



## *World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2009*

# **FACTS ON** *safety and health at work*



International  
Labour  
Organization

The protection of workers' lives and health has been a key objective of the ILO from its very beginning 90 years ago, as an element of its founding charter. Today, rapid technological change and a fast-paced and globalized economy pose new challenges and pressures for all areas of the world of work, and especially for occupational safety and health, which is also an integral element of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

Developing countries, where the rate of accidents has been increasing, face particular challenges. There, most workers are in the informal economy where work-related accidents, disease and death are likely to be unrecorded. Their health and safety must be a prime concern.

While the promotion of occupational safety and health (OSH) has improved over the past decades, the level of workplace fatalities, injuries and illnesses still remains unacceptably high and takes an enormous toll on men, women and their families. Economies lose out as well; the cost of accidents and ill health amounts to an estimated 4 per cent of the world's GDP.

In the current global financial and economic crisis, this situation may even worsen. There are growing concerns that the global economic slowdown will have negative effects on specific sectors, possibly endangering the safety and health of millions of workers. The potential for compromises in safety and health due to economic factors may lead to an increase in the number of workplace accidents and diseases.

Today's workplaces can only benefit from the construction of a new preventive safety and health culture that is integrated into wider societal culture and economic development. Many ILO constituents recognize that safety at work is not only an ethical imperative, but that it makes "dollars and sense".

### **FACTS**

- The ILO estimates that each year about 2.3 million men and women die from work-related accidents and diseases including close to 360,000 fatal accidents and an estimated 1.95 million fatal work-related diseases.
- This means that by the end of this day nearly 1 million workers will suffer a workplace accident, and around 5,500 workers will die due to an accident or disease from their work.
- In economic terms it is estimated that roughly four per cent of the annual global Gross Domestic Product, or US\$1.25 trillion, is siphoned off by direct and indirect costs of occupational accidents and diseases such as lost working time, workers' compensation, the interruption of production and medical expenses.
- Hazardous substances cause an estimated 651,000 deaths, mostly in the developing world. These numbers may be greatly under-estimated due to inadequate reporting and notification systems in many countries.
- Data from a number of industrialized countries show that construction workers are three to four times more likely than other workers to die from accidents at work.
- Occupational lung disease in mining and related industries arising from asbestos, coal and silica exposure is still a concern in developed and developing countries. Asbestos alone claims about 100,000 deaths every year and the figure is rising annually.

## The role of the ILO

The ILO's lead unit on OSH is the Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment (SafeWork). It plays an important role in raising awareness of OSH issues and sharing best practices in the field.

SafeWork has four major goals: develop preventive policies and programmes to protect workers in hazardous occupations and sectors; extend the effective protection to vulnerable groups of workers falling outside the scope of traditional protective measures; better equip governments, employers' and workers' organizations to address problems of workers' well-being, occupational health care and the quality of working life; and document the social and economic impact of improving workers' protection so that it can be recognized by policy- and decision-makers.

## Key ILO standards relating to Occupational Safety and Health

The ILO has developed a number of comprehensive instruments to further its work in the field of OSH. Many of these international instruments concern specific sectors or specific hazards.

The ILO Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 197) define provisions for countries to promote OSH through national OSH systems and programmes, the building of a preventive safety and health culture and applying a systems approach to the management of OSH. Employers, workers and governments all play key roles in making this happen.

## 28 APRIL: WORLD DAY FOR SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK

The annual World Day for Safety and Health at Work on 28 April promotes a preventive culture to help reduce work-related deaths and injuries globally.

Each of us is responsible for stopping deaths and injuries on the job: As employers we are responsible for ensuring that the workplaces are safe and without risk to health. As governments we are responsible for providing the infrastructure – laws and services – necessary to ensure that workers remain employable and that enterprises flourish: this includes the development of a national policy and programme and a system of inspection to enforce compliance with OSH legislation and policy. As workers we are responsible to work safely and to protect ourselves and not endanger others, to know our rights, and to participate in implementing preventive measures.

The 2009 theme of the World Day is "Health and life at work: a basic human right". Past themes have included Safe work and HIV/AIDS (2006); Safe and healthy workplaces – making decent work a reality (2007); and Managing risk in the work environment (2008). See [www.ilo.org/safeday](http://www.ilo.org/safeday)

*"Safety and health at work is a basic human right. The final message is loud and clear: Even in a changing world, we tolerate **NO COMPROMISE** on the right to safe and healthy work."*

ILO SafeWork

## Providing safe and healthy workplaces for women and men

April 2009 theme of the Gender equality at the heart of decent work Campaign 2008-2009

Today, women represent over 40 percent of the global workforce, or 1.2 billion out of the global total of 3 billion workers. This increasing proportion of women in the workforce has led to a range of gender-related questions about the different effects of work-related risks on men and women, in terms of exposure to hazardous substances, or the impact of biological agents on reproductive health, the physical demands of heavy work, the ergonomic design of workplaces and the length of the working day, especially when domestic duties also have to be taken into account. Moreover, occupational safety and health (OSH) hazards affecting women workers have been traditionally under-estimated because OSH standards and exposure limits to hazardous substances are mainly based on male populations and laboratory tests.



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April 2009