

Occupational Safety and Health at the Workplace

ABSTRACT



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Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) is defined as the discipline which deals with the protection of workers' health and the environment from the effects of occupational hazards. It is covered by two main disciplines, namely Occupational Hygiene and Occupational Medicine. While occupational hygiene deals with the recognition, evaluation and control of the chemical, physical, biological, mechanical, ergonomic and psycho-social hazards; occupational medicine deals with the prevention and treatment of occupational diseases and accidents. Control of hazards covers a number of basic disciplines such as the substitution of hazardous substances and processes by less hazardous ones, isolation, maintenance of machinery, housekeeping, ventilation, and safety engineering control



measures, provision of welfare facilities, personal protection, and health education. Pollutants enter the body through inhalation, skin absorption and ingestion. Transmission through the placenta to the fetus has been recorded among pregnant women workers who are exposed to the fumes and dust of heavy metals such as lead. **According to the International Labour Organization, 2.3 million deaths occur globally due to work-related accidents and diseases each year. In addition, more than 160 million workers fall ill every year due to workplace hazards. In the Middle East, the annual rate is estimated at 19,000 occupationally related deaths and 14 million work accidents and injuries.** The above figures translate into direct and indirect annual losses of 2.8 billion dollars. The magnitude of the effects of occupational accidents and injuries, referred to as the Burden of Disease, may be measured by the Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALY) index. Hazardous industries include, but not restricted to, construction, agriculture and fishing, mining, chemical, manufacturing, oil and petrochemical. Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) employ close to 85% of the working populations and are considered hazardous since they are either not covered by OSH legislation, or do not benefit from inspection since they are too numerous and small in size to be given inspection priority. In Lebanon, OSH is mandated to the Ministry of Labor and regulated by the Labor Law and its amendments, particularly the provisions of Ministerial Decree No. 11802 of 2004. The country has a number of hazardous industries such as construction, agriculture, chemical, cement, petrochemical refineries and more than 20 thousand registered SME. Statistics indicate that occupational accidents amounted to 15 thousand, and that 20 occupationally related deaths were recorded in the country in 2003. OSH in hospitals is reviewed, covering the workers' and patients' safety. The chemical, physical, biological, ergonomic and psycho-social hazards and their control are enumerated, and reference to the disposal of medical waste is made.

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