

SAFETY AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH: CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES IN EMERGING ECONOMIES

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Abstract

Health and safety of the employees is an important aspect of a company's smooth and successful functioning. It is a decisive factor in organizational effectiveness. It ensures an accident-free industrial environment. Proper attention to the safety and welfare of the employees can yield valuable returns to a company by improving employee morale, reducing absenteeism and enhancing productivity, minimizing potential of work-related injuries and illnesses and increasing the quality of manufactured products and rendered services. Every person has a right to maintain good health, so it is necessary for the state to make provisions for the health care of the employees. In, India, provisions of health care services is complex. It is provided mainly by the public and private sector. The public sector provides health services through the central government, state governments, municipal corporations and other local bodies. Accidents, ill-health and irregularity of attendance reduce productivity of an organization. So, management is concerned with keeping the accident rate at the lowest possible figure and health at the highest possible level. To operate adequate programs for health and safety is one of management's most effective means of demonstrating its continuing interest in the welfare of every employee, regardless of his organizational status. Right attitude towards the safety of workers, contractors, customers and the public is required. Occupational health & safety (OH&S) shouldn't be seen as an additional cost, by the management, it is better to deal with health and safety issues with right attitude, before they escalate.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Occupational safety and health (OSH) is a cross-disciplinary area concerned with protecting the safety, health and welfare of people engaged in work or employment. The goals of occupational safety and health programs include fostering a safe and healthy work environment. The health and safety of employees should be major concerns of management. The accident record is a significant index of individual health, both physical and mental, as well as of the quality of supervision and the level of teamwork. Moreover, accidents involving injury are connected with morale, both as cause and effect. Accidents, ill-health and irregularity of attendance reduce productivity. Management is concerned with keeping the accident rate at the lowest possible figure and health at the highest possible level. To operate adequate programs for health and safety is one of management's most effective means of demonstrating its continuing interest in the welfare of every employee, regardless of his organizational status. The Constitution of India has also specified provisions for ensuring occupational health and safety for workers. The regulation of labor and safety in mines and oil fields is under the Union list. While the welfare of labor including conditions of work, provident funds, employer's invalidity and old age pension and maternity benefit are in the Concurrent list. The Ministry of Labor, Government of India and Labor Departments of the States and Union Territories are responsible for safety and health of workers. Directorate General of Mines Safety (DGMS) and Directorate General Factory Advice Services & Labor Institutes (DGFASLI) assist the Ministry in technical aspects of occupational safety and health in mines and factories & ports sectors, respectively. DGMS exercises preventive as well as educational influence over the mining industry. Its mission is the reduction in risks of occupational diseases and casualty to persons employed in mines, by drafting appropriate legislation and setting standards and through a variety of promotional initiatives and awareness programs. It undertakes inspection of mines, investigation of all fatal accidents, grant of statutory permission, exemptions and relaxations in respect of various mining operation, approval of mines safety equipment, appliances and material, conduct examinations for grant of statutory competency certificate, safety promotional incentives including organization of national awards and national safety conference, etc. The International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have shared a common definition of occupational health which says that Occupational health should aim at the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations and to protect the workers from risks resulting from

factors adverse to health; the placing and maintenance of the worker in an occupational environment adapted to his physiological and psychological capabilities; and to summarize, the adaptation of work to man and of each man to his job.

2. HISTORY OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY

Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) has its roots in Europe; in 16th century the concept of Occupational Health has come a long way only to become a very integral part of the world economy & society. In 1906 in Milan an important step for the modern global workforce was the formation of the Permanent Commission on Occupational Health later renamed the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH). Today, ICOH is the world's leading international institution in the field of occupational health with a membership of 2,000 professionals representing nearly 100 countries. Occupational health & safety is not a new concept for India. The existence of the Indian Association of Occupational Health (IAOH) for the past 60 years since 1948 is a testimony of the same. The Factories Act, 1948 mainly makes following provisions regarding the health care of employees. There are many instances of increased hazards for workers in various sectors including in the expanding health sector where the workers are exposed to an array of unknown hazards. The State shall direct its policy towards securing the health and strength of workers, men and women ensuring just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief. The main provisions regarding health care of employees are cleanliness; disposal of waste and effluents; ventilation and temperature; dust and fume; artificial humidification; overcrowding; lighting; and urinals; spittoons.

3. NEED & IMPORTANCE OF OH&S TO DEVELOPING COUNTRY

The benefits of OH&S are increase in productivity, quality of work, boost in workforce morale and reduced absenteeism. You have heard of “Maslow's hierarchy of needs”, that human beings first look to satisfy their physiological and safety needs before aiming for social, esteem and growth needs. In line with this an individual at a workplace, also looks for health and safety first and its absence can be a serious de-motivator. As per facts from the International Labour Organization's report on the global burden of occupational health illnesses, out of 2.7 billion workers around the world, about 2 million deaths are attributable to occupational diseases and injuries, about 4% of the GDP is lost due to occupational diseases and injuries. Health, Safety and Environment are enablers for economic development. All the three aspects of business are

measured by their negative impact on people, assets and environment. While the impact of safety is felt immediately, the ill effects of OHS related issues are felt over generations. A prime example in India is the Bhopal gas tragedy. Today emerging economies like China and India have caught the attention of the developed world not only for the vast potential the markets but for the huge mass of low cost labour. There is a huge flow of Foreign Direct Investment in emerging economies leading to the inception of huge infrastructure projects. Also many multinationals are setting up a manufacturing or service base to cut down on manpower cost. The magnitude and complexity of the workforce required to drive the economic growth makes it necessary for emerging economies to focus on OH&S to sustain the economic growth. Developing economies have certain unique characteristics which differentiate them from the developed world. High growth rates, large population density, Low cost Labour, Poor literacy rates, Lack of Technical Know How, High rate of Unemployment, about 70% of economically active population works in agriculture sector. According to a report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in the year 2001, 37% of the total fatal occupational injuries are contributed by China and India alone as compared to the 5% by developed market economies. Infrastructure spending determines the sustained economic growth of any nation; many countries have found their growth rates stagnating for the want of good infrastructure.

The developing economies need to realize that OH&S is a similar strategic enabler to their economic growth. Without sufficient focus and spending on occupational health emerging economies too would find their growth stagnating. The developing economies need to take strong steps to be at par with the developed countries. But for this to happen various challenges need to be overcome and diverse issues need to be addressed in an effective manner. These key issues are leadership mind-set and corporate commitment; life cycle approach to OH&S, investment in infrastructure and management systems; Awareness, Education and Training; Regulatory framework and compliance; Use of Technology as a strategic enabler. The objective of this program is not only to prevent industrial accidents. Another important objective of the program is to create awareness about safety amongst the management and workers by arranging seminars, workshops, training programs in co-ordination with the other social partners and industries associations. If anyone want to reduce health and safety hazards in his workplace but don't know where to begin, there are simple steps that will allow him to concentrate his efforts as well as help his business to be prepared in all situations. Having the right attitude towards the safety of workers,

contractors, customers and the public is an important first step. Occupational health & safety (OH&S) shouldn't be seen as an additional cost by the management, it is better to deal with OH&S issues with right attitude.

The OH&S program are an organized plan for the implementation of this program there should be an organized plan. Adequate facilities OH&S encompasses the social, mental and physical well being of workers in all occupations that's why adequate facilities should be provided to all the employees. Procedure to be implemented in order to set up a successful health and safety program, it is essential that there is a strong management commitment and strong worker participation in the effort to create and maintain a safe and healthy workplace. Additional services all levels of management must make health and safety a priority. They must communicate this by going out into the worksite to talk with workers about their concerns and to observe work procedures and equipment required. In addition to such standard and extra services, which may be offered as part of a health program, certain other features of life in an organization have an important effect on the health of employees. Among these are adequate working conditions maintaining adequate ventilation, proper lighting, reasonable hours of work, good housekeeping and cleanliness and making reasonable work assignments. Places and Times for rest pause making due allowance for brief respites such as tea breaks and for proper places where employees may eat food which they bring from home. Hygienic food if meals are provided by the company, making sure that food is hygienic, nutritious, prepared and served under sanitary conditions and at affordable price. Enforcing minimum health requirements: To prevent the spread of ill health, by prohibiting spitting on the door and by arranging that any employee shall be sent home if the doctor or nurse thinks that there is risk of spreading any communicable disease.

4. OH&S - AN INDIAN PROSPECTIVE

Government of India is providing more and more information dissemination through circulars, technical updates, annual reports, training programmes etc. is being done to extend the area of workers participation is safety management and improve the status Occupational Safety, Health (OSH) and Welfare of persons working in the mines and to those residing in the vicinity thereof. As per the data available, the number of working factories for the years 2003 to 2007 has increased by about 46% with the increase in average daily employment from 4.92 million to 8.02 million. The number of injuries also decreased by about 7% i.e. from 16,432 to 15,290 however

the fatalities during the period increased from 525 to 821. It may be noted that the frequency rate of injuries significantly reduced by about 30% during the above period. The number of reportable accidents in major ports from 2003-2007 decreased from 191 to 158 thus registering a decrease of about 17%. The number of fatal accidents also decreased from 29 to 23 thus registering the decreased of about 20% during the same period. Latest available analysis of injury statistics published by Labour Bureau, Govt. of India, shows a decline in total Incidence Rate (IR) for Industrial injuries from 65.59 in 1980 to 1.91 in the year 2007. Similarly, in respect of the Frequency Rate (FR) of industrial injuries in factories also shows a decline from 22.02 in 1980 to 1.73 in the year 2007. The Incidence Rate of total injuries per 1000 workers has gradually declined by 43% and Frequency Rate of total injuries per one lakh man days worked has declined by 31%. Hence there is a marked decrease in the total number of injuries.

In India, there are comprehensive safety and health statutes for regulating safety and health of persons at work exists only in respect of three sectors namely factories, docks and construction sectors and these statutes are highly sector specific. The approach in the statutes is to lay down specific and detailed requirements to prevent risk of injuries in specific operations or circumstances. There is a strong need for a general (umbrella) legislation covering safety and health aspects of workers employed in all sectors of economy irrespective of the number of employees employed in those units except mining sector. There is a trend all over the world, except the major mining countries in the world like USA, South Africa, and Australia etc., to enact legislation on the subject, which has general applicability to all work-sites. This legislation should be applicable to factories, plantation, ports, construction, unorganized sectors except mining sector and also to such categories of workplaces or work activities as may be notified by Central Government.

5. EXISTING CONSTRAINTS & CHALLENGES

Need for Setting up of an Apex Body on Occupational Safety & Health at present there is no agency or department of the Govt. of India exclusively dealing with matters of Occupational Safety & Health. DGFASLI is dealing with safety and health issues of workers employed in factories and ports, DGMS deals with various issues of OSH mines and other departments under the Ministry of Labour deals with OSH issues in different sectors such as Chief Labour Commissioner (CLC) for construction sector. There is no agency to cover the safety and health of

workers in unorganized sectors. Therefore, there is a need for an apex body at national level to deal with matters connected with safety and health of workers in all sectors of economy. Need for Strengthening of Enforcement Authorities and DGFASLI officials: Rapid liberalization in the industrial sector and newer technological advancement has created a need for adequate and competent enforcement officials to ensure compliance with the requirements under the various OSH legislations. To achieve this, adequate manpower would be required at the State Factories Directorates/ Inspectorates and DGFASLI. Further, the capacity building of these officials is essential by imparting training in National and International Institutes to keep themselves abreast with the latest developments in the field of OSH and to effectively discharge their enforcement and other advisory functions.

Need for Enhancement of OSH skills of Key Personnel in Industry to ensure and maintain a high level of OSH at industry level, it is necessary that the various key personnel such as Safety Officers, Competent Supervisors, Factory Medical Officers, Occupational Health Nurses, Fire Personnel, Industrial Hygienists, Members of Emergency Response Group, Safety Committee Members, Union Representatives, etc. need to be updated periodically on the latest developments of OSH to create a positive safety culture in the industry. Need for National Data Base on OSH it is evident from the injury statistics published at the national level by the Labour Bureau that there is a need for speedier publication of the latest statistics with complete details from all the states and union territories and there is a back log of nearly five years. The entire scenario of national data base calls for urgent need to identify the problems in obtaining injury data from the states and speeding up the process of transfer and processing of injury data at the State, Union Territory and national level. Hence, there is an urgent need for having an on-line data transfer facility for national data-base with standardized OSH data system in line with the National Policy on Safety Health and Environment at Workplace. Need for OSH Management Systems in Industry the rapid succession technological advancements are bringing in quick changes in working conditions, work processes and systems in the organisation. Legislation is essential but insufficient on its own to address these changes or to keep pace with new hazards and risks. Therefore, there is a need to enhance the capability of organizations to sustain under such conditions to tackle occupational safety and health challenges continuously and to build effective responses into dynamic management strategies. This can be attained by formulating and initiating an OSH Management System within the organisation.

Implementation of National Policy on Occupational Safety, Health & Environment: During the 12th five year plan DGFASLI to effectively implement the National Policy in the manufacturing and port sector proposes to implement the same through the active involvement of the various stakeholders in the following major activities Providing an effective enforcement machinery, amending expeditiously existing laws relating to safety and health and environment and bringing them in line with the relevant international instruments. Need for Amendment of the Factories Act, 1948; the factories act, 1948 was last amended in the year 1987. Thereafter, the DGFASLI on its own and based on the deliberations with the Chief Inspectors of Factories from all the States of India in the Annual Conference of the Chief Inspectors of Factories, had proposed a number of additional provisions to be made in the Act in the context of the changing industrial, technological and socio-economic scenario. The enactment of the proposed provisions would result in the improvement of the status of occupational safety and health in the factories across the country. In view of some of the provisions being obsolete in the light of present day context, the Factories Act, 1948 and the rules made there under a need is felt for amending the present Factories Act and revision of the Model Factories rules prepared by DGFASLI for consideration and adoption of the state government in their State Factories Rules. Organised National wide yearly campaigns on various OSH issues to implement the National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at Workplace DGFASLI proposes to organize yearly campaigns such as Respiratory Diseases, Central Nervous System (CNS), Dermatitis, Noise and Vibration through various awareness programs. These Awareness programmes will be through development of Video Films, Posters, Pamphlets, Reading Materials and distributed to all concerned. Strengthening of Enforcement System the state factories directorate also needs to be strengthened with Infrastructure as well as enhancing the capabilities of the enforcement officials. This could be achieved by equipping the Factories Directorate with latest equipment for carrying out their enforcement functions and Laboratory Equipment for analysing the samples collected through their inspections. During the 12th Five Year Plan it is proposed to Strengthening of Enforcement Systems in Factories through an Establishment of Industrial Safety, Occupational Health and Work Environment Centre in the State Factory Directorate by Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

6. SUMMARY

All organizations have a duty of care to ensure that employees and any other person who may be affected by the companies undertaking remain safe at all times. Moral obligations would involve the protection of employee's lives and health. The main objective of the Industrial Safety and Health is to ensure Safety, Health and Welfare of the workers in the factory, by effective enforcement of the provisions and Rules made there under. It is also to ensure the protection of right of workers and to redress their grievances. The Indian Constitution provides a framework for a welfare/socialist pattern of development. While civil and political rights are enshrined as Fundamental Rights that are justifiable, social and economic rights like health, education, livelihoods etc. are provided for as Directive Principles for the State and hence not justifiable. The latter comes under the domain of planned development, which the State steers through the Five Year Plans and other development policy initiatives. Post-independence India adopted a development paradigm that aimed at creating limited entitlements to a wide range of resources for the underserved people. While this was critical to India's economic development it also contributed substantially to the growth of private capital. The State also actively participated in the productive sectors of the economy, especially capital goods industry. This often subsidized inputs for private sector growth. Since the beginning of liberalisation, many regulations have been brought about to facilitate economic growth and development but hardly any initiative has been taken to ameliorate the working conditions of labourers even from health and safety angle. Despite the increasing manufacturing and mining activities, regulatory authorities ensuring occupational safety have been limited and are grossly inadequate even for the inspection of formal units. Development with inclusive growth would have no meaning if the leaders in government and in the corporate secure the same at the cost of health and safety of workers. Management must have an organized plan, adequate facilities and specific procedures to implement health and safety standards in an organization. The role of OH&S is of great relevance in respect to emerging economies like India. The Indian Government is taking steps to implement OH&S throughout the country but still strong measures are required, due to existing constraints in the system, to enforce the same

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