



Workplace Safety and Health Management

Practical Guidelines on the Implementation and Maintenance of an Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare Management System

PART 1

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References

- International
- Health and Safety Authority Guidance

ABOUT THIS ARTICLE

WHO SHOULD READ THIS ARTICLE?

The article is principally aimed at enterprises with a well-defined management structure, where occupational safety and health management can be integrated into the general management system. In particular, it is aimed at executive directors, boards of directors, other boards of management and senior management controlling bodies in workplaces, all senior managers who discharge responsibilities for occupational safety and health, and safety and health professionals. Smaller companies with a less formal management structure can use this article as appropriate to their needs. Safety Representatives should also find it helpful.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE SAFETY AND HEALTH MANAGEMENT SYSTEM?

There are sound economic reasons for reducing work-related accidents and ill-health, as well as ethical and regulatory reasons.

Economic Reasons

Besides reducing costs, effective safety and health management promotes business efficiency. Thousands of work-related accidents, resulting in more than three days off work are reported each year. Work-related diseases and ill-health are more difficult to measure due to their long latency period but result in excess of one million days lost at work each year. These accident and ill-health cases are due to failures and deficiencies in the occupational safety and health management in organisations.

Legal Reasons

The legal requirements in most countries require you to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of your employees and to manage and conduct your work activities in such a way as to ensure their safety, health and welfare. This requires you to be proactive in managing your safety, health and welfare responsibilities and deal with them in a systematic way. This article should help organisations to improve their safety and health performance by providing advice on how safety and health should be managed, and in the process help them to comply with their legal requirements.

Moral and Ethical Reasons

The proactive management of safety and health in the workplace helps organisations prevent injuries and ill-health at work. This article should help organisations reduce the personal loss caused as a result of accidents and ill-health at work.

HOW WILL THIS ARTICLE HELP?

This article aims to give practical advice and recommendations on developing an occupational safety, health and welfare management system for your organisation. The words 'safety and health' are used throughout the document for conciseness and are intended to include the safety, health and welfare of employees and others at work due to work activities. This article is not intended to be a specification or to be used for certification purposes This document:

- describes the principles and management practices that provide the basis for effective occupational safety and health management;
- sets out the issues that need to be addressed;
- serves as a tool to develop improvement programmes, self-audits or self-assessments.

INTRODUCTION

Safety and health principles are universal, but how much action is needed will depend on the size of the organisation, the hazards presented by its activities, the physical characteristics of the organisation, products or services, and the adequacy of its existing arrangements.

Many of the features of effective safety and health management are analogous to the sound management practices advocated by proponents of quality management, environmental protection, and business excellence. Commercially successful companies often excel at safety and health management as well, precisely because they apply the same efficient business expertise to safety and health as to all other aspects of their operations.

While the quality management of products or services and environmental protection principally protect physical phenomena, safety and health management in the workplace involves protecting people and developing a safety culture between employers and employees. However, there are considerable similarities between the approaches to safety and health described here and those advocated for effective quality management (ISO 9000 series of standards) or environmental protection (ISO 14000 series).

For example, quality management systems promote continuous improvement in all aspects of an organisation's activities. They are founded on a continuous process of:

- identifying the key processes;
- setting performance standards;
- measuring achievement against these standards;
- taking corrective action;
- identifying opportunities for improvement.

Success in quality management requires the development of supportive organisational cultures. Quality management systems also stress the importance of the active involvement of all employees in the quality process, and the crucial importance of visible leadership by managers.

Organisations that manage safety and health successfully invariably have a positive safety culture and active safety consultation programmes in place. Successful organisations can establish and maintain a culture that supports safety and health. Practical methods of designing, building, operating, and maintaining the appropriate systems are outlined in this article. In the following sections the similarities and strong links between total quality management, environmental protection and effective safety and health management will become increasingly apparent.

1. KEY ELEMENTS OF SAFETY AND HEALTH MANAGEMENT

The key elements of a successful safety and health management system are set out in this section. Diagram 1 (Next issue – Part 2) outlines the relationship between them. They also comply with the main elements of an occupational safety and health management system as set out in the ILO Guidelines. The manner and extent to which the individual elements will be applied will depend on factors such as size of the organisation, its management structure, the nature of its activities, and the risks involved. The terminology used in this guidance is explained in Appendix A.

1.1 POLICY AND COMMITMENT

The organisation should prepare an occupational safety and health policy programme as part of the preparation of the Safety Statement. Effective safety and health policies should set a clear direction for the organisation to follow. They will contribute to all aspects of business performance as part of a demonstrable commitment to continuous improvement. Responsibilities to people and the working environment will be met in a way that fulfills the spirit and letter of the law. Cost-effective approaches to preserving and developing human and physical resources will reduce financial losses and liabilities. In a wider context, stakeholders' expectations, whether they are shareholders, employees or their representatives, customers or society at large, can be met.

1.2 PLANNING

The organisation should formulate a plan to fulfil its safety and health policy as set out in the Safety Statement. An effective management structure and arrangements should be put in place for delivering the policy. Safety and health objectives and targets should be set for all managers and employees.

1.3 IMPLEMENTATION AND OPERATION

For effective implementation, the organisation should develop the capabilities and support mechanisms necessary to achieve its safety and health policy, objectives and targets. All staff should be motivated and empowered to work safely and to protect their long-term health, not simply to avoid accidents. The arrangements should be:

- underpinned by effective staff involvement and participation through appropriate consultation, the use of the safety committee where it exists, and representation systems;

- sustained by effective communication and the promotion of competence which allows all employees and their representatives to make a responsible and informed contribution to the safety and health effort.

There should be a planned and systematic approach to implementing the safety and health policy through an effective safety and health management system. The aim should be to minimise risks. Risk assessment methods should be used to determine priorities and set objectives for eliminating hazards and reducing risks. Wherever possible, risks should be eliminated through the selection and design of facilities, equipment and processes. If risks cannot be eliminated, they should be minimised by the use of physical controls and safe systems of work or, as a last resort, through the provision of personal protective equipment. Performance standards should be established and used for measuring achievement.

Specific actions to promote a positive safety and health culture should be identified. There should be a shared common understanding of the organisation's vision, values and beliefs. The visible and active leadership of senior managers fosters a positive safety and health culture.

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