

# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1. A Global Perspective

According to the ILO, there are more than 250 million work-related accidents every year. Further it is estimated that more than 160 million workers fall ill annually through exposures to hazards in the workplace and that as many as 1.2 million workers die as a result of workplace accidents and diseases. The stark reality is that the human and social cost of production is unacceptably high. In economic terms, it is estimated that annual losses resulting from workplace accidents and diseases may be as high as 4% of gross national product (GNP). These figures include both the direct and indirect costs of accidents and diseases such as medical expenses, lost working days, reductions in production, compensation, training and retraining of workers, equipment damage and repairs, low staff morale, poor publicity and so on.

In the past, such figures have had little impact on people as accidents and ill health at work had always been seen as part and parcel of production and why change, especially if there were many unemployed workers outside the factory gates waiting for any form of employment? Such losses, whether counted in human or financial terms, were considered inevitable. But times have changed whereby employers, factory owners, workers and governments are increasingly recognising that the social and economic costs of workplace accidents and diseases are unacceptably high and place a considerable burden on the competitiveness of the enterprise and the economic welfare of the country. Compliance with International Labour Standards (ILS), national law and practice and industry codes at the level of the enterprise is now seen as a fundamental pre-requisite for a successful modern company. Improving occupational health and safety is in the best interests of all stakeholders, namely, governments, employers and workers and requires **consultation, co-operation and commitment** from all concerned. Good health and safety management and practice forms one of the main foundations of success of the business – it is something to which many companies aspire. This current publication has been developed to help factories in the Cambodian garment sector meet these aspirations. There are no short cuts to improving health and safety in the workplace – it has to be seen as part of a total quality management (TQM) philosophy<sup>1</sup> whereby “best health and safety practices are managed in” rather than relying solely on “inspecting defects out”. Successful companies in the national and global arenas have clearly recognised that workplace accidents and diseases cost money and that an effective system for managing health and safety, which involves workers in the process, will help to reduce costs, increase productivity and benefit workers and society as a whole.

## 1.2. How This Manual Can Help Stakeholders Improve OSH in the Workplace

If you are a manager or owner of a garment factory, or a member of a joint health and safety committee, it is important to stress at the outset that tackling health and safety issues has to be seen as an integral part of management, not an optional extra. Successful

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<sup>1</sup> Successful Health and Safety Management, Health and Safety Executive, UK, 1992.

companies have long recognised that health and safety is a management responsibility of equal importance to production and quality. National and international standards all emphasise that it is the duty of employers to provide a safe and healthy working environment. Similarly many buyers are now insisting through their codes of conduct that occupational health and safety be considered as a priority. Poor publicity, with news of “sweat shop” production in third world countries and with sales falling as a result, has meant that buyers are now insisting that factories comply with core standards including occupational health and safety. For local factories it is a matter of complying with these core standards or lose the contract.

For some managers and owners, any commitment to improving working conditions may be seen as an unnecessary cost – why spend the money when margins are so tight; when competition both within Cambodia and internationally (China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, etc) is fierce; when the owners are from overseas and unwilling to invest for the long-term; when national legislation is weak and is rarely enforced; and when the workforce have little awareness of health and safety issues? In spite of the importance of the sector to the economy, many garment factories fail to grow or even survive in the highly competitive global market.

As we will see in the manual, every garment factory in Cambodia has some health and safety problems. This manual gives guidance on how to improve health and safety within your factory so that it meets both national and international standards. It puts forward a series of practical, low-cost suggestions for improving the working conditions and increasing productivity – in essence the manual will help you to develop a healthier and safer workplace.

### **1.3. Structure of the Manual**

This manual comprises the following technical areas, written in a practical, user-friendly format:

- Introduction;
- Policy and implementation;
- General workplace conditions;
- Temperature, ventilation, noise and lighting;
- Chemical dusts, fumes and vapours;
- Workstation design;
- Machine guarding;
- Electrical safety;
- Fire safety;
- Welfare;
- Checklist and risk mapping.

Each section includes a summary of the key points and, where appropriate, some simple “rules of thumb” to help the reader understand the issues. Each section is made up of the following components:

- General introduction;
- Core information
- Section checklist;
- Summary

The sections have been written to give managers, workers, members of joint health and safety committees, and ILO monitors, some practical, hands-on information that will help them to improve occupational health and safety in their factories. Some models of best practice and a number of photographs taken at various garment factories have been included to demonstrate key points. Each section is built around a checklist that will help the reader to systematically audit the factory.

The final section *Checklist and Risk Mapping* gives guidance to the reader on how to inspect the workplace as a whole and to prioritise areas of concern that need attention.

Each section is complemented by a number of case studies illustrating models of good practice. The authors are most grateful to the participating factories for their contributions. New cases studies and photos will be added as more good practices are developed.

#### **1.4. Other Reference Material**

A number of relevant ILO Standards on OSH (Conventions and Recommendations) will be referred to throughout the text as will key Cambodian Health and Safety Regulations so that the reader can understand both national and international requirements. Other reference material will be used to illustrate various components as necessary. Of particular relevance are the following ILO texts:

- ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention, C155, (1981)
- ILO Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, R164, (1981)
- ILO Occupational Health Services Convention, C161, (1985)
- ILO Occupational Health Services Recommendation, R171, (1985)
- ILO, Decent Work, Report of the Director-General, ILC, 87<sup>th</sup> Session (1999)
- ILO Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems, ILO-OSH (2001)
- ILO, Fundamental Principles of Occupational Health and Safety, B.Alli (2001)
- ILO, Improving Working Conditions and Productivity in the Garment Industry, J.C. Hiba (1998)
- ILO, A Training Manual for Labour Inspectors, Anterro Vahapassi (2003).