2023 ICOH mid-term meeting!

**Day one, Monday 15 May 2023**

The mid-term meeting started with the joint meeting of the ICOH Officers, Board, and SCs, and was attended by close to 50 participants. The joint meeting opened with the report from the ICOH President, Prof. Seong-Kyu Kang, and was followed by reports on the SCs (Claudina Nogueira, ICOH Vice President), the activities on the NSs (Dr Martin Hogan, ICOH Vice President), the report by the Secretary General, Dr Diana Gagliardi, and a short presentation by Dr Won-Jun Choi, Editor-in-Chief of the ICOH Newsletter. The meeting participants then broke into groups for discussion and feedback on three topics, viz. i) increasing collaboration among SCs and with NSs, ii) increasing the visibility of SC work, and iii) optimisation of management for SCs. A general discussion on the way forward for SCs followed, emanating from the ideas that emerged.

Prof. Abdeljalil El Kholti, President of the ICOH2024 Congress in Marrakesh, Morocco, and Prof. Kamal Wifaq, Chair of the National Scientific Committee, shared updates on the organisation of the event, which will be hosted by the Moroccan Occupational Health Association (MOHA), in collaboration with The Occupational Health Department of the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, Hassan II University of Casablanca. The second announcement was disseminated at the end of March 2023, with information on plenary speakers, fees, grants, and awards, the congress venue and accommodation options, and the topics for Free Paper Sessions, to which abstracts could be submitted for consideration as oral or poster presentations, until the extended deadline of 20 August 2023. The scientific programme is being developed with the participation and suggestions of the ICOH SCs and WGs, the National Organising Committee, and other entities.

The day ended with a guided tour of highlights of the city of Angers, followed by a social dinner at the meeting venue.

**Day two, Tuesday 16 May 2023**

**International Scientific Event on ‘Translational Epidemiology in Occupational Health’**

The half-day event in hybrid format and co-organised by ICOH and the University of Angers and Hospital, was held at the meeting venue. The international scientific event was partly funded by Pays de la Loire Région and Angers Loire Métropole.

Epidemiology constitutes a crucial aspect of occupational health, involving research and evaluation with the ultimate aim of generating evidence-based recommendations. Translational aspects of epidemiology aim to transfer scientific responses studied by researchers to field practitioners for workers and decision-makers, to be adapted to a wide range of workplaces. The international scientific event gathered high-profile presenters who shared their expertise and experience on a wide range of topics. The first session, titled ‘Translational Epidemiological Centre on Occupational Health, Toxicology and Preparedness’, included presentations related to a specific project on translational epidemiology to illustrate some examples of tools that can be used (e.g. job exposure matrices, systematic reviews, cohort studies, etc.). In the second session, titled ‘Occupational health around the world’, selected ICOH Board members and other professionals shared their knowledge on current issues in occupational health, presenting on different aspects of occupational risk management in various countries, thus illustrating the importance that ICOH gives to improving working conditions for all. The presentation topics of the second session were:

- The spatial-temporal distribution of musculoskeletal disorders: results of the ‘Global Burden of Disease’ in 204 countries and 21 sub-regions from 1990 to 2019
- Biological risks in relation to other occupational risks
- Controlling workplace health hazards in the chemical industry – a case study from India
- Psychosocial risk management and the promotion of health, safety, and wellbeing in the future of work
- Landscape and legal frameworks of basic occupational health services in southern Africa

**View of the Angers Cité and Château, with the Maine River in the foreground** Photograph: ICOH Secretariat
In-person and virtual gathering of OSH professionals – around 50 participants attended the 2023 ICOH mid-term meeting in Angers, France, in mid-May 2023, including the ICOH Officers, Board members, selected National Secretaries, representatives of Scientific Committees and Working Groups, and other invited guests. Photograph: ICOH Secretariat

The long arm of the ‘selfie’ – ICOH Board members and the VP for SCs enjoy some leisure time out in the Angers Cité and Château.

L to R: Akizumi Tsutsumi (Japan), Riitta Sauni (Finland), Frida Marina Fischer (Brazil), Claudina Nogueira (South Africa), Alexis Descatha (France – meeting host and ‘king of the bow-tie’), and Shyam Pingle (India). Photograph: Dr Shyam Pingle

First ICOH Board meeting

The first ICOH Board meeting followed the international scientific event in the afternoon. The final contract between the National Organising Committee of the ICOH2027 Congress and ICOH was formally signed before the beginning of the meeting. The ICOH2027 Congress will be hosted by the Indian Association of Occupational Health (IAOH) in Mumbai, India, with the theme Sustainable Occupational Health in the Era of Globalization.

The programme for the afternoon included reports from the task groups on membership and information and communication. The following ICOH WGs also reported on their activities: Future of Decent Work; Demographic Changes and Occupational Health; Implementation of the Global Strategy of Occupational Health for All, with special reference to the global ban of asbestos; Occupational Cancer; Implementation of ICOH Guidelines on Congress Organisation; and Inequalities in Occupational Health.
Day three, Wednesday 17 May 2023
Second ICOH Board meeting

The following reports were presented on the final day, from 09:00 to 13:00: ICOH Finance Committee; ICOH Budget; and TG on Constitution, and Bylaws and Guidelines. There was a session dedicated to election procedures for the next triennium (2024–2027), as well as a discussion around the bidding process for the ICOH2030 Congress, which is open for submissions until the end of October 2023. The remainder of the meeting time was dedicated to discussions on the following topics: relationships between ICOH and the international organisations, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO); a proposal for the appointment of ICOH honorary members; and the current ICOH strategy and future developments.

The meeting adjourned with the ICOH President thanking all attendees for their valuable contributions and active participation during the three days. A special vote of thanks and appreciation was extended to the ICOH Secretariat staff for their tireless work in organising the ICOH mid-term meeting, and their support and able assistance to the ICOH Officers, Board members and Chairs of the SCs and WGs.

UPCOMING ICOH EVENTS FOR 2023
Please refer to the Events page of Occupational Health Southern Africa (http://www.ochealth.co.za/index.php?p=events) and the ICOH website (https://www.icohweb.org/site/events.asp) for more information on upcoming ICOH events until the end of 2023.

NEWS FROM THE SASOM NATIONAL OFFICE
SASOM is once again holding its Annual Congress in a virtual format in 2023. Four sessions will be held on the last Fridays of the months of June, July, August, and September, with the overarching theme being Occupational Health Practice in 2023 – Shining a light on the shadows of medicine. SASOM will report on all four sessions of the Annual Congress in the next issue of Occupational Health Southern Africa.

SASOM is represented on the organising committee of the upcoming conference of the ICOH SC on the History of the Prevention of Occupational and Environmental Diseases – 7th International Conference on the History of Occupational and Environmental Health – to be held at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, from 15 to 17 November 2023. SASOM will present a poster on the history of the Society and deliver an oral presentation on the history of occupational health in South Africa. For more information, please access the official congress website: https://icohhistory.ukzn.ac.za

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12th Scientific Committee on Occupational Health for Health Workers
October 25-27, 2023
New York City

Global Perspective on Occupational Health for Health Workers Workshops
October 24, 2023
New York City

Occupational Health and Safety for Vulnerable Health Workers
National Programmes for Occupational Health and Safety for Health Workers
Guideline for Preventing Violence and Harassment at Work
Global Research and Data Landscape at the Nexus of Precarious Work, Migration and Occupational Health

jhsph.edu/erc/scohhcw2023