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Students learn injury prevention strategies

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Nearly 150,000 Americans and 6 million people worldwide die each year as a result of injuries sustained during activities of daily living. Among Americans ages 1-34, 3.5 million years of potential life are lost annually. This number exceeds the potential years of life lost by cancer, heart disease and AIDS patients. Such injuries and deaths, many of which are preventable, cost the U.S. economy \$470 billion annually.

Students in Oakland University's **Wellness, Health Promotion and Injury Prevention** (WHP) program learn about the magnitude of this problem as well as how to implement strategies that prevent injuries.

To create an awareness of the engineering side of injury prevention, students in WHP 310, "Injury Prevention Control and Safety Promotion," visited **Breed Safety Restraint Systems**, a research and development site in Shelby Township that designs seat belts and air bags for automotive companies worldwide.

"Breed Technologies is one of four companies in the nation that design and test vehicle restraint systems," said Associate Professor of Health Sciences and WHP Director Stafford Rorke, who accompanied his class in the behind-the-scenes tour of Breed's facilities. "I think it was an eye-opener for the students to learn things as simple as the effectiveness of seat belts. A child who weighs about 20 pounds and is unrestrained in a vehicle moving at 35 miles per hour translates to 800 pounds of force when the vehicle comes to a sudden, dead stop. No parent will be able to safely hold their child in place under such tremendous force in that situation."

At Breed, students witnessed tests of air bags and seat belts that simulate their performance after the equivalent of 15 years of constant use. Other tests demonstrated how effectively air bags deploy in extreme temperatures. The students also witnessed how sled machines and dummies are set up for side and front impact crash tests.

"It was very interesting to see how restraint systems are created and tested," said senior general studies major and WHP and exercise science minor Melissa Wiesner, who visited the company with her class. "We also saw a sewing room where employees were constructing a curtain-type air bag that won't have a detrimental effect on children and infants when deployed. It's reassuring to see how the systems are tested to ensure that they operate properly. We learned about the complicated process of creating new safety products and releasing them on the market."

Future sections will continue to visit Breed and other area companies as the WHP program develops more relationships within the surrounding community.

"It's very important to understand the magnitude and nature of the injury problem to society," Rorke said. "About one-third of the 400 deaths in the U.S. each day of those between age 1 and 34 are the result of motor vehicle crashes. We talk about accidents as random occurrences, but we need to change that fatalistic mindset. When certain conditions present themselves we can predict with some certainty that there will be a crash. Through studying injury prevention and changing certain behaviors, many motor vehicle collisions can be prevented."

Visit OU's **Wellness, Health Promotion and Injury Prevention** Web site for information on core curriculum, faculty, course descriptions and more.

SUMMARY

To learn about the engineering side of injury prevention, students in OU's Wellness, Health Promotion and Injury Prevention program visited Breed Safety Restraint Systems, a research and development site in Shelby Township that designs seat belts and air bags for automotive companies worldwide.

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