

Everyday Heroes Like You Are Found at AIHce EXP

We plan AIHce EXP with all levels of IH career paths in mind, from students interested in our industry to our seniormost professionals entering their "emeritus" phase. If you haven't already, take the time to meet and get to know our [IH Heroes](#), who are, like you, making a difference in our workplaces every day. This year, we want to spotlight two IH Heroes who recently had quite an adventure.

You'll have to keep reading to find out more, but we'll just say that it could've been an ecological disaster. Without further ado, let's get to know our IH Heroes, Marcus and Stephen.

Marcus was inspired to build a career in public safety after seeing the debilitating effects of asbestos in his grandfather's life. Though he graduated with a BS in biology and worked in the safety office of a large construction firm, he decided he wanted more. Intrigued by his prior studies in occupational and environmental health and safety (OEHS), he diligently pursued and acquired a MS and PhD through UIC's OEHS Education and Research Center.

Stephen has spent several years on the Board of Directors of AIHA and the Product Stewardship Society and now actively advances sustainability strategies through public policies and legislation at the state and territorial levels in the USA and Canada.

AIHA: Marcus, what's your current level of involvement with your AIHA local section?

Marcus: Right now, I attend our meetings when I can. Last month, I did a quick info session on drone sensor technology, and how advancements are accelerating to where we can use them for really hard-to-access areas. I've been asked to consider running for a leadership position next year, though I want to complete my CIH first.

AIHA: Stephen, you spent several years on the Board of Directors of AIHA. Tell us about your involvement.

Stephen: Honestly, it was probably one of the best professional experiences I've had outside of my day-to-day job. It's something special to be able to have a hand in guiding an organization dedicated to lifting up and supporting this oft-forgotten but vital profession.

Even if you don't get onto the Board, you can still make a difference by joining some of the strategic volunteer opportunities, such as the [Content Portfolio Advisory Group](#) or [the Guideline Foundation](#).

AIHA: Have you been to any AIHce EXP conferences? What are you looking forward to at the conference this year?

Marcus: I went last year for the first time; it was so much fun! Seattle was such a blast and I met some really great people there during the late night sessions. Since I'm from that area, I enjoyed playing "local tour guide" for some of them.

I'm really looking forward to following a lot of the sessions in the Emerging Issues and Sensor Technology topic areas, since those closely relate to my work. I've heard that the Sunday night Meet-up Merry Go Round networking event is going to be pretty cool, too.

Stephen: I really like the changes that AIHA instituted last year. The sessions seem more tight and focused with their shorter length; as a result, the schedule is more streamlined with opportunities and choices and really feels packed! Plus, there's such an array of PDCs this year...a lot of our younger members will have a really tough time selecting.

What I'm really looking forward to, however, is the Tuesday morning panel on the opioid crisis and how it specifically impacts our first responders. I think that's an area of concern that many aren't truly aware of just how critical an issue it is. I'm really glad AIHA is putting this at the forefront of this year's programming and that it's a primary focus for the Association's government relations team.

AIHA: Marcus, being from Seattle, it's no surprise you're interested in hiking and camping! How do you combine your passions of hiking with your professional pursuits?

Marcus: I love the outdoors, always have. So being able to focus on bettering our environment AND making the blending of nature and civilization safer for all of us is really where I feel the most comfortable. When I'm out with my family in the Cascades, I can really sense how critical our ecological balance is for our future livelihood as a species. Technology, industrialization, environmentalism...it can all work together, and I'm enjoying the challenge of finding out how we can safely and successfully do that for generations to come.

AIHA: Any tips for first time AIHce attendees?

Marcus: Take every opportunity to network, especially with those "outside" of your normal career experience. While it's great to talk shop with similar folks, sometimes you really get inspired in conversations with those on the other end of the career spectrum from you.

Oh, and try to take some time to enjoy the city you're in. All work and no play makes us a tired, cranky, and stressed out people.

AIHA: Stephen, what's next for you in your career journey?

Stephen: Well, I'm venturing into what AIHA now calls the "Senior Emeritus" level of my career, and I am not complaining! I'm looking forward to fully retiring, though I know I'll always stay connected to the profession. I think it's really important that us older and more seasoned folks try to pass down our wealth of knowledge and experience to the younger generations; while our methods may be outdated by technology and advancements, our critical thinking, research, and foundational knowledge is still a vital resource to keeping the profession on the road to worker safety and health. And that's what's important.

AIHA: And now, the question we've all been waiting for. You recently had an adventure involving a chlorine tank car spill after a train derailment. On a mountainside. Using drones. Tell us about that!

Stephen: It was downright scary for a bit, to be honest. Train derailments are uncommon these days, and incidents with hazardous materials moreso. Normally, liquid chlorine tank cars are built to withstand such accidents but in this case... Well, freak accidents always happen.

Fortunately, I remembered a conversation with a younger OEHS professional last year – Marcus – who was doing some research and field testing with drone sensor technology. I'm glad he was available and that he had some of his equipment on hand; we were able to detect a leak and stop it before it affected the entire watershed area.

Marcus: Oh wow, that was so crazy! I have to give props to Stephen, who I met last year at AIHce EXP, because he remembered a conversation we were having about using drones as remote sensors in a rural setting. We were able to use one of my modified sensor drones to detect a nasty chlorine leak from one of the tanker cars before it reached a critical stage. We managed to cut the leak off and transfer the remaining liquid chlorine to another car with only minor damage to the immediate environment. Twenty years ago, it would've been a major ecological disaster.

We're glad our two IH Heroes were there to stop a disaster from happening! Want to know more about our heroes' adventures? Don't miss our next comic, debuting at AIHce EXP in Philadelphia.