



HEALTH AND SAFETY AT THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract

This article provides general information about occupational health and safety and the magnitude and diversity of the problem in the world, and explains the role of the health and safety representative.

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Introduction

The study of workers' health and safety is a very broad discipline that covers many specialized fields. In its most general sense, it should aim to:

1. Promote and maintain the highest possible level of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations;
2. Prevent the adverse health effects of workers due to their working conditions;
3. Protect workers from the dangers that threaten their health;
4. Place and maintain the workers in a work environment appropriate to their physical and mental needs;
5. Adapt work to men.

In other words, workers' health and safety cover all aspects of the social, psychological and physical well-being of the workers.

To ensure the safety and health of workers, both employers and employees must collaborate and participate in health and safety programs in occupational health, industrial hygiene, toxicology, training, machine safety, ergonomics, psychology, etc.

Issues related to worker's health are often less important than safety issues, as they are often more difficult to resolve. However, when dealing with health, safety is also a concern, because a healthy working environment is by definition also a safe environment. However, the opposite is not necessarily true. A workstation can be safe without necessarily being healthy. It is important to address both health and safety in all workplaces. Overall, the above

definition of health and safety of workers covers both health and safety in the broader context.

Poor working conditions affect workers' health and safety, in such way that:

1. Poor working conditions, whatever their nature, may have an impact on the health and safety of workers.
2. It is not that in the factories we encounter unhealthy or dangerous working conditions; they can exist anywhere, whether indoors or outdoors. For many workers like farmers or miners, the workplace is the natural environment and it can present many health and safety hazards.
3. Poor working conditions can also affect the environment in which the worker lives, because many workers live and work in the same place. This means that occupational hazards can have adverse effects on workers, their families and other members of the community, as well as on the physical environment around the workplace. The classic example is the use of pesticides in agricultural work. Workers may be exposed to toxic chemicals in a variety of ways when applying pesticides: they can inhale the products during application and afterwards, absorb them by the skin or ingest if they eat, smoke or drink without wash hands or if drinking water has been contaminated. Family members can also be exposed in a variety of ways: they can inhale pesticides that remain suspended in the air, drink contaminated water or be exposed to residues that may remain on workers' clothing. Other members of the community may also be exposed. When chemicals are absorbed into the soil or contaminate groundwater, the negative effect on the natural environment can be permanent.

Overall, health and safety efforts should be directed at preventing work-related accidents and diseases and taking into account the links between worker health and safety, the workplace and the external environment.

Why are workers' health and safety important?

Work plays a central role in people's lives, as most workers spend at least eight hours a day at their workplace, whether it's a plantation, an office, a plant, and so on. Therefore, the workplace should be healthy and safe. Unfortunately, this is not the case for many workers. Everyday workers around the world are exposed to various threats to their health, such as:

1. Dusts;
2. Gas;
3. Noise;

4. Vibration;
5. Extreme temperatures.

Unfortunately, some employers do not assume their responsibilities in protecting the health and safety of workers. In fact, some employers do not even know that they have a moral and often legal responsibility in this regard. Due to the many hazards that exist and the fact that health and safety problems are often overlooked, occupational accidents and diseases are common in all regions of the world.

The cost of occupational diseases and accidents

Occupational accidents or illnesses are very expensive and can have many serious, direct and indirect effects on the lives of workers and their families. For workers, the direct cost of an injury or illness includes:

1. Suffering due to injury or illness;
2. Loss of income;
3. The risk of losing his job;
4. The cost of medical treatment.

It has been estimated that the indirect cost of an accident or illness can be as much as four to ten times the direct cost, or even more. An illness or occupational accident can result in so much indirect costs for workers that it is often difficult to measure them. One of the most obvious is the suffering caused to the worker's family, which no compensation can compensate.

It is estimated that the cost of accidents or occupational diseases is also enormous for employers. For a small business, the cost of a single accident can be a financial disaster.

Direct costs for employers include:

1. Payment of work not done;
2. Medical expenses and allowances;
3. Replacement or repair of damaged machinery and equipment;
4. Temporary reduction or cessation of production;
5. Increased training and administrative expenditure;
6. Possible reduction in the quality of work;
7. Negative effect on the morale of other workers.

Whereas the indirect costs include:

1. The injured or ill worker must be replaced;
2. A new worker must be trained and given time to adapt;

3. It takes some time for the new worker to be as productive as the old one;
4. Time must be devoted to mandatory investigations, reporting and various formalities;
5. Accidents are often of concern to other workers and have a negative influence on the relations between workers and employers;
6. The existence of poor hygiene and safety conditions in the workplace can also give a negative image of the company.

Overall, the cost of most work-related accidents and illnesses for workers and their families and for employers is very high.

HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAMS

For all the above reasons, it is essential that employers, workers and trade unions take health and safety seriously and must:

1. Combat hazards in the workplace by preventing them at source as much as possible;
2. Keep records of any exposure for many years;
3. Inform workers and employers about workplace hazards to health and safety;
4. Establish an active and effective Health and Safety Committee with workers and managers;
5. Aim to improve health and safety at the workplace.

A workplace health and safety program can help save lives by reducing risks and their effects. These programs also have positive effects on the morale and productivity of workers, which is not negligible. In addition, they can allow employers to save a lot of money.

THE RANGE OF RISKS

An almost unlimited number of risks can be present on almost any workplace. There are obviously unsafe working conditions, such as unprotected machines, slippery floors or inadequate precautions against fire, but there are also more insidious, less obvious risks such as:

1. Chemical hazards (exposure to liquids, solids, dusts, vapours and gases);
2. Physical hazards such as noise, vibration, poor lighting, radiation and extreme temperatures;
3. Biological hazards such as bacteria, viruses, infected waste and infestations;
4. Psychological risks (stress);
5. Risks related to failure to apply ergonomic principles such as poorly designed machinery, machinery and equipment, inappropriate seats and workstations, or poorly designed work methods.

Workers do not create the risks - in many cases the risks are related to the workplace. In terms of health and safety, the position of unions is to ensure that work is made less dangerous by changing the workplace and methods. This means that the solution is to eliminate the risks and not to try to adapt the workers to dangerous conditions. Forcing workers to wear protective clothing that is unsuitable for the region's climate is an example of what should not be done, that is, forcing workers to adapt to unhealthy or dangerous conditions, and it is a way for the employer to evade responsibility by transferring it to the worker.

It is important that the trade unions affirm this position, because in the event of an accident, it is very common for employers to accuse the worker of negligence. This suggests that work may be less dangerous if workers change their behaviour or employers hire only workers who never make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes, it's in human nature, but workers do not have to pay for their mistakes in their lives. It is not enough to raise workers' awareness of safety issues so that accidents disappear. Awareness can be useful, but it does not remove unsafe working methods or conditions. The most effective prevention of accidents and illnesses begins in the development of methods and design of the workplace.

IMPORTANCE OF THE COMMITMENT OF THE MANAGEMENT

In order to develop an effective health and safety program, it is essential that coaching is undertaken and that workers are involved in the effort to create and maintain a healthy and safe workplace. Executives should be concerned with all work-related hazards, not just those listed in the regulations.

All levels of management should consider health and safety as a priority. They must show this by going to work sites and workshops to talk with workers about their concerns and observe the work methods and equipment. At each workplace, lines of responsibility need to be clear and workers need to know who is responsible for various health and safety issues.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING

Workers often experience and are not aware of work-related health problems, especially in the early stages of an occupational disease. In addition to the more obvious benefits of training such as skills training, risk recognition, etc., a detailed training program at each workplace will help workers to:

1. Recognize the first signs or symptoms of an occupational disease before it becomes chronic;
2. Evaluate their work environment;

3. Insist that management take action before dangerous conditions arise.

ROLE OF HEALTH AND SAFETY REPRESENTATIVE

The health and safety representative must prevent problems, that is, take initiatives before hazards are realized so that workers are not exposed to occupational hazards. This requires management to eliminate or control risks when they cannot be eliminated.

To achieve these objectives, the Health and Safety Representative shall:

1. Be well informed about the various hazards present in the workplace and possible solutions to control them;
2. Work with the union and the employer to identify and control risks;
3. Although the present modules have been developed for the protection of workers, occasional information needs to be shared with management and the employer to work together to ensure the safety and health of workers.

The task of the health and safety representative is not always easy, but helping to protect the lives of your colleagues is worth all the time and effort you will devote to it.

CONCLUSION

In all occupations, workers may be exposed to a multitude of hazards in the workplace. Health and safety measures address the full spectrum of hazards in the workplace, from accident prevention to more insidious hazards such as toxic fumes, dust, noise, heat, stress, etc. Health and safety programs should aim at preventing work-related illnesses and accidents rather than solving problems later on.

Workplace hazards can take a variety of forms: chemical, physical, biological, psychological, ergonomic, etc. Due to the multitude of these risks and the fact that many employers neglect health and safety, occupational accidents and diseases are still a serious problem in all regions of the world. Therefore, trade unions must insist that employers fight hazards at the source and do not force workers to adapt to unsafe conditions.

The commitment of management and the strong participation of workers are two essential elements for the effectiveness of any safety and health program in the workplace. The most effective prevention of accidents and diseases begins with the development of working methods.