

SUMMARY

STATUS OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN KENYA

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The status of occupational health and safety conditions in Kenya is an issue of growing importance to the industrialists, practitioners, the Government and consumers. Occupational, health and safety issues are anchored in the ministry of Labour, department of Occupational Health and Safety. The factories Act Cap 514 which came into operational on 1st September 1951, makes provision for the health, safety and welfare of persons employed in factories and other places of work. The Act is predominantly socio-economic in nature and focuses on the shop floor conditions of the factory, safety devices, machine maintenance, safety precautions in case of fire, gas explosions, electrical faults, provisions of protective equipment among others.

In 2004, a subsidiary legislation (legal Notice NO.30) was enacted to provide for the formation of Safety Committees by the occupier of every factory or other workplaces. The Committee is responsible for all health and safety issues of enterprises including undertaking safety audits. Despite all these, it is almost impossible to characterize the conditions under which employees work due to the scarcity of data. The ministry of Labour reports that more than half of the industrial accidents and injuries in Kenya go unreported. It estimates that reported occupational fatalities and injuries for the last five years 2000-2004 are: 1528, 1923, 1332, 1599 and 1387. This is viewed against the background that factories and other workplaces have to be registered by the Department of Occupational Health and Safety, but by the end of 2004 only 11,387 such enterprises are registered excluding the 1.3 million micro- and small enterprises (juakali).

Most of the reported accidents are those seeking compensation under the Workman's Compensation Act. In the year 2003 data indicates that mining, construction and transport accounts for 41% of accidents in Kenya, machine operators and assemblers 28% while other occupations share 31% of workplace accidents. This shows that these occupations are injury prone while matters of safety are treated casually by both the employer and employees. In relation to age groups 44.4% of the injuries occurred to persons in the age group of 20 to 29 years, 25% to the age group of 30 to 39 years and 24% to the age group below 20 years.

The Kenya National Cleaner Production Centre is playing active role in building national capacity in occupational health and safety. Since the year 2003, the Centre has integrated occupational health and safety issues in its programs especially the Cleaner Production

Workshop on the IUPAC–UNESCO-UNIDO Safety Training Program, part of the IUPAC Congress in Beijing, on Wednesday, August 17

and Environmental Audits. It has assisted a total of 85 enterprises train staff and implements occupational health and safety (OHS) programs. The Centre also runs a 3-day training of trainers program in OHS and is involved in supply chain management where the issues of Material Safety Data Sheets are discussed. Among the key challenges in this program is to create enough human capacity to assist enterprises develop and implement safety programs. Thus, much of the Centre's focus in the future will be to mount a "*learning-by-doing*" training program for Consultants.