



Improving Occupational Safety and Health of the People in our Region

SIHLWA Expert Group, Sub-group on Occupational Safety and Health

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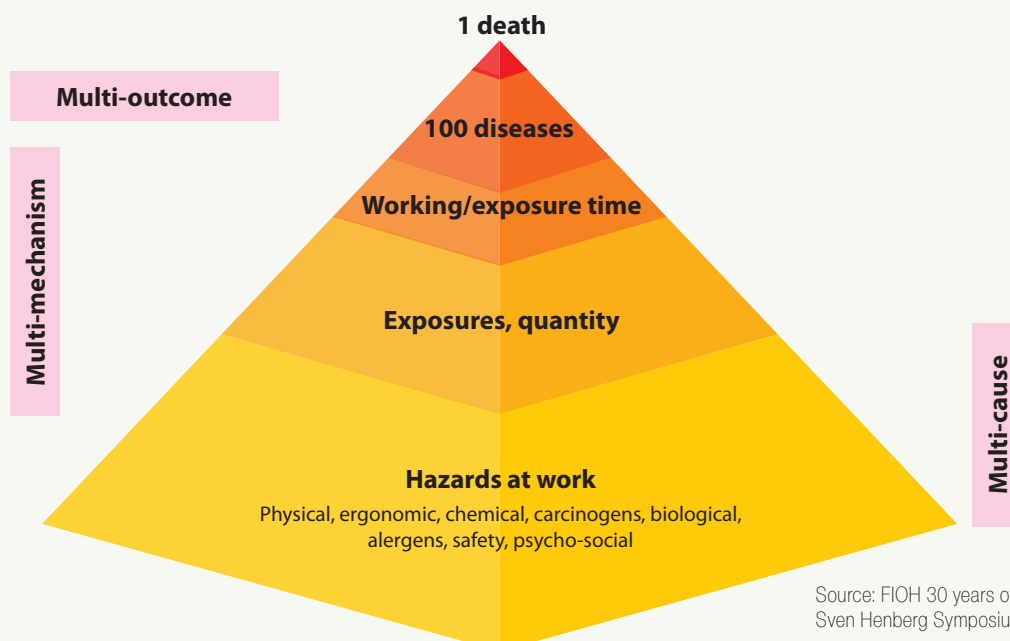
Fact sheet 11/2008

Why occupational safety and health is an important issue

Health at Work concerns 125 million working people in the Northern Dimension area. Therefore, achieving and keeping high standards of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) is an important task for the respective authorities in all countries in the region. Rapidly changing work environment and introduction of new technologies often constitute a challenge for the governmental policies in this sector. A coherent and holistic approach is indispensable for reducing health hazards, improving the productivity and the level of social well-being of every employee.

Gaps and challenges to address

- Among the countries in the Baltic Sea Region great variations in working conditions and, in some areas, lack of preventive occupational health services are important sources of enormous inequities in health. Large differences in basic safety and health approaches and regulatory policies may cause transfer of hazardous operations and dumping of hazardous chemicals and machinery, they may result in unfair competition, and infringement of the human rights of women and men;
- Poor working conditions, occupational accidents, and occupational diseases cause a great deal of human suffering, are partly the cause of low life expectancy and high working age mortality, and exclude people from work. Altogether, for the countries in the Baltic Sea Region they cost EUR 225 billion, which is 4% of the GDP;
- In spite of some positive developments, which have taken place in many countries in the Baltic Sea Region within the past years, the situation is in great need of further improvement. For instance, Estonia still has no formal system of state insurance for occupational accidents and diseases. In Latvia, both the number of workplace accidents and deaths arising from workplace accidents has increased over the past few years. This is also due to the insufficient capacity of the relevant institutions;
- Even in some Nordic countries the level of occupational hazards has increased within the past decade. For example, in Norway and in Finland the number of occupational accidents is in an upwards trend.



Source: FIOH 30 years of Epidemiology
Sven Henberg Symposium ILO/SafeWork

To decrease occupational accidents and diseases, proactive and systematic risk assessment and preventive work need to be focused on hazards, incidents and exposure.

How poor occupational safety and health standards affect our societies

Good standards of occupational safety and health, and working conditions have direct relevance to an overwhelming part of the society. Poor occupational safety and health performance result in substantial cost to the state through social security payments to the incapacitated, costs for medical treatment, and the loss of the 'employability' of the worker. Employing organisations also sustain costs in the event of an incident at work such as legal fees, fines, compensatory damages, investigation time, lost production, lost goodwill from the workforce, from customers and from the wider community. In order to avoid this, both respective authorities and the members of the public impacted by the workplace environment have to team-up with an aim of ensuring that employers and employees comply with the highest attainable health and safety standards.

What should be done to improve occupational safety and health

Actions that the NDPHS Expert Group recommends include multi-sectoral efforts to promote and uphold high occupational safety and health standards, such as:

- Improving statistics and making more surveys to guide health policy actions in our countries;
- The governments, labour unions, employers and preventive health organisations need to work together in raising awareness and knowledge of occupational health and safety issues among employers, employees, and public in general;
- Introducing of new, simple and inexpensive methods in risk management in the micro-companies and the small and medium size enterprises.

The role of the NDPHS

In 2007, during its annual conference held at the ministerial level, the NDPHS decided to take a determined action to help alleviate challenges and gaps in the occupational safety and health sector. To that end it adopted a "Partnership Strategy on Health at Work" that is aimed to help reduce non-communicable diseases and to benefit the health and well-being of women and men in the work environment. More specifically, the strategy aims at drawing up national OSH profiles, policies and programmes, defining high-risk sectors to eliminate health hazards at work and, finally, organising seminars, information and awareness campaigns with the help of International Labour Organization (ILO), World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work and the participating institutions. The systematic approach of the strategy, developing policies, programmes and systems for health at work and linking the public health and occupational health systems will harness the resources of both systems for a coherent and effective delivery of health services for the working age population.

Learn more

This fact sheet has been developed on the basis of a paper "Country Reports on Occupational Safety and Health in the Northern Dimension Area," which was developed by the Occupational Safety & Health (OSH) Sub-group of the Expert Group on Social Inclusion, Healthy Lifestyles and Work Ability (SIHLWA) in collaboration with the Baltic Sea Network on Occupational Health and Safety. The paper can be downloaded in "Papers" section of the NDPHS Database (www.ndphs.org/?database).

Information about the Expert Group on Social Inclusion, Healthy Lifestyles and Work Ability and its OSH Sub-group and their activities can be found on the NDPHS website at www.ndphs.org/?sihlwa_eg and be obtained from:

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