

ENS Alexandra Shishkova

AlexShishkova@gmail.com

Office of Agriculture Safety and Health (OASH)

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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JRCOSTEP Summer 2017 Narrative

About Me

I am a Master of Public Health (MPH) Candidate in Environmental Health at the [University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston \(UTHealth\)](#).

I am also a [National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health \(NIOSH\) Trainee](#) in the [UTHealth Industrial Hygiene Program](#). Industrial hygiene is the art and science of controlling exposures in the occupational environment. I intend to pursue a career where I can protect workers and their families from injuries, sickness, discomfort and other impairments to their health and well-being.



[Denali National Park](#) celebrated its 100th birthday in 2017!

I became interested in the [U.S. Public Health Service](#) and the [Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Externship Program \(JRCOSTEP\)](#) last summer while interning for the [Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation \(ISN\)](#) at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C. There I assisted the U.S. delegation prepare for the [Eighth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention](#). Doing a JRCOSTEP seemed like such a great choice to serve my country and assist vulnerable populations, as well as gain professional experience while working for an accomplished mentor at a public health agency.

My Duty Station

I was hired by the [Office of Agriculture Safety and Health \(OASH\)](#) in [Anchorage, Alaska](#) at the [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health \(NIOSH\)](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#). I was surprised to hear back from the CDC because I was told it can be really difficult for students to find positions there. That is actually true because I was one of only three CDC JRCOSTEPS this summer, and the only one placed in Alaska!

My Preceptor

PHS Captain Brad Husberg is the Director of NIOSH's [Office of Agriculture Safety and Health \(OASH\)](#) within the [Office of the Director \(OD\)](#), and he manages the [NIOSH Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing \(AgFF\) Program](#). I gathered that Captain Husberg was going to be a phenomenally cool Preceptor when he and his wife picked me up from the airport and gave me an Anchorage city tour in their [Tesla Model S](#)!

These are the priority areas for the NIOSH AgFF Program:

- ✓ Reducing pesticide exposure in agriculture workers
- ✓ Reducing traumatic injuries among fishing industry workers
- ✓ Reducing traumatic injuries in forestry workers
- ✓ Reducing disparities among vulnerable workers
- ✓ Reducing environmental and zoonotic exposures



[NIOSH's Office of Agriculture Safety and Health \(OASH\)](#) provides leadership to prevent work-related injuries and illnesses among workers in the agriculture, forestry and fishing (AgFF) sector, who experience the highest work-related fatality rate in the U.S.

Major Projects

CAPT Husberg wanted to recruit a JRCOSTEP to help him review and update strategic planning documents that incorporate engaging diverse interests and perspectives.

The first project I worked on was the [NORA Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing \(AgFF\) Sector Council's new Sector Agenda](#) for the third decade (2016-2026) of [the National Occupational Research Agenda \(NORA\)](#). NORA provides a framework to guide occupational safety and health research for the nation based on input from diverse [NORA Sector Councils](#), which NIOSH encourages industry stakeholders to [participate](#) in by e-mailing NORACoordinator@cdc.gov.



Ultimately, through NORA, [NIOSH's mission](#) “to develop new knowledge in the field of occupational safety and health and to transfer that knowledge into practice,” is supported by virtue of building industry partnerships that can enhance research and practice.

The second project entailed reviewing the (intramural) AgFF Strategic Goal documents for the [NIOSH Strategic Plan](#), using [Burden, Need, and Impact](#) analysis—a framework developed by NIOSH in 2016 for prioritizing research.

NIOSH's Strategic Plan has strong ties to NORA Agendas. Each of the [NIOSH Sector Programs](#) had its goals plotted in a matrix against Cross-sector Programs organized around health topics having application across many or most industrial sectors. The AgFF Program then crafted Strategic Goal documents discussing setting priorities for its intersecting goals. The advantage of this strategic planning approach is that multiple NIOSH Programs can work towards accomplishing goals that span multiple programs.

Another interesting thing I did was take part in the Robotics Workgroup meetings with CAPT Husberg. NIOSH recognizes that rapid growth in the use of robotics and other emerging farming technologies are likely to introduce new risks in the AgFF sector. Thus, the workgroup presented a proposal for establishing a “Robotics Center” to the Director of NIOSH, which he suggested be named the Center for Occupational Robotics Research.

Mentorship

My JRCOSTEP experience has taught me a lot and improved my leadership and program management skills. I learned how program evaluation and analysis can best be implemented by a government agency in order to set effective occupational health goals. It was inspiring to see how important it was to CAPT Husberg that the AgFF Program makes a difference in terms of its ability to demonstrate impact and relevance to NIOSH, and most importantly that research is being used effectively to improve the safety and health of workers.



On top of everything, this was such a rewarding opportunity to learn about the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. I got to attend [Aurora Borealis Commissioned Officers Association \(COA\)](#) meetings, including their annual barbecue. CAPT Husberg also encouraged me to explore Alaska's [Joint Base Elmendorf–Richardson \(J-BER\)](#) in order to better understand the unique life and culture inherent in working for one of America's uniformed services.

I have a great deal of respect for the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and definitely hope to sign on after graduating.

I would like to add a sincere thank you to CAPT Husberg and CDC/NIOSH for providing this incredible opportunity! I would do it again in a heartbeat.

Me (Center) with my Preceptor CAPT Brad Husberg (Right) who manages the [NIOSH Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Program](#) and CAPT Mary O'Connor (Left), manager of the [NIOSH Aviation Safety Program](#)