



Successful Management to Prevent Accidents

Every year nearly 5 million people in the European Union suffer workplace accidents resulting in more than 3 days absence, amounting to around 146 million working days lost (!). Some effects are permanent, affecting people's ability to work and life outside work. Work-related accidents occur in all industries and include slips and trips, falls, falling objects, sharp and hot objects, and accidents involving vehicles and machinery. Yet many of the **problems can be prevented with good management.**

The cost of occupational accidents is high, including:

- Sick pay, overtime payments, temporary replacement labour, early retirement, recruiting new labour, retraining
- Lost production time and business
- Damage to plant, equipment, materials, products
- Management time to deal with accidents
- Increased insurance premiums, lawyers' costs
- Lower worker morale

Accident risks are higher for those employed in **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**. The incidence rate for fatal accidents to workers in enterprises of fewer than 50 employees is around double that of larger units (!).

Responsibilities for good management

Under European Union directives, **employers** have responsibilities for the safety and health of their workers.

Directive 89/391 provides the general **framework** for health and safety management, risk identification and prevention (?)

The Directive has been implemented in **national legislation** that may include additional requirements.

Employers are required to assess risks and take practical measures to protect the safety and health of their workers, keep accident records, provide information and training, consult employees and co-operate and co-ordinate measures with contractors. A hierarchy of prevention is set including: avoid risks; combat risks at source; adapt work to the worker; replace the dangerous with the non-dangerous; and, give collective measures priority over individual measures. Workers have a right to receive information about the risks to health and safety, preventive measures, first aid and emergency procedures. **Employees** have duties to co-operate actively with employers' preventive measures, following instructions in accordance with training given and taking care of their own and workmates' safety and health.

Accident prevention - Elements of success

Health and safety requires strong **management commitment**; good **employee involvement** and a well-structured **management system**.

(!) Accidents at work in the EU in 1996, Statistics in Focus, Theme 3 - 4/2000, Eurostat.

(?) <http://europe.osha.eu.int/legislation/> provides links to **EU legislation**, details of Commission guidance for SMEs and on risk assessment and to Member State sites where **national legislation** to implement the Directives and guidelines may be found.

Management commitment

Management should drive health and safety by:

- Setting policy and health and safety objectives
- Providing adequate resources to implement the policy
- Including health and safety at all levels of management functions and decisions
- Consulting with employees
- Monitoring and reviewing to check effectiveness of policy and the whole system

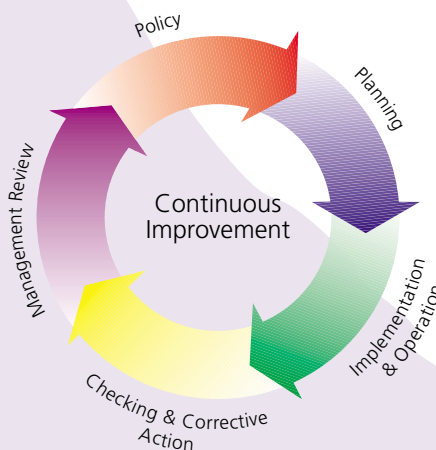
Commitment implies, for example, putting decisions into practice, discussing safety at management meetings, regular workplace tours, and involvement in safety investigations.

Employee involvement

Consulting the workforce is a requirement. Using their knowledge helps to ensure hazards are correctly spotted and workable solutions implemented. Worker representatives have an important role. Employees must be consulted on health and safety measures and also before the introduction of new technology or products. Consultation helps to ensure that workers are committed to safety and health procedures and improvements.

Management of health and safety

A structured approach to management ensures that risks are fully assessed and that safe methods of work are introduced and followed. Periodic review checks that these measures remain appropriate. A typical management model is described below.



Policy – Sets clear commitment, objectives, responsibilities and procedures for the organisation.

Planning – Identifies and assesses the risks arising from work activities, and how they can be controlled. Activities in the planning process include:

- Risk assessment and identification of prevention measures
- Identifying the management arrangements and organisation needed to exercise control
- Identifying training needs
- Ensuring that occupational health and safety knowledge, skills and expertise are available

Risk assessment involves:

- Identifying hazards - what might go wrong?
- Judging who might be harmed and how seriously, including employees, contractors, the public
- Deciding how likely it is to happen
- Deciding how these risks can be eliminated or reduced - can facilities, work methods, equipment or training be improved?
- Setting priorities for action based on size of risk, numbers affected etc.
- Implementing control measures
- Reviewing, to check that control measures are working
- Including employee consultation in the process and providing information on risk assessment results.

Implementation and operation – Involves putting plans into practice. This may mean: making changes to the organisation and working procedures, working environment, equipment and products used; training management and staff; and improving communications.

Training

All workers need to understand how to work safely. Therefore training should cover: what the risks are; the protective measures to follow; and, emergency procedures.

Training should be relevant and understandable, including for workers who speak a different language. Training should be provided for new workers and for existing workers when work practices or work equipment change, with change of job, or when new technology is introduced.

Checking and corrective action – Performance should be monitored. This can be reactive, e.g. using accident records or proactive, e.g. by feedback from inspections and audits and from staff surveys. **Accident investigations** should identify the immediate and underlying causes, including management failings. The aim is to ensure that systems and procedures are working and to immediately take any corrective action needed.

Management review and audit – Allows checking of the management system's overall performance. External circumstances may have changed, e.g. new legislation has been introduced. There is also an opportunity to look forward, e.g. to changes in business

structure, development of new products or the introduction of new technology. Review of accidents should include learning lessons at management level. Auditing examines whether the policy, organisation and systems are actually achieving the right results.

Checklist

- Have clear procedures and responsibilities for health and safety been set and does everyone know their own and others' responsibilities?
- Do you know what you have to do to comply with health and safety legislation? If not, have you appointed a competent person who can provide advice?
- Have you identified the main risks to health and safety and taken action to eliminate or reduce them?
- Are your arrangements for the maintenance of work equipment adequate?
- Have you provided your workers with any necessary personal protective equipment for risks that can not be avoided by other means? Have you trained them in its use?
- Have you provided information to the workers on the risks, and trained them in safe working and emergency procedures?
- Do you consult your workers about health and safety issues, including changes to policy, work procedures, equipment?
- Do workers know how to report unsafe conditions and accidents?
- Do you take prompt action to investigate accidents, near misses and reported problems?
- Do you regularly inspect the workplace, and check that workers are following safe working procedures?
- Do you have a system for reviewing your health and safety policy and working procedures?

Getting more information / References

More information on good safety management practice is available from the Agency website <http://osha.eu.int>. All Agency publications can be downloaded free of charge. 'Preventing work-related accidents' is the theme for the European Week for Safety and Health at Work being run by the Member States during October 2001 and more information is given at <http://osha.eu.int/ew2001/>. The Agency site links to Member State sites where national legislation and guidance may be found: <http://ie.osha.eu.int/> for Ireland <http://uk.osha.eu.int/> for UK

