

Occupational Health
and Safety
Management System
(OHSMS)

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What is Occupational Health and safety Management system? (OHSMS)
An Occupational Health and safety Management system is a frame work that allows an organization to consistently identify and control its health and safety risks, reduce the potential for accidents, help achieve compliance with health and safety legislation and continually improve its performance.

Principles of Occupational Health and Safety

Several definitions of occupational health and safety and occupational health services have been produced by professional bodies, international organizations such as WHO and International Labor Organization (ILO) and national bodies and authorities. If one summarizes those definitions, occupational health is considered to be multidisciplinary activity aiming at:

- protection and promotion of the health of workers by preventing and controlling occupational diseases and accidents and by eliminating occupational factors and conditions hazardous to health and safety at work
- Development and promotion of healthy and safe work, work environments and work organizations.
- enhancement of physical, mental and social well-being of workers and support for the development and maintenance of their working capacity, as well as professional and social development at work
- Enablement of workers to conduct socially and economically productive lives and to contribute positively to sustainable development.

The most successful economies have demonstrated that workplaces designed according to good principles of occupational health, safety and ergonomics are also the most sustainable and productive. Furthermore, wide experience from countries show that a healthy economy, high quality of products or services and long-term productivity are difficult to achieve in poor working conditions with workers who are exposed to health and safety hazards. The available scientific knowledge and practical experiences of organizations and countries which have achieved the best results in the development of occupational health indicate the value of several principles. These principles are common denominators in occupational settings that have shown the best results in health, safety,

social relations and economic success. Organizations with such occupational settings are also the most stable in times of crisis.

Implementing an Occupational Health and safety Management system

Implementing an Occupational Health and safety Management system standard is now a legal requirement in many countries. The new OHSAS 18001: 2007 provides an organization with a structured approach to planning, implementing and managing an OHSAS.

If any organization is already certified to OHSAS 18001: 1999 or is in the final stages of certification to it, a two year transition period has been agreed to allow the time to make the change to the new standard.

The transition period will end as July 1st 2009.

Steps to transition

The first step in migrating to the standard should be to understand the differences from the old one, then to verify current practices in place and identify any potential gaps. Then you will be able to categorize and prioritize the actions needed to take for successful transition and begin communicating them to the organization. The main goal is to implement all the necessary changes so that evidence of their application can be assessed before certification by the July 1st 2009 deadline.

Advantages of implementing an Occupational Health and Safety Management system

1- **A safer workplace**

An Occupational Health and safety Management system enables the organization to identify hazards, assess risks and place the necessary risk control measures in place to prevent accidents.

2- **Moral**

Implementing an Occupational Health and Safety Management system shows a clear commitment to the safety of the organization staff and can contribute to a more motivated, efficient and productive workforce

3- **Reduced costs**

Fewer accidents mean less expensive downtime for any organization. Besides the Occupational Health and Safety Management system improves the insurance liability ruling

4- **Training**

An Occupational Health and Safety Management system highlights whether or not the employees in any organization are competent for the task they are performing, which impacts in training and teamwork.

5- **Monitoring**

The regular assessment process will help in continually monitor and improve the Health & Safety performance

6- **Integrated**

The safety management system can be easily integrated with other management systems

7- **Stakeholders' confidence**

An independently assessed Safety management system tells to the organization stakeholders that the organization itself has met a number of legal and regulatory requirements, giving stakeholders confidence in the organization.

Disadvantages of not implementing an Occupational Health and Safety Management system

The ILO Constitution sets forth the principle that workers should be protected from sickness, disease and injury arising from their employment. Yet for millions of workers the reality is very different. Some two million people die every year from work-related accidents and diseases. An estimated 160 million people suffer from work-related

diseases, and there are an estimated 270 million fatal and non-fatal work-related accidents per year. The suffering caused by such accidents and illnesses to workers and their families is incalculable. In economic terms, the ILO has estimated that 4% of the world's annual GDP is lost as a consequence of occupational diseases and accidents. Employers face costly early retirements, loss of skilled staff, absenteeism, and high insurance premiums due to work-related accidents and diseases. Yet many of these tragedies are preventable through the implementation of sound prevention, reporting and inspection practices.

Impacts of globalization on occupational health and Safety

Increased world trade has generally benefited industrialized or strong economies and marginalized those that are weak. While the share of world trade to the world's poorest countries has decreased, workers in these countries increasingly find themselves in insecure, poor-quality jobs, sometimes involving technologies which are obsolete or banned in industrialized countries. The occupational illness which results is generally less visible and not adequately recognized as a problem in low-income countries. Those outside the workplace can also be affected through, for example, work-related environmental pollution and poor living conditions. In order to reduce the adverse effects of global trade reforms on occupational health, stronger social protection measures must be built into production and trade activities, including improved recognition, prevention, and management of work-related ill-health. Furthermore, the success of production and trade systems should be judged on how well they satisfy both economic growth and population health.

Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems at Developing Countries

Developing countries constitute a large and important sector of the world. Their needs and aspirations require serious consideration by the international scientific community. When considering the countries of the developing world, it must be appreciated that they do not constitute a homogeneous entity but are a disparate group with different cultural backgrounds and at varying stages of economic and industrial

development. But in spite of such diversity, it is possible to establish at least two issues of common interest to these nations. The first is in relation to the setting of environmental standards in the workplace. In the setting of such standards cultural, political, social, economic, and administrative factors must be taken into consideration. In some situations, for economic reasons, the standards may have to be less stringent than the prevailing standards in the industrialized world. On the other hand, because of administrative and health reasons, they may have to be more stringent.

The movement of capital and technology, and changes in work organization appear to have outpaced the systems for protecting workers' health. Work in the agriculture, manufacturing, and mining sectors is already associated with high rates of injury from mechanical, electrical, and physical hazards. In African countries, for example, the injury rates in forestry, electricity production, mining, basic metal production, non-metallic mineral manufacturing, wood-product manufacturing, and transport are all greater than 30 injuries per 1000 workers. The expansion of chemical, electronic, and biotechnology industries and of the service and transport sectors has introduced new risks, widened the spread of work-related risks and increased their interaction with non-work factors in ill health, such as environmental pollution. Thus, in addition to old and prevalent problems, such as traumatic injury, respiratory disease, occupational dermatitis and musculoskeletal injury, workers now also suffer new stresses, such as new asthmatic disorders, psychological stress, and the ergonomic and visual effects of using video display units. Work is increasingly characterized by a high level of demand, with little control over the nature and content of the work, leading to digestive disorders, sleep difficulties and musculoskeletal problems.

The Key Strategy principles

The key strategy principles of international and national occupational health and safety policies are:

- avoidance of hazards (primary prevention)
- safe technology
- optimization of working conditions
- integration of production and health and safety activities
- government's responsibility, authority and competence in the development and control of working conditions
- primary responsibility of the employer and entrepreneur for health and safety at the workplace

- recognition of employees' own interest in occupational health and safety
- cooperation and collaboration on an equal basis by employers and workers
- right to participate in decisions concerning one's own work
- right to know and principle of transparency
- Continuous follow-up and development of occupational health and safety.

Implementation of such principles requires appropriate legal provisions, administrative enforcement and service systems for occupational safety and health and occupational health services.

Some national and international industries have adopted a strategy setting zero risk as an objective in the work environment. Though not totally achievable such a strategy has stimulated programs and actions for planning and designing the work environment and working practices according to the best available technology and principles and carrying out production according to good practices, operation and maintenance. This has led to substantial reduction of hazardous exposures at work, elimination or decrease in occupational injuries and diseases, and saving of costs by reduction of disturbed production and costs of sickness. Such experiences demonstrate that a safe and healthy work environment can be planned, constructed, organized and maintained if the best occupational health and safety standards are applied. They also demonstrate that a healthy and safe work environment is a realistic and achievable objective, a positive investment rather than a burden for economy.

Goals and Objectives

Goals and objectives of occupational health are based on the WHO definition of health as a "**state of physical, mental and social well-being**" that provides the individual with an opportunity to conduct a "**socially and economically productive life**". Both the WHO and the ILO Conventions on Occupational Safety and Health (No. 155) and on Occupational Health Services (No. 161) start from the principle that occupational health and safety services should be available and are the right of each individual taking part in work, irrespective of the sector of the economy, size of the company or type of assignment. This objective covers also the self-employed, agriculture, home industries and other workplaces in the so-called informal sector, as well as workers in

cooperatives and the public sector. It aims, therefore, at occupational health for all working persons everywhere. Not only the health problems directly related to work, but also the so-called work-related diseases, problems of general health and working capacity, and the potentially positive impact of occupational health on environmental health should be considered in setting objectives for occupational health.

To identify occupational health hazards, to provide appropriate advice on their control and prevention, to contribute to the development of healthy and safe workplaces and to follow up and take the necessary actions for the health of workers, a comprehensive and competent occupational health service is necessary. Such a service should be available at each workplace and accessible by each worker. Comprehensive occupational and health services are understood as front-line services, active at the workplace, containing preventive, curative and promotional elements and using, where appropriate, the primary health care approach. In their most advanced forms, comprehensive OHS focus on workers and working populations, to the work environment and its hazardous factors, exposures and structures, and work organization. Such OHS contain preventive, control, curative, treatment, rehabilitation and promotion activities for the improvement of working conditions, protection of health and for the maintenance and promotion of working capacity.

The development of occupational health and safety calls for full utilization of all the expertise and knowledge. This should be demonstrated by giving a high priority to occupational health and by elevating the status within the Organization and within its regular budget.

As the resources for activities are scarce in every country, effective networking of the existing educational, research and information resources, programs and institutions should be fully utilized. Such networking should aim to avoid duplication of work and waste of human and financial resources, to increase motivation and to improve quick and immediate transfer of knowledge.

Conclusion

As a minimum requirement, greater effort is now needed to study the occupational health and Safety consequences of global economic and trade reforms, and standards put in place to protect workers' health. Adequate public-sector and union capacity for setting standards and enforcement should also be ensured, as well as international cooperation on norms of safe work; the liabilities of manufacturers, employers, and exporters; and work-safety rights. This means focusing attention on those currently marginalized from the opportunities of globalization. Unfortunately, the most creative social protection systems cannot confront a tidal wave of health problems from insecure, hazardous and low-quality jobs. Instead, attention should focus on the source of the hazard. The health problems emerging from liberalized, competitive production processes demand that production be organized to meet sustainable development goals, not only in terms of economic growth, but also in the development and health of human resources.

Recommendations:

1. To launch an Occupational health and Safety Award as a mean for motivating all organizations in implementing these management systems.
2. Adopting strategies for increasing involvement of all staff in any organization in all health and safety activities.
3. To ensure compliance with legislative requirements and current industry standards.
- 4. Supporting developing countries in establishing health and safety management systems and obtaining standard Personnel protective equipment.**
5. Developing a Code of ethics for Occupational Health and Safety professionals. (To guide all those who carry-out health and safety activities and set a reference level on the basis of which their performance can be assessed).

