Present, new and emerging risks

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Objective This paper and related presentation reviews the present latest information on traditional and new and emerging risks, indicators, trends, and recent strategies to make workplaces and countries safe, healthy, competitive and productive.

Methods Employment figures, mortality rates, occupational burden of disease and injuries, reported accidents, surveys on self-reported occupational illnesses and injuries, attributable fractions, and the most recent information on the problems from published papers, documents, and electronic data sources of international organizations have been reviewed, and European institutions/agencies, and public websites were studied. Programs and strategies to reduce the work-related negative outcomes at various levels were identified and analyzed.

Results Work-related illnesses that have a long latency period and are linked to ageing are clearly on the increase, while the number of occupational accidents has gone down in industrialized countries thanks to prevention and structural changes. Globally there are 2.3 million deaths annually for reasons attributed to work. Long term health aspects and related occupational hygiene problems will need much more attention than earlier as traditional safety issues have been taken over by “new” health problems at work. We refer to prevention methods as a “toolbox” and categorize the following as “individual tools”: legislation and enforcement, information on the existing state of problems and capacities (profile), knowledge of solutions and good practices, communication and promotion to increase awareness, and collaboration and networking for exchange of good practice. Global, regional, national, and sectoral strategies and systems cover these issues, reflecting their respective priorities.

Conclusion In the present political situation and serious economic downturn, legal measures need to be supplemented with economic justification and convincing arguments to reduce corner-cutting and avoid long-term disabilities, premature retirement, and corporate closures due to a poor work environment. Quality work should be made not only a survival strategy but a successful business and society strategy at all levels.

Key words: Traditional risks, emerging risks, occupational health and safety

Background
The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work is a decentralized European body that collects, analyses and disseminates information on safety and health at work through the network of national focal points, research institutions, and is based on continuous collaboration between national and European tripartite collaboration between governments, workers and employers. The main products are the biannually arranged campaigns, good practice information and fact finding and research on occupational safety and health issues. In addition to the 27 EU Members, we work with the EFTA countries and candidate countries. Links and contacts with institutions globally enhance the relevance of the products and services.

Annually 2.3 million people die in the whole world for work-related causes, and out of those 167,000 in the EU27.

Methods
This paper has used, in particular the following documentation as sources and baseline for analysis.

- European Statistics on Accidents at Work, ESAW (Eurostat)
- European Occupational Diseases Statistics, EODS (Eurostat)
- The Labour Force Survey, LFS (Eurostat)
- The 1999 and 2007 Labour Force Survey Ad hoc modules on Accidents at work and work-related health problems (Eurostat)
- The European Survey on Working Conditions, EWCS (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions)
- The Risk Observatory (The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work)
- The European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks, ESENER The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

These sources [Eurostat, 2010] were sometimes complemented by other statistical information or results of scientific studies or surveys.

Deaths attributed to work, 2.3 million/year

Figure 1: Work-related Annual Deaths - World (Hamalainen et al., 2009; Takala et.al, 2009).

According to Eurostat 3.2% of the workers in Europe report that they had an occupational accident and 8.6% report that they were suffering fro a work-related health proble [De Norre, 2007].
While the ILO has earlier estimated that the loss of GDP caused by poor working conditions is 4 %, latest Australian studies [SafeWork Australia] place a higher value of 5.9% of the GDP.

In a recent European Summit the Swedish Minister of Labour representing the Swedish Presidency of the European Union stated that every third worker in Sweden is out of the work force and a large part of them permanently disabled, many of an early age. Main reasons for disability are musculoskeletal disorders and psychosocial factors including depression.

A study in Finland (www.stm.fi) which has approximately 1% of the European population, and equally 1% of those employed in Europe showed that when adding the social security payments (4.5 billion euros), some 25 billion euros (25 x 109) were lost due to premature retirement. The formal retirement age is 63 - 68 years but the average real retirement age was 57.4 years, this means 7.6 years in short from 65 years. If the whole EU27 figures would follow the same pattern then some 2,500 billion euros are lost every year due to premature retirement.

The European Risk Observatory of the Agency while having in recent past issued four forecasts on emerging risks has just completed a major survey: The European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks. Figures 4 - 7 illustrate some key results from the ESENER study. Country level data exist at the web site for further analyses.

Discussion and conclusions

While fact-finding and research establish a solid priority for further action the main concern is on how to convey the messages to those who need to act. Campaigning, dissemination through media and web are vital. Equally presenting good practice models and solutions, for example, how to carry out a risk assessment with electronic means in a small and medium enterprise. The Online interactive Risk Assessment OiRA-tool is one such approach. Good practices need also be easily transferable and may contain wider ideas than simple technical solutions, including those changing leadership requirements and promoting a new preventative OSH culture.

References


Figure 5: Work-related stress: some or major concern and existence of procedures to deal with it

Figure 6: Concern regarding work-related stress and existence of procedures to deal with work-related stress, by country

Figure 7: Which of the following reasons prompted your establishment to deal with psychosocial risks?
