



SEVENTEENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Report of the Director-General

**Third Supplementary Report: Activities of the
International Occupational Safety and Health
Information Centre (CIS) in 1998-99**

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1. This report on the activities of the CIS covers the 1998-99 biennium.¹

1. Mission

2. The International Occupational Safety and Health Information Centre (CIS) pursues the ILO's strategic objective of enhancing social protection by providing tools that enable constituents to target and take effective action against hazardous conditions in and around the workplace. The activities of the CIS are particularly oriented toward strengthening the ILO's knowledge base and putting it at the disposal of those who need it. This two-way flow of information is amplified by the participation of counterparts at the national level in a well-established institutional network. The multiplier effect is further enhanced by the ILO units and international organizations that come to the CIS for information – for research material, for facts to support advocacy campaigns, and on behalf of their own constituents. In addition to the body of occupational safety and health documentation that has been built up over the years, new knowledge is constantly becoming available, and the steady arrival of new entrants into the workforce imposes an unending need for information on everyone engaged in the fight against work-related accidents and diseases.

2. Performance

3. Reduced staff and a shrinking budget led to a reduction in the level of service offered by the CIS during 1998 and 1999. Nonetheless, core outputs were maintained by increased reliance on subcontractors and a reduction in the time devoted to THE CIS's bibliographic database. The fourth edition of the ILO *Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety* was put on sale by the ILO's Bureau of Publications in both print and electronic forms. Large numbers of people began consulting the CIS pages on the Internet, which enabled them to learn about the Centre without taking extra staff time.

3. Outputs

4. Citations of 2,100 useful documents were added to the CIS bibliographic database, CISDOC, which included over 53,000 references by the end of 1999. Twelve issues of the bimonthly bulletin *Safety and Health at Work* were issued in English and French (2,100 copies of each issue). The replacement of abstracts in the citations by automatically reformatted indexing terms caused a suspension of the Spanish edition of the bulletin. Work was begun in 1999 to apply the same automatic system to the generation of Spanish equivalents of the English and French citations, so that material published in the two latter languages in 1998-99 will become available retrospectively in the former in 2000. To compensate for the reduced information content of the citations, a full-text supplement was added to each issue of *Safety and Health at Work*. In 1998, the supplemental topics were information management, HIV/AIDS and ergonomics; in 1999, all the supplements were devoted to aspects of occupational accident and disease statistics. A grant from PROGRAM's "Flagship Databases" initiative made possible the full integration of 6,500 Spanish translations into CISDOC – translations obtained from the CIS National Centre for Spain in the preceding biennium.

¹ For the report on the preceding biennium, see GB.271/17/2.

5. Approximately 300 requests for information were answered by the editorial staff and documentalist, not including queries about subscriptions, the monitoring of document exchanges with other institutions or internal administrative communications. A topical bibliography and relevant extracts from the *Encyclopaedia* were published for the Tripartite Meeting on Safety and Health in the Fishing Industry (Geneva, 13-17 December 1999).
6. The CD-ROM edition of the English version of the *Encyclopaedia* was completed internally by a CIS team and sent to market. Translation of the *Encyclopaedia* into French was undertaken by 200 external collaborators, whose work was overseen and edited by three members of the CIS staff. The first volume went to press in December 1999. The English version of the *Encyclopaedia* was made available on a subscription basis on the Internet at a site in Canada. Translation of the *Encyclopaedia* into Chinese and Russian was undertaken by partner institutions.
7. Some 40 International Hazard Datasheets on Occupations were drafted and are in various stages of review. Sixteen that have passed review by an expert group are available to the public on the SafeWork website.² Paper copies of the datasheets will be published in the next biennium.
8. The *International Directory of Occupational Safety and Health Institutions* having become outdated, a contract was issued for the creation of a new database and associated computer program that will permit rapid and consistent updating of the information. The system is expected to be operational and a new directory available in the 2000-01 biennium.
9. The collection of occupational exposure limits, formerly published as Occupational Safety and Health Series No. 37 and more recently sold by the CIS on diskette, was updated under the aegis of the Flagship Databases initiative, for publication on a CD-ROM in the 2000-01 biennium.
10. The latest versions of the International Chemical Safety Cards (1,300 cards), user-friendly data sheets produced by the ILO/WHO/UNEP International Programme on Chemical Safety, were formatted for printing and for computer display, for print and electronic publications that will appear in the next biennium. (The popularity of the ICSCs is shown by the frequency with which they are consulted on the US website where they are available: almost 140,000 times in English, over 56,000 times in German and over 6,000 times in French in July 1999, the last month for which statistics are available.)
11. Technical cooperation activities were scaled back in response to reduced funding and staff movements. The scope of the project was reduced: although other countries were not excluded, activities in China, Mongolia, Thailand and Viet Nam were given priority. These activities included expert missions, training courses, study tours and assistance to CIS centres in the region. The project's web pages and links to its Asian-Pacific network are now linked into the ILO's main site.³ The interregional project (INT/89/M16/FIN), aimed largely at Africa, devoted its resources mainly to publishing six issues of the *African Newsletter on Occupational Health and Safety*. (The Asian-Pacific project similarly has a widely distributed newsletter, and six issues appeared during the period under review.) However, in addition, an important study on occupational safety and health in the informal sector in Zimbabwe, initiated in the preceding biennium, was published on the ILO

² <http://mirror/public/english/protection/safework/idhindex.htm>.

³ <http://mirror/public/english/region/asro/bangkok/asiaosh/index.htm>.

website;⁴ the CIS national centre for Uganda was connected to the Internet; several important occupational safety and health publications, including the *Encyclopaedia*, were purchased in quantity and provided to appropriate institutions and individuals in Africa; and the *Chemical Safety Training Modules* developed early in the interregional project were published as a supplement to the *African Newsletter*.

4. External relations

12. The network of CIS focal points expanded by the recognition of national centres in Bahrain and Belarus and collaborating centres in Australia, Yemen and the territories represented by the Palestinian Authority. This brings the total membership to 128 institutions.
13. The long-standing practice of annual meetings of the centres was continued. In 1998, the centres met in October in Rome, Italy, in conjunction with an international conference on the history of occupational safety and health. Some 27 centres participated. In 1999, the annual meeting was held in April on the occasion of the XVth World Congress of Occupational Safety and Health in São Paulo, Brazil, with representatives of 22 centres, three observer countries, the European Union and the ILO field structure. The rotation of the annual meetings around widely separated venues puts the meetings within easy reach of a certain number of centres on each occasion, and thus broadens the possibilities of participation, since the CIS cannot pay the travel and subsistence costs of those attending.
14. During the 1998-99 biennium, CIS staff visited the national centres of France, India, Italy and Spain. Experts employed by CIS-administered technical cooperation projects undertook missions to China, India, Mongolia and Viet Nam. The national centres of several countries contributed citations to the CIS bibliographic database, and they and many others also sent original documents. The Canadian national centre represented the CIS at a major conference of labour relations librarians in September 1998. One CIS collaborating centre in the Russian Federation began translating the *Encyclopaedia* and the Hazard Datasheets on Occupations into Russian and making them available on the World Wide Web⁵ using a server at Tampere University of Technology in Finland, former host of the CIS web pages.
15. The CIS pages themselves were moved from the Finnish host to the ILO and integrated into the ILO's main site.
16. Relations with the European Union continued on two fronts: the European Commission continued its direct financial contribution to the CIS, albeit at a reduced level, and The CIS contributed its computer file of indexing terminology to the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.
17. Work with the ILO's partner institutions continued as in previous biennia. The CIS contributed a staff member to three peer-review meetings of the ICSC project and to a consultation on the translation of the ICSCs. Between meetings, information from the chemical literature was provided on request to the IPCS secretariat at the WHO. The CIS

⁴ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/papers/infzimb/index.htm>.

⁵ <http://oshnet.me.tut.fi:1887/iloencrus/> and <http://oshnet.me.tut.fi:1887/cotspb/datasheets/list1.htm>, respectively.

also represented the ILO in meetings of the Interorganization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) devoted to information exchanges.

18. Funds from the ILO's regular budget for technical cooperation were used to help institutions in China, India and Pakistan translate International Chemical Safety Cards into national languages. By the end of 1999, the Chinese ICSCs were beginning to appear on the Internet.⁶

5. Financial situation

19. In 1998-99, the ILO regular budget contributed 11/00 Professional work-years and 11/03 General Service work-years, compared with 14/06 Professional work-years and 14/00 General Service work-years in 1996-97. The contribution amounted to \$2,747,132, which represented 75 per cent of the total expenditure of \$3,652,169.
20. Extra-budgetary income (sales of information services, contributions and royalties), which had been estimated at \$1,095,000, amounted to \$521,469. Sales of information services brought in \$365,562. Contributions and copyright payments totalled \$155,407, the major contributor being the European Commission. The decline in income is attributable to reduced subscriptions and royalties, and to the lower dollar value of income in other currencies. Extra-budgetary expenditure, which was estimated at \$1,669,892, was \$905,037. The reduced level of expenditure was mainly a result of lower staff costs, with some savings in the cost of supplies as a consequence of moving from photographic storage of original documents to electronic storage.
21. Additional expenditure on CIS-related activities totalling \$606,798 was incurred under the technical cooperation projects referred to in paragraph 11 above.

6. Trends

22. The trend in CIS income, both from the ILO regular budget and extra-budgetary sources, is clearly downward. The funds carried over into the 2000-01 biennium will enable the Centre, by maximum use of an external service bureau, to honour subscriptions to the existing product line for publication in 2000. At the same time, the range of products and services will be reviewed, with input from the national and collaborating centres as well as other constituencies inside and outside the ILO, in order to determine the causes of the decline in subscriptions. An important factor to be included in the review is the change in the expectations of information consumers brought about by the World Wide Web: the fact that large amounts of text are available for little more than the cost of a local telephone call has led to a widespread feeling that all information should be free, especially if it is provided over the Internet, and a corresponding reluctance to subscribe to electronic information services. A further issue to be considered is the importance of dialogue between CIS specialists and their peers outside the ILO in the promotion of CIS products and services in the context of present staffing levels. The results of this reflection will be seen in the Programme and Budget proposals for 2002-03.

Geneva, 8 March 2000.

⁶ <http://www.brici.ac.cn/icsc/>.

