



[back to previous page](#)

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Online accident-reporting system (OARS) debuts

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As online technology grows at the UW, paperwork is reduced and communication becomes more immediate and effective. Now, a new online program called OARS — the Online Accident Reporting System — is bringing that immediacy to UW worker safety.

The system was created to comply with new reporting rules for on-the-job injuries, illnesses and “near-misses” set by the federal Occupational Health and Safety Administration and the state Department of Labor and Industries. The new guidelines were designed to simplify reporting and increase involvement by employees’ supervisors.

OARS starts at the University’s Employee Health and Safety Department Web site, though it also can be accessed through employees’ MyUW site. Under a heading titled “What’s New,” employees can learn about the system, arrange for online or classroom training and read frequently-asked questions about how it all works.

John Chaisson, program operations specialist for EH&S, said the new system will help shorten and clarify the reporting system for all UW employees.

“This includes both hospitals and all campus and offsite facilities,” Chaisson said. “It combines all the different forms — I think we had up to five different forms.”

Another feature of the new system, Chaisson said, is that reporting will be done more collaboratively between supervisors and their employees. Supervisors have always been responsible for the safety of their employees, he noted, “but now the supervisor and employee collaborate on the report.” He also said that the new system will help cut down on inappropriate use of accident reports.

Built into the system, too, are online reminders to supervisors, at 72 hours and again at 30 days. Chaisson explained, “Often times (the report) may change. The injury may turn into an illness, or with a sprain you may wind up five days later learning it was a fracture.” The automatic updates allow supervisors to update the report as necessary, but also continue to provide for necessary employee confidentiality.

Chaisson noted that OARS is not the same as Worker’s Compensation or the Patient Safety Network, a way of reporting patient injuries at medical facilities.

OARS is for UW employees only, but the EH&S Web site also has a form where injuries can be reported for non-UW-employed students and visitors. Those reports can be printed and then faxed or mailed to the department.

The OARS system also will help the UW collect and categorize data that can be studied,

Chaisson said.

"The design of the system is point-and-click, which enables us to do data analysis and trending. We'll be able to run trends for any particular department, and for University health and safety committees." Previous written reports made trending much more labor-intensive, he said.

-PETER KELLEY

