



International
Labour
Organization

FACTS ON *Safety at Work*

“There has been progress on many fronts in the world of work. But work-related deaths, accidents and diseases, are still major causes for concern. Decent work must also be safe work.”

Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General

Each year, an estimated two million women and men die as a result of occupational accidents and work-related diseases. Across the globe, there are some 270 million occupational accidents and 160 million work-related diseases each year.

The ILO has never accepted the notion that injury and disease “go with the job”. Prevention works. Over the course of the 20th century, industrialized countries saw a clear decrease in serious injuries, not least because of real advances in making the workplace healthier and safer. The challenge is to extend the benefits of this experience to the whole working world.

Experience has shown that a preventative safety culture is beneficial for workers, employers and governments alike. Various prevention techniques have proven themselves effective, both in avoiding workplace accidents and illnesses and improving business performance. Today’s high safety standards in some countries are a direct result of long-term policies encouraging tripartite social dialogue, collective bargaining between trade unions and employers, and effective health and safety legislation backed by strong labour inspection.

World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2005: “A Preventative Safety and Health Culture”

The World Day for Safety and Health at Work is held on 28 April each year, a date that was first marked by the ILO in 2001 and 2002. The concept of the World Day is rooted in the Workers Memorial Day, which originated in the trade union movement and is still observed as a means of commemorating workers who have suffered from occupational death, injury or disease. The ILO began marking the World Day in 2001 as a way of bringing a tripartite focus and awareness-raising to accident and ill-health prevention at work.

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Key Statistics

- Each day, an average of 6,000 people die as a result of work-related accidents or diseases, totalling more than 2.2 million work-related deaths a year. Of these, about 350,000 deaths are from workplace accidents and more than 1.7 million are from work-related diseases. In addition, commuting accidents increase the burden with another 158,000 fatal accidents.
- Each year, workers suffer approximately 270 million occupational accidents that lead to absences from work for 3 days or more, and fall victim to some 160 million incidents of work-related disease.
- Approximately 4% of the world’s gross domestic product is lost with the cost of injury, death and disease through absence from work, sickness treatment, disability and survivor benefits.
- Hazardous substances kill about 438,000 workers annually, and 10% of all skin cancers are estimated to be attributable to workplace exposure to hazardous substances.
- Asbestos alone claims about 100,000 deaths every year and the figure is rising annually. Although global production of asbestos has fallen since the 1970s, increasing numbers of workers in the USA, Canada, UK, Germany and other industrialized countries are now dying from past exposure to asbestos dust.
- Silicosis – a fatal lung disease caused by exposure to silica dust – still affects tens of millions of workers around the world. In Latin America, 37% of miners have some degree of the disease, rising to 50% among miners aged over 50. In India, over 50% of slate pencil workers and 36% of stonecutters have silicosis.

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World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2005:

As in previous years, the over-arching theme for World Day 2005 is the promotion of a preventative safety and health culture, but this year there is a particular focus on the prevention of work-related accidents and ill-health. Several sub-themes are also in focus:

Construction

As a major employment generator in many parts of the world, construction is also a sector associated with a proportionately high number of job-related accidents and diseases. Despite mechanization, the industry is still largely labour-intensive, while working environments are frequently changing and involve many different parties. The industry also has a long tradition of employing migrant farm labour from lower-wage economies and much employment is precarious and short-term. According to ILO estimates...

- Each year there are at least 60,000 fatal accidents on construction sites around the world. This is one fatal accident every ten minutes.
- One in every six fatal accidents at work occurs on a construction site.
- In industrialized countries, as many as 25% to 40% of work-related deaths occur in on construction sites, even though the sector employs only 6% to 10% of the workforce.
- In some countries, it is estimated that 30% of construction workers suffer from back pains or other musculoskeletal disorders.

Younger and Older Workers

The ongoing increase of younger workers (ages 15 to 24 years) in the world's economy gives rise to particular concerns in the area of occupational safety and health. Younger workers are more at risk from serious non-fatal accidents than are their colleagues, due to general lack of work experience and understanding of workplace hazards, as well as a lack of safety and health training and their general lack of physical and emotional maturity. In the European Union, for example, the incidence rate for non-fatal accidents is 50% higher among young workers than among any other age category.

At the other end of the scale, the growing number of older workers is causing many organizations to take a new look at the occupational risks that older workers face. While aging is an individual process, it can be accelerated by arduous working conditions such as manual handling of heavy loads, excessive noise exposure or atypical working hours. The European Union has noted that the incident rate of fatal accidents at work was more than twice the rate of the youngest age group.

The role of the ILO

A preventative safety and health culture comprises all the values, managerial systems and practices, participatory principles and working behaviour conducive to creating a safe and healthy working environment. The ILO's Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) provides a suitable framework supporting a safety and health culture at work.

While the development of a safety culture begins during a child's early education years, the effective prevention of occupational accidents and diseases begins at the enterprise level. Prevention involves participation from governments and workers' and employers' organizations. Implementation of work organisation procedures, the provision of training and information to workers and inspection activities are important tools to promote a safety and health culture. Companies with occupational safety and health and management systems have good records both in safety and productivity. Meanwhile, government labour inspectors have a pivotal role. More than 130 member States have ratified the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), making it one of the most ratified instruments of the organization.

The ILO *Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems (ILO-OSH 2001)* provide a powerful tool for developing a sustainable safety and health culture at the enterprise level and mechanisms for the continual improvement of the work environment.

ILO Standards

More than 70 ILO **Conventions** and **Recommendations** relate to questions of safety and health. In addition, the ILO has issued more than 30 **Codes of Practice on Occupational Health and Safety**.

With regard to the special themes of the 2005 World Day, the ILO has long been conscious of the need for special treatment for the **construction industry**, having adopted its first convention for the industry in 1937. In 1988, the Safety and Health in Construction Convention (No. 167) and its associated Recommendation (No. 175) were adopted, reflecting the need for a broad approach to tackling some of the safety and health problems in construction. Complementing this approach is the ILO Code of Practice on *Safety and Health in Construction*, approved in 1992. And while the 2001 *Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems* apply to all economic sectors, they are particularly useful for the construction industry, as they highlight issues related to sub-contracting.

With regard to **younger and older workers**, the Minimum Age Convention 1973 (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 1999 (No. 182) and their associated Recommendations (Nos. 146 and 190) prohibit younger workers under the age of 18 from carrying out hazardous work. The Older Workers Recommendation 1980 (No. 162) specifies measures to be taken to reduce difficulties which can be encountered by older worker relating to advancement of age. The Recommendation addresses safety and health issues, setting them in the wider context of equality of treatment, non-discrimination and retirement practices.

For more information: www.ilo.org/safework



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