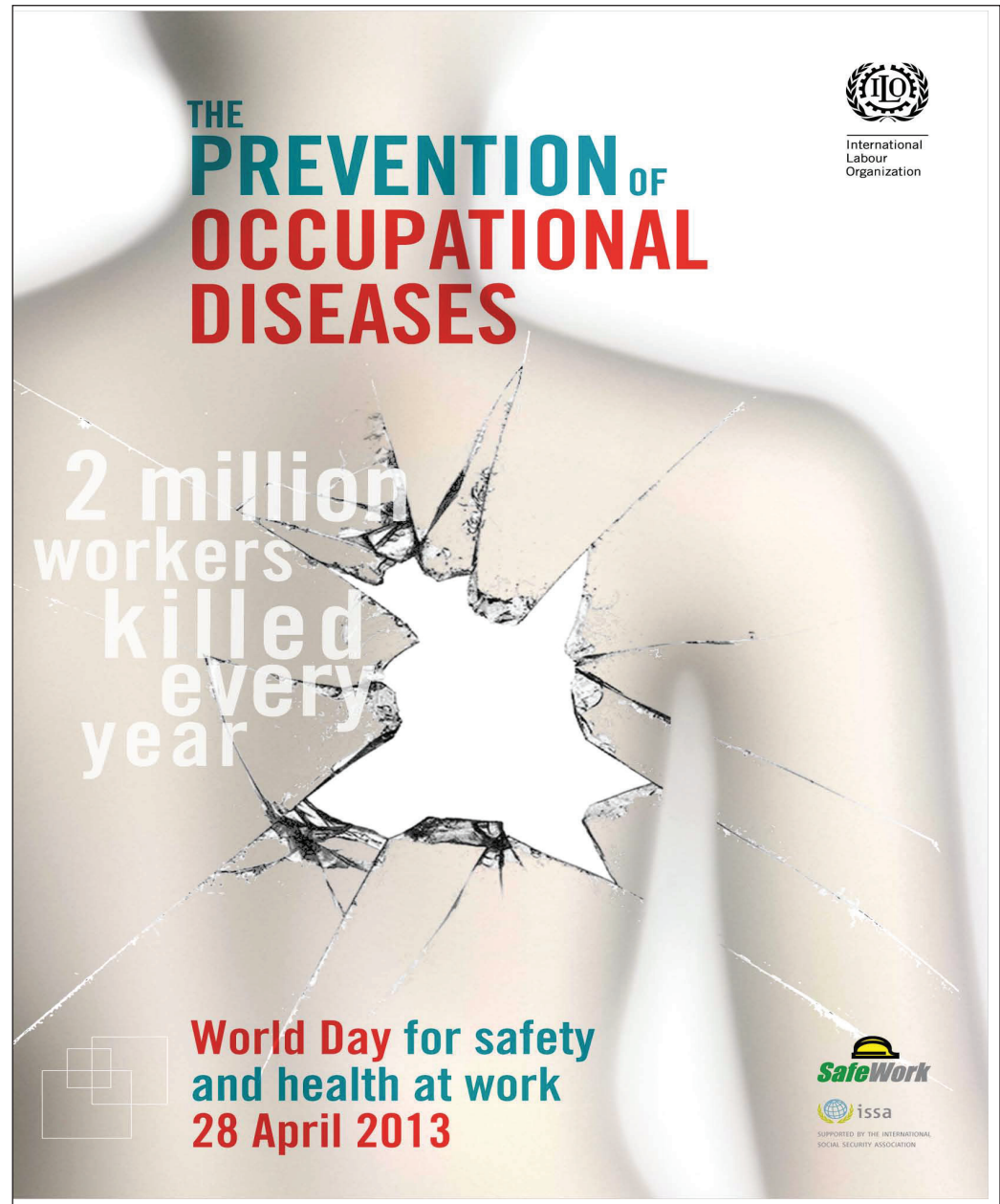




International
Labour
Organization

WORLD DAY FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK



THE PREVENTION OF OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES

2 million workers killed every year

World Day for safety and health at work
28 April 2013


International Labour Organization



SUPPORTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION

ILO calls for urgent global action to fight occupational diseases

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has called for an “urgent and vigorous” global campaign to tackle the growing number of work-related diseases, which claim an estimated 2 million lives per year.

“Occupational disease impoverishes workers and their families and may undermine whole communities when they lose their most productive workers,” said the ILO Director-General Guy Ryder in a statement issued for the World Day for Safety and Health at Work. “Meanwhile, the productivity of enterprises is reduced and the financial burden on the State increases as the cost of health care rises. Where social protection is weak or absent, many workers as well as their families, lack the care and support they need.”

Ryder said prevention is the key to tackling the burden of occupational diseases, and is more effective and less costly than treatment and rehabilitation. He said the ILO was calling for a “paradigm of prevention with comprehensive and coherent action targeting occupational diseases, not only injuries.”

The head of the International Organization of Employers (IOE), Brent Wilton, said: “The ILO is well placed to lead a concerted and holistic effort to address OSH challenges by providing integrated web-based information that is practical and easily accessible to workplace actors, prevention and treatment centres, employers’ and workers’ organizations, enforcing authorities and labour inspectorates. We have an opportunity to ensure that countries are better equipped to avert the risk of facing the same OSH challenges by learning from shared experiences.”

Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), said: “Our societies must not accept that workers can lose their health to make a living. And we must not forget that occupational diseases put a huge burden on families and the public purse

– a burden that is preventable. Harnessing the knowledge of workers, backed by their unions, is crucial for preventing death and illness. Protection, including through respect for workers’ rights to trade union representation, and government legislation and enforcement following ILO standards and guidance should be expanded.”

The Government of Zimbabwe has initiated work on merging all relevant Acts and subsidiary regulations pertaining to Occupational Safety and Health and has already adopted principles to guide this exercise. Currently consensus is being sought among the key stakeholders in order to harmonise the two principal legislative instruments in force for OSH administration in Zimbabwe, that is the Factories and Works (revised) Act, (Cap 14:08) 1996 and its Regulations and The Pneumoconiosis (revised) Act, (Cap 15:08) 1996. The two pieces of legislation are supplemented by the Statutory Instrument 68 of 1990 on - The Accident Prevention and Workers Compensation scheme. The main objective of this exercise is to develop a new legislative framework which embraces the instruments recently adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and also to give effect to Conventions that have been ratified by Zimbabwe.

In a report issued for the World Day for Safety and Health at Work, the ILO said that despite the fact that occupational diseases kill six times as many people, accidents attract greater attention. Of the estimated 2.34 million annual work-related deaths, the vast majority – approximately 2.02 million – are due to work-related diseases. This represents a daily average of 5,500 deaths. The ILO also estimates that 160 million cases of non-fatal work-related diseases occur annually.

Zimbabwe
In 2012 the Division of Occupational Health and Safety at NSSA diagnosed 13 cases of pneumoconiosis. By the end of April 2013, the Division had diagnosed

and recorded another thirteen (13) cases of the disease

Technological and social changes, along with global economic conditions, are aggravating existing health hazards and creating new risks. Well-known occupational diseases, such as pneumoconiosis and asbestos-related diseases, remain widespread, while relatively new occupational diseases, such as mental and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), are on the rise.

Occupational diseases carry an enormous cost – for workers and their families, as well as for economic and social development. The ILO estimates that occupational accidents and diseases result in an annual 4 per cent loss in global gross domestic product (GDP), or about US\$2.8 trillion, in direct and indirect costs of injuries and diseases.

Good quality data is of key importance, providing the basis for an effective prevention strategy. Yet, globally, more than half of all countries do not provide statistics for occupational diseases. Only a few countries collect sex-disaggregated data. This makes it difficult not only to identify specific types of occupational injuries and diseases that affect men and women, but also hinders the development of effective preventive measures for all.

“Significantly reducing the incidence of occupational disease is not simple, it may not be easy and it will not happen overnight, but progress is certainly feasible. So let us, in our respective areas of responsibility, set clear OSH goals, establish a road map and most critically, act and persevere so that, together, we succeed in turning the tide on the epidemic and make good progress on this dimension of decent work,” Ryder said.

The Prevention of Occupational Diseases

The World Day for Safety and Health at Work in 2013 focuses on the prevention of occupational diseases.

Worldwide, occupational diseases continue to be the leading cause of work-related deaths. According to ILO estimates, out of 2.34 million occupational fatalities every year, only 321,000 are due to accidents. The remaining 2.02 million deaths are caused by various types of work-related diseases, which correspond to a daily average of more than 5,500 deaths. This is an unacceptable Decent Work deficit.

The inadequate prevention of occupational diseases has profound negative effects not only on workers and their families but also on society at large due to the tremendous costs that it generates; particularly, in terms of loss of productivity and burdening of social security systems.

Prevention is more effective and less costly than treatment and rehabilitation. All countries can take concrete steps now to improve their capacity for preventing occupational diseases.

As every year, the ILO Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment has prepared a report on ‘The Prevention of Occupational Diseases’. The report highlights occupational safety and health (OSH) as an integral part of the promotion of the prevention of occupational diseases and outlines the current situation concerning occupational diseases and presents proposals for addressing this serious Decent Work deficit. It calls on governments, employers, workers and their organizations to collaborate in the development and implementation of national policies and strategies aimed at preventing occupational and work-re-

lated diseases.

Occupational diseases cause huge suffering and loss in the world of work. While much progress has been made in addressing the challenges of occupational diseases, there is an urgent need to strengthen the capacity for their prevention in national OSH systems. With the collaborative effort of governments and employers’ and workers’ organizations, the fight against this hidden epidemic will have to feature prominently in new global and national agendas for safety and health.

Health and safety at work: Facts and figures

- **2.02 million people die each year from work-related diseases.**
- **321,000 people die each year from occupational accidents.**
- **160 million non-fatal work-related diseases per year.**
- **317 million non-fatal occupational accidents per year.**

This means that:

- **Every 15 seconds, a worker dies from a work-related accident or disease.**
- **Every 15 seconds, 151 workers have a work-related accident.**

Deaths and injuries take a particularly heavy toll in developing countries, where a large part of the population is engaged in hazardous activities, such as agriculture, construction, fishing and mining.

Questions and Answers about the prevention of occupational diseases

Occupational diseases cause huge suffering and loss in the world of work. Yet, occupational or work-related diseases remain largely invisible in comparison to industrial accidents, even though they kill six times as many people each year. What’s more, the nature of occupational diseases is altering rapidly: technological and social changes, along with global economic conditions, are aggravating existing health hazards and creating new ones. Well-known occupational diseases, such as pneumoconiosis, remain widespread, while relatively new occupational diseases, such as mental and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), are on the rise.

What constitutes an occupational disease?

Occupational diseases are diseases contracted as a result of an exposure to risk factors arising from work. Recognition of the occupational origin of a disease, at the individual level, requires the establishment of a causal relationship between the disease and the exposure of the worker to certain hazardous agents at the workplace. This relationship is normally established on the basis of clinical and pathological data, occupational history (anamnesis) and job analysis, identification and evaluation of occupational hazards as well as exposure verification. When a disease is clinically diagnosed and a causal link is established, the disease is then recognized as occupational.

What is the global picture today?

An estimated 2.34 million people die each year from work-related