

FACTS ON *SafeWork*

Each year, an estimated two million women and men die as a result of occupational accidents and work-related diseases. Across the globe, there are some 270 million occupational accidents and 160 million work-related diseases each year.

The ILO has never accepted the notion that injury and disease “go with the job”. Prevention works. In the course of the 20th century, industrialized countries saw a clear decrease in serious injuries, not least because of real advances in making the workplace healthier and safer. The challenge is to extend the benefits of this experience to the whole working world.

Experience has shown that a strong safety culture is beneficial for workers, employers and governments alike. Various prevention techniques have proven themselves effective, both in avoiding workplace accidents and illnesses and improving business performance. Today’s high safety standards in some countries are a direct result of long-term policies encouraging tripartite social dialogue, collective bargaining between trade unions and employers, and effective health and safety legislation backed by potent labour inspection.

2004 is the twentieth anniversary of one of the worst chemical disasters ever. In a gas leak from a pesticides factory in Bhopal, central India, 2,500 people were killed and over 200,000 injured in the space of a few hours. Not only were the workers at the factory affected, but their families, their neighbours, whole communities. This reminds us of the imperative to create a safety culture in which governments, employers and workers play their role in order to prevent such tragedies from happening again.

Key Statistics

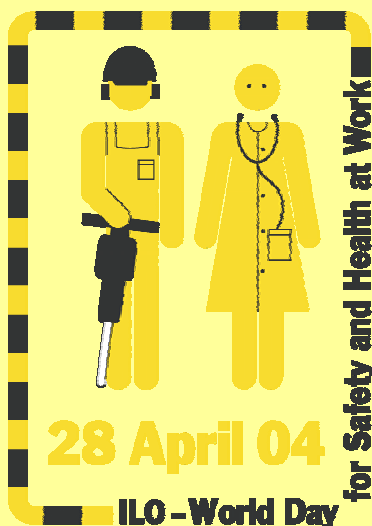
- Each day, an average of 5,000 people die as a result of work-related accidents or diseases, according to ILO estimates.
- Workers suffer approximately 270 million occupational accidents each year (fatal and non-fatal), and fall victim to some 160 million incidents of work-related diseases. In one third of these cases, the illness causes the loss of four or more working days.
- Four per cent of the world’s gross domestic product (US\$ 1,251,353 million) is lost with the cost of injury, death and disease through absence from work, sickness treatment, disability and survivor benefits.
- The loss in GDP resulting from the cost of death and illness in the workforce is 20 times greater than all official development assistance.
- Close to 350,000 people lose their lives in accidents on the job each year. Half these deaths occur in agriculture, the sector with half the world’s workforce.
- Each year, 22,000 children are killed by work accidents.
- Hazardous substances kill 440,000 workers annually. Asbestos alone claims about 100,000 lives.
- Ten per cent of all skin cancers are estimated to be attributable to workplace exposure to hazardous substances.
- In the United States in 2002, approximately two million workers were victims of workplace violence. In the United Kingdom, 1.7% of working adults (357,000 workers) were the victim of one or more incidents of workplace violence.
- Thirty-seven per cent of miners in Latin America have silicosis (a deadly lung disease caused by exposure to silica), rising to 50% among miners over 50.
- In India, 54.6% of slate pencil workers and 36.2% of stone cutters have silicosis.

World Day for Safety and Health at Work

Every April 28th, the world's trade union movement has commemorated the victims of occupational accidents and disease. In 2003, the ILO adopted April 28th as World Day for Safety and Health at Work, focusing on the promotion of a safety and health culture at workplaces throughout the world and capitalizing on the organization's traditional strengths of tripartism and social dialogue.

World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2004 focuses on three of the many areas of concern which the ILO addresses – chemical hazards, workplace violence and occupational respiratory diseases.

- Chemical hazards represent a serious danger for workers. Information about the proper use, handling and storage of hazardous chemicals is a key factor in preventing accidents and illnesses. The ILO recognizes this and has acted to provide easily accessible sources of information to protect workers around the world, such as a globally uniform system of labeling hazardous materials.
- Workplace violence, while not a new phenomenon, has only recently been recognized as a potential danger to workers' health and to productivity. The ILO has adopted a Code of Practice on workplace violence, providing a tool for governments, employers and workers to prevent such violence.
- Hundreds of thousands of deaths from lung disease, caused by exposure to dusts containing asbestos, silica and other dangerous substances, are all the more tragic because they are preventable. Appropriate action taken by governments, employers and workers can make a notable difference. The ILO provides both a policy framework for action in this area as well as practical information and training.



The Role of the ILO

The International Labour Organization works to ensure for everyone the right to work in freedom, dignity and security – which includes the right to a safe and healthy working environment. The ILO pursues an integrated approach that streamlines all its means of action, including standard-setting, codes and guidelines, technical and international cooperation, statistical analysis and information dissemination, so as to achieve more effective occupational safety and health implementation by member states.

A workplace safety culture comprises all the values, managerial systems and practices, participatory principles and working behaviour conducive to creating a safe and healthy working environment. The ILO's Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) provides a suitable framework supporting a safety and health culture at work.

While the development of a safety culture begins during a child's early education years, the effective prevention of occupational accidents and diseases begins at the enterprise level. Prevention involves participation from governments and workers' and employers' organizations. Implementation of work organisation procedures, the provision of training and information to workers and inspection activities are important tools to promote a safety and health culture. Companies with occupational safety and health and management systems have good records both in safety and productivity. Meanwhile, government labour inspectors have a pivotal role. 130 member states have ratified the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), making it one of the most ratified instruments of the organization.

The ILO Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems (ILO-OSH 2001) provide a powerful tool for developing a sustainable safety and health culture at the enterprise level and mechanisms for the continual improvement of the work environment.

ILO Standards

More than 70 ILO **Conventions** and **Recommendations** relate to questions of safety and health. In addition, the ILO has issued more than 30 **Codes of Practice on Occupational Health and Safety**. For more information: www.ilo.org/safework.