

Promoting safe and healthy jobs: The ILO Global Programme on Safety, Health and the Environment (Safework)

The adoption in 2006 of a far-reaching ILO Convention (No. 187) and Recommendation (No. 197) concerning the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health provides a key tool in the struggle to meet the challenges of OSH in today's fast-paced, globalized economy. In this article Dr. Sameera Al-Tuwaijri, Director of the ILO Safework Programme, describes these challenges and how the ILO is responding to them.

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GENEVA – The ILO estimates that 337 million accidents occur on the job annually, while the number of people suffering from work-related diseases is close to 2 million. These mistakes amount to approximately 2.3 million deaths each year, with 650,000 of them due to hazardous substances – double the number of a few years ago.

The economic burden of poor OSH practices is staggering. Roughly 1.25 trillion US dollars is siphoned off annually by costs such as lost working time, workers' compensation, the interruption of production, and medical expenses. Beyond the economic issues, we have a moral obligation: the human costs are far beyond unacceptable. Although work should not be a dangerous undertaking, in reality it kills more people than wars do.

Why is this, when there is an unprecedented volume of research and knowledge about risk management, and large numbers of legal instruments, technical standards, guidelines, training manuals, and practical information available?

A closer look at the statistics shows that, although industrialized countries have seen steady decreases in the numbers of occupational accidents and diseases, this is not the case in countries currently experiencing rapid industrialization or those too poor to maintain effective national OSH systems, including proper enforcement of legislation.

In developing countries, standards and practices are often far below acceptable levels and the rate of accidents has been increasing rather than decreasing. Rapid globalization has led to technological change and competitive pressures in the scramble for capital that often induce employers in these regions to regard occupational safety and health as an afterthought. The potential for institutions with the capacity to act on a worldwide level to mobilize the forces of globalization for positive change must be realized to reverse these trends.

This is where the ILO can really make a difference. Its tripartite organizational structure of workers, employers, and governments is well suited to the initiation and facilitation of far-reaching programmes. It also possesses the resources and the global mandate to coordinate the exchange of knowledge and ideas on OSH. This is why we have every reason for optimism as we push for decent work for all in the 21st century through the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health, 2006 – part of the ILO's Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health (see sidebar).

Challenges

Four major challenges must be overcome if we are to realize the promise of the ILO's Global Strategy on OSH:

- *The need for a stronger political will to improve OSH standards.* While legislation often exists, many nations fail to give "teeth" to the law in that they do not provide adequate implementation and enforcement mechanisms. Both adequate resources and the willingness to follow up on progress are required for effective enforcement to take place. If OSH is high on the list of political priorities, it will be continually examined, reviewed, and refined.
- *Better opportunities for education and on-the-job training.* The importance of education will only increase as the pace of technological advancement accelerates. The technical safety training that is required in most industries can be very complex. For example, a truck driver must know how to handle his vehicle in a wide variety of situations and weather conditions. But safety can also be as simple as understanding the importance of wearing safety goggles or turning off machines before cleaning them.

Vocational training centres, governments, and enterprises themselves must all take part in educating workers on avoiding unnecessary accidents and the contraction of diseases.

For ILO SafeWork, the best way to reach as many workers as possible is through a “training the trainers” approach. This means that we gather together as many officials that are responsible for OSH in various industries or geographic regions as we can, and train them on the latest best practices in the appropriate fields. ILO Training Centres have been especially helpful in this aim. We also strive to apply this approach to those who need OSH education the most, for example workers in developing countries and/or vulnerable workers in the informal economy. One example of this is the Work Improvements in Small Enterprises Programme (WISE), which has been used to great success in several countries such as Mongolia. This focuses on the particular challenges facing small or family-owned businesses.

- *Improved awareness of OSH issues*, closely related to the concern over education. A culture of prevention must be established within the workplace for OSH measures to make significant headway. Even if governments, businesses, and unions do everything correctly, accidents will still occur if workers show little regard for their own safety. The process of training and education, in addition to effective disciplinary measures, can go a long way in alerting workers to threats to their well-being. And if a noticeable change in the regard for safety is shown within the general workforce, this can in turn influence businesses and governments to take more proactive stances.

- *Wider partnerships that integrate many layers of society*. No one entity can tackle all the challenges that must be addressed. Governments can legislate, enforce, and advise. Businesses can educate and perform self-compliance. Workers can push for their rights and strictly observe all safety regulations. If all these moving parts work together in a synergistic manner, the potential for progress is boundless. International organizations such as the ILO have a large role to play in coordinating and facilitating the partnerships necessary to achieve these aims. The Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health was formulated with this in mind.

An important aspect of the Plan of Action for the ILO's Global Strategy on OSH is technical assistance and cooperation. One example is the ILO-Volkswagen-GTZ project. GTZ is a German international cooperation agency for sustainable development with worldwide operations. Volkswagen, in line with its corporate social responsibility initiatives, would also like to see better labour standards applied to its suppliers, many of whom are in South Africa, Mexico, and Brazil. VW and GTZ are funding an ILO project through SafeWork to strengthen the labour inspectorates of these three countries, especially in relation to VW suppliers. Joint inspections between the company and the government, with an emphasis on advisory initiatives to assist the suppliers in pursuing safer practices, have experienced great success. The ILO, through public/private partnerships such as this one, has the capacity to foster growth in many areas of the OSH field, especially education and the establishment of a preventative culture.

A global strategy on Occupational Safety and Health

The ILO has developed a number of comprehensive instruments to further its work in the field of OSH. The most recent of these are the Convention (No. 187) and Recommendation (No. 197) concerning the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health, 2006. These instruments are best seen in the context of the Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2003, which confirms the role of ILO instruments as a central pillar for the promotion of OSH. At the same time the Strategy calls for integrated action that better connects the ILO standards with other means of action such as advocacy, awareness raising, knowledge development, management, information dissemination and technical cooperation.

ILO instruments include 19 Conventions, 26 Recommendations, 2 Protocols, and 37 codes of practice and guidelines (see the book feature on page 31 for a description of some of these). Some of the Conventions, such as the Safety and Health in Construction Convention, 1988 (No.167), or the Safety and Health in Mines Convention, 1995 (No.176), are very industry specific. However, their scope can also be quite broad. One of the most notable of these is Convention No.155, the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981, with its accompanying Protocol of 2002. This relates to the need for the formulation and implementation of national OSH policies that focus on preventing injuries and diseases at work. It also calls for periodic reviews of national policies and programs in recognition of the fact that technological and social changes are occurring at an incredibly rapid pace.

Two other Conventions of note are Convention No. 81, the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947, one of the most widely ratified of all ILO instruments, and Convention No. 129, the Labour Inspection in Agriculture Convention, 1969. These two Conventions provide a background for the development of labour inspectorates throughout the world. The ILO has also developed training materials such as the Integrated Labour Inspection Training System, and has held training workshops for inspectors in many countries, such as Croatia, Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Fiji, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, South Africa, Uzbekistan, Ukraine and Viet Nam.

The relevancy of inspection continues to increase as developing countries in various regions begin to address their OSH situations. Proactive national laws, especially related to accident and disease prevention, are an important first step on the path of progress. However, without effective implementation, enterprise-level advisors, and enforcement, this legislation is in danger of becoming little more than ink and paper. The labour inspection Conventions reinforce the right of inspectors to enter workplaces and take appropriate enforcement action. As such, inspection remains a key component of the ILO's Global Strategy on OSH. Its important role in implementation and practical-level advancement in the field cannot be overstated.

National OSH systems

In recent years, governments, enterprises and international organizations have all been giving greater attention to the need to adopt systematic models for managing OSH. A major aim of the ILO Global Strategy on OSH is the development of national OSH policies, systems, programmes, and profiles through a management systems approach. OSH is a complex subject, involving a large number of specific disciplines and a wide range of workplace and environmental hazards. National OSH systems need somehow to capture these complexities if they are to function coherently and effectively.

While national policies will vary greatly based on regional cultures, customs, and political situations, they should all operate within the relatively broad framework set out in the new Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No.187) and in accordance with the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155).

Convention No. 187 sets out the essential elements of a national OSH system:

- Legislation and any other relevant OSH instruments
- One or more authorities or bodies responsible for OSH
- Regulatory compliance mechanisms, including systems of inspection
- A national tripartite advisory mechanism addressing OSH issues
- Arrangements to promote at the enterprise level, cooperation between employers and workers
- OSH information and advisory services
- Systems for the provision of OSH training
- Occupational health services
- Research on OSH
- A mechanism for the collection and analysis of data on occupational injuries and diseases
- Provisions for collaboration with relevant insurance or social security schemes covering occupational injuries and diseases
- Support mechanisms for a progressive improvement of OSH conditions in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and in the informal economy

The preparation of a national OSH profile is an essential initial step in building a good national OSH programme. Twenty-nine countries have developed national profiles or are currently in the process of doing so. The profile is a summary of the OSH situation including data on occupational accidents and diseases and an inventory of all the tools and resources available in a country to implement and manage OSH. Once completed, the profile can be used not only as a basis for identifying priorities for action, but also as a tool for measuring progress over time through periodic updating.

Forecasting the future

With the pace of change in patterns of employment and in developing technologies over recent years, it has become ever more important to anticipate different, often new, risks if they are to be effectively managed. And many long-standing concerns have been reconsidered in the light of changing patterns of work and technologies.

OSH experts are forecasting an increase in different kinds of risk:

Physical risks, including lack of physical activity, poor awareness of heat and cold (particularly among agriculture and construction workers), exposure to heavy physical work, vibration or UV radiation.

Biological risks such as HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, tuberculosis, SARS, avian flu, dengue fever, and so on. It is estimated that 320,000 workers worldwide die every year from exposure to viral, bacterial, insect- or animal-related biological risks. Global trading has increased the risk of infection and the difficulty of developing effective responses.

Chemical risks from hazardous substances such as heavy metals, oxides, carcinogens, endocrine disrupting chemicals such as some insecticides, and toxic dusts and fumes when workers are exposed to them over a long period.

New categories of exposures such as the potential harms from nanomaterials in the workplace. The worldwide impact of nanotechnology-related products has been predicted to exceed US\$1 trillion by 2015. A nanometre-sized particle is smaller than a living cell and can be seen only with the most powerful microscopes. A single nanometre is one-billionth of a meter, compared to human hair, which is approximately 80,000 nanometres in diameter. At nano levels, materials begin to exhibit unique properties that affect physical, chemical, and biological behaviour. Nanoscale materials are increasingly being used in optoelectronic, electronic, magnetic, medical imaging, drug delivery, cosmetic, catalytic, and materials applications. Potential health issues, including occupational health risks associated with nanomaterials, are not yet clearly understood.

Stress. Changes in work design and organization, and the introduction of new technologies or new forms of employment contract (including precarious employment) can all result in increased stress levels. When HIV/AIDS, abuse of alcohol, drugs and tobacco, violence or harassment are added to the mix, a serious deterioration of mental and physical health can ensue.

Building a national OSH system in Kazakhstan

ASTANA, Republic of Kazakhstan – Kazakhstan has pioneered the new approaches to occupational safety and health and become a model for other countries of Central Asia. Recent economic transformation has brought a stunning 10 per cent growth, but the country still faces formidable challenges inherited from Soviet times. An outdated OSH legislation and management system was one of them.

The situation became acute in the 1990s, when working conditions deteriorated drastically and the annual number of victims of accidents and work-related diseases ran into thousands. It was obvious that a radical upgrading and modernizing of the country's OSH system was required.

Kazakhstan started by adopting a set of new laws, first a law on OSH, which later was transformed into a labour code with a chapter on OSH, as well as a law on social partnership.

Kazakhstan has ratified key OSH Conventions, such as Convention No. 81 on Labour Inspection, and Convention No. 167 on Occupational Safety and Health in Construction, and is considering ratifying the new Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 187) adopted in 2006. To implement the latter, the country is systematically building a modern occupational safety and health system by means of a national OSH programme, following the logical steps described in Convention No. 187.

The initial step was to prepare a national OSH profile that contained all basic data related to occupational safety and health: current legislative framework; implementation mechanisms; information and training; enforcement and infrastructure; human and financial resources available; OSH initiatives at the enterprise level, and so on.

The second phase of the Korean project will assist these countries to draft these national OSH programmes. In Kazakhstan, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection has requested the regions to prepare regional OSH programmes, which will be the base for the updated national OSH programme from

the year 2008 onwards, replacing the previous programme.

“Kazakhstan is certainly a good example of the systematic and effective implementation of OSH requirements at the national and enterprise level with the full involvement of the social partners,” says Wiking Husberg, senior OSH specialist at the ILO Subregional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia. “Some issues still need to be addressed; but we have an agreement with the trade unions now to establish safety committees at the enterprise level. The issue of restrictions on labour inspections, which was pointed out by a recent labour inspection audit, still needs to be resolved. However, what is most important is that a process of continuous action, review and improvement is under way in this country.”

An important development was the adoption by Kazakhstan of a new inter-state GOST standard identical to the *ILO-OSH 2001 Guidelines for occupational safety and health management systems*, based on risk assessment, workers’ participation and prevention, aimed at reaching a safety culture. The introduction of systematic OSH management systems at enterprises was strongly endorsed by major corporations in a seminar on risk assessment last April.

Imstalkon, one of the biggest building and construction companies in Kazakhstan, has already introduced the new OSH management system at dozens of its enterprises throughout the country. The company now employs more than 9,000 workers. Over the more than 50 years of its existence, it has built hundreds of projects, including the 372-metre Kok Tjube TV tower, Almaty International Airport, the 26-storey Kazakhstan Hotel and many industrial enterprises.

“Construction works are connected with many risks, that is why we pay special attention to occupational safety,” says Mikhail Rezunov, Imstalkon chief engineer. “Our task was to create a completely new management system, oriented towards risk assessment and prevention, addressing occupational risks at their source. And still the main change had to happen in people’s minds – they had to realize that it is much easier and less costly to prevent an accident than to deal with its consequences. Now, with the new system in place, we can say that our efforts pay back – not only in financial terms, but also in terms of our company’s image, which is equally important.”

Berdybek Saparbayev, Kazakhstan’s minister of labour and social protection, agrees: “Using the ILO methodology, we have compared the cost of prevention and that of the consequences from an accident in two of the most dangerous industries in our country – mining and construction. And we found that prevention costs dozens times less! ILO-OSH 2001 has proved to be a very efficient tool and we have to introduce it throughout Kazakhstan. Of course much is still to be done, but we will continue to move forward.”

Changing patterns in the workforce

- *Migration.* International migration of workers will most likely accelerate in the 21st century. Yet migrant workers continue to be particularly vulnerable, tending to be employed in “3-D” work (dirty, dangerous and demanding), with long hours, inadequately covered by social security and with language and cultural barriers that make communication on OSH difficult.
- *Ageing, particularly in industrialized countries.* Increasing numbers of older workers are opting to stay at work. In Europe, the 45-64 age group is expected to represent almost half the working population by 2020. Although ageing is an individual process related to genetics and lifestyle, older workers frequently have one or more chronic medical diseases or disorders. Rates of hypertension, chronic pulmonary or cardiac disease, diabetes, obesity, cancer, neurological disorders, renal and liver disease are increased. But on the other hand, older workers have much to offer their employers as a result of their experience, knowledge and skills, and can continue to be valuable assets if due attention is paid to their safety and health.
- *Gender.* The increasing proportion of women in the workforce raises a range of questions about the different effects of work-related risks on men and women, including exposure to hazardous substances, the effects of biological agents on reproductive health, the physical demands of heavy work, the ergonomic design of workplaces and the length of the working day. The emergence of nanotechnology and previously unexplored health effects of prolonged exposure to nanoparticles will doubtless have impacts on safety and health, but will those health effects be the same for women as for men, who face the same exposures?
- *The informal economy.* At the dawn of the 21st century most of the world’s working population earns its livelihood under the vulnerable and insecure conditions of the informal economy. The ILO Resolution on Decent Work and the Informal Economy adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2002

highlights the fact that workers in the informal economy experience the most severe decent work deficits. Among these are unsafe and unhealthy working conditions. The extension of OSH to informal workers and economic units is a major challenge that participatory training methodologies such as the WISE (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises) and WIND (Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development) programmes have successfully addressed in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Raising awareness and knowledge sharing

ILO SafeWork is committed to taking a leadership role in raising awareness of OSH issues and best practices in the field. Much of this relates directly to the dissemination of available information.

The International Occupational Safety and Health Information Centre (CIS), a specialized unit within the SafeWork Programme, plays an important role in the collection, organization and dissemination of high-quality OSH information at an international level. It is helped in its tasks by its network of regional, national and collaboration centres, which includes all the major OSH information centres around the world. The CIS bibliographic database, with 70,000 records, is the primary guide to the world literature on OSH, while the CIS website is available free of charge and receives about 1.2 million page hits per month.

The “SafeWork Bookshelf” is a CD-ROM (in English and French) that includes the *ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety* as well as the International Chemical Safety Cards. Guides, codes of practice and training materials are available in printed as well as electronic formats.

In keeping up with the rate of change in the world today, ILO SafeWork designs to be on the cutting edge of progress. Collaboration with other organizations, and particularly universities and vocational training institutions in high-impact research projects, is pursued.

One particularly successful collaboration has been the ILO/WHO Global Programme for the Elimination of Silicosis: in 2003 the Joint ILO/WHO Committee on Occupational Health concluded that decades of effort were paying off and decided to push for the elimination of silicosis and asbestos-related diseases as a priority. A major tool in this is the ILO Classification of Radiographs – now in existence for over 50 years and still the international standard for early detection of silicosis.

Other important partnerships include the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, the International Association of Labour Inspection, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Maritime Organization, and UNEP.

The men and women who go to work every day and whose efforts there drive the global economy deserve the highest degree of safety and health that can be provided to them. 2.3 million deaths and hundreds of millions of accidents suffered and diseases contracted annually does not reflect an adequate degree of protection. The new Declaration on Safety and Health adopted in July in Seoul, Korea at the XVIIIth World Congress on Safety and Health (see page 43) raises new hope of revitalized political will, increased awareness, continuous education, and the engagement of partnerships at all levels of society to strengthen and improve the state of occupational safety and health locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

Extending Occupational Safety and Health to the informal economy

Over a billion people, more than 60 per cent of Asia’s workforce, are still working in the informal economy, with little or no social protection. Experience shows that workers and small businesses in the informal economy are usually motivated to improve safety and health conditions out of their own initiative, but they still need practical support. *World of Work* spoke with Tsuyoshi Kawakami, ILO specialist on occupational safety and health in Bangkok.

What are the safety and health conditions of workers in the informal economy in Asia?

Asia’s informal economy cuts across all economic sectors – agriculture, industry and services. They all need practical support measures to improve the safety and health problems they face. Workers and the self-employed often work in substandard conditions, being exposed to various hazards in the workplace without having appropriate safety and health training and information. As far as national labour laws are concerned, they do not always cover the informal economy.

What are the immediate priorities for occupational safety and health (OSH) programmes?

We need measures that are practical, easy-to-apply, and work at the local level. Just to give you an example: low-cost approaches based on good practices have overcome cost barriers in small workplaces in Asia and have also allowed the active participation of many workers, resulting in concrete improvements. We found that things that may appear obvious have actually helped us kick-start our programmes: I think of practical training tools such as illustrated checklists and photographs showing good OSH practices.

Can you give us examples of successful programmes?

In Cambodia, four Training-Of-Trainer (TOT) courses were held in four different cities to cover all the regions. These participatory OSH training networks have constantly increased nation-wide coverage. This expansion was possible because of the practical orientation of the training programmes providing workers with low-cost solutions to their OSH problems. As of April 2008, more than 3,000 workers in the informal economy were trained through the established participatory trainer networks.

These participatory training approaches will be part of the first Occupational Safety and Health Master Plan (2008-2012) of Cambodia that will be launched this year. The positive experiences and achievements have been widely shared with other ASEAN countries and publicized in international OSH conferences and journals.

How can we reach workers and the self-employed in the informal economy?

Local workplaces and communities have varied peoples' networks. It is common for local small business owners to form associations for exchanging ideas and information to upgrade their businesses. Local trade union leaders and members often have good access to grassroots workers and know the way to support informal economy workplaces to improve their working conditions. Often self-employed workers have their own cooperation system to improve their work environments.

You stress the importance of a local approach to OSH in the informal economy...

Local intervention teams are a good option, as they include a variety of local resource persons, including government officials, inspectors, health personnel, trade associations, workers' organizations, community leaders and local NGOs. They can carry out rapid assessments of the target groups in a given region. This is done by workplace walkthroughs using relevant safety and health action-checklists and direct interviews with workers and employers.

The next step is to design participatory training programmes adjusted to specific needs of the target groups. The ILO Training Centre in Turin helps us to organize activities at all levels. Obviously, support at the national policy level is also key to the success of OSH programmes in the informal economy. The Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) calls for the establishment of support mechanisms for a progressive improvement of occupational safety and health conditions in the informal economy...