Tripartite Sectoral Meeting on Occupational Safety and Health and Skills in the Oil and Gas Industry operating in Polar and Subarctic Climate Zones of the Northern Hemisphere

Geneva
26–29 January 2016

Conclusions on occupational safety and health and skills in the oil and gas industry operating in polar and subarctic climate zones of the northern hemisphere [1]

The Tripartite Sectoral Meeting on Occupational Safety and Health and Skills in the Oil and Gas Industry operating in Polar and Subarctic Climate Zones of the Northern Hemisphere,

Having met in Geneva from 26 to 29 January 2016,

Adopts this twenty-ninth day of January 2016 the following conclusions:

Risks and challenges for workers' health and well-being in the Arctic

1. Occupational safety and health (OSH) risks should be seen in relation to internal and external factors. The working environment may include one or a combination of cold, wind, ice, wildlife encounters, extended periods of darkness and light, noise, dust, biological hazards, etc. These conditions, if not mitigated or controlled, can potentially cause or exacerbate illnesses and injuries such as carbon monoxide poisoning (especially in enclosed spaces), frostbite, frostnip, hypothermia and seasonal affective disorder (SAD). The different factors involved may compound each other, making health issues more urgent to treat and safety issues more difficult to resolve.

2. Remote and offshore installations often make transportation to the site and prompt access to medical treatment within the "Golden Hour of Life" difficult.

3. Working patterns may adversely affect workers' work–life balance. Excessive working hours and inadequate rest times may affect the health and well-being of workers.

[1] These conclusions were adopted by the Tripartite Sectoral Meeting on 29 January 2016. In accordance with established procedures, they will be submitted to the Governing Body of the ILO for its consideration.

Policies needed by governments and employers' and workers' organizations to improve workers' health and well-being in the Arctic, and tools that would best serve in initiating, implementing, monitoring and continuously improving OSH in Arctic operations

4. Strategies and tripartite commitments on prevention are essential in occupational safety and health. [2] Policies should prioritize the most urgent challenges, consider the safety and health of workers, and recognize their rights to know the risks and to participate in mitigating the risks. The workers should have the right to refuse or stop unsafe work if there is a possibility of accident or injury.

Risk assessment

5. The tools to manage safety and health risks should commence with an effective risk assessment which will include the identification, assessment and control of hazards. Risk assessment should be done with full participation of those who face the risk. Risk assessments should encompass the diversified risks, including impact on the environment and communities surrounding the projects. OSH Management Systems should be risk orientated to achieve a culture of prevention and continuous improvement, with full worker participation and commitment by senior management. An essential reference document is the ILO's *Guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems (ILO–OSH 2001)*.

Hazardous tasks and medical surveillance

6. Hazards should be identified in the earliest planning phase of projects, including extreme remote readiness assessments, and controlled at the source whenever possible, including communication and relevant training. In this context, particular attention should be paid to the exposure to hazards of all workers including contractors and subcontractors, as well as language barriers and gender-sensitive aspects. Learning from incidents and accidents relies on good data management systems and reporting. Medical surveillance is a tool to monitor development of the workers' health to uncover any work-related illness or injury and to prevent these. Special care should be taken by all parties to ensure workers' privacy and rights. The worker should have the right to receive full disclosure of all findings related to work fitness.

OSH skills and training

7. Education and training should address the specific skills and competencies that are required for Arctic oil and gas operations, and be based on an assessment of skills needs in the Arctic. Regulations, rules and tools should be easy to access and be understood by the industry and workers. Self-assessment tools are useful to promote compliance.

8. Sharing good practices and learning from the experiences among tripartite constituents is a good means to improve skills and competencies in OSH in the Arctic. Governments and employers' and workers' organizations have shared responsibilities in the design and implementation of policies, actions and tools. Industry-wide programmes, such as "safety

[2] See ILO Resolution concerning the recurrent discussion on social protection (labour protection), 2015.

passport" schemes, may facilitate the prevention of accidents and illness and the promotion of workers' health and well-being, particularly among contractors and subcontractors. Care must be taken that the safety passport is not used as a substitute for job-specific education, training and skills. Other standardized systems, like personal protective equipment (PPE) specifications and accredited training systems, may also be helpful.

9. Elected worker health and safety representatives and/or members of Joint Health and Safety Committees should receive additional training specific to their responsibilities.

10. All parties, such as authorities, and employers' and workers' representatives, should be involved in developing specific training tools. Multiple skills sets need to be taken into consideration in their design, development and implementation.

11. Appropriate safety, apprenticeship and recruitment programmes, as well as emergency communication and response preparedness, can help workers and enterprises manage risks that affect work in the Arctic.

Air transport safety

12. Air transport is regulated at both the national and international levels, but involves distinct risks, for example extreme weather and crew fatigue, when used for Arctic oil and gas operations, particularly when using helicopters. Oil and gas enterprises should employ safe and appropriate means for transporting workers. Aviation operators should have a record of safe operation in the Arctic.

Recommendations for future action by the International Labour Organization and its Members

13. In view of the discussion at the Tripartite Sectoral Meeting on Occupational Safety and Health and Skills in the Oil and Gas Industry operating in Polar and Subarctic Climate Zones of the Northern Hemisphere, the following future actions were recommended.

14. Tripartite constituents should:

(a) reinforce the use of existing OSH mechanisms and take into consideration the knowledge developed through the work carried out by other international organizations;

(b) recognize relevant regulations on working hours for workers in the oil and gas industry in the Arctic, upon consultations with social partners; and

(c) establish appropriate apprenticeship programmes. Where possible, these can be supervised by experienced workers.

15. Governments should establish a tripartite mechanism to facilitate the formulation of appropriate health and safety best practices, including training, for the oil and gas operations in the Arctic.

16. The Office should:

(a) collect data to help identify the root causes of OSH issues in the oil and gas industry in the Arctic, and develop solutions with the engagement of experts in that field;

(b) undertake a review of existing ILO documents and update them for the purpose of covering operations in the Arctic; and

(c) collect and disseminate best practices from the polar region to strengthen OSH instruments.