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World Health and Safety day 2022

Let’s not forget the basics in OSH management.

ISO/TC 283
Occupational health and safety management systems

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As the most recent wave or variant of COVID rises, crests and recedes, the world is starting to move towards a new kind of normal. Within this normal we are hopefully left with an ongoing appreciation of the role of occupational health and safety (OH&S) in adapting to serious health crises. But we must not forget the basics and ‘day to day’ health and safety practices and become complacent as the new normal settles. The global losses for health and safety still remain unacceptably high. The ILO[1] estimates that some 2.3 million women and men around the world are killed because of incidents and occupational diseases related to work. Additionally, they estimate 340 million incidents and 160 million illnesses related to work annually. The standards and related guidance documents and research being developed by the ISO/TC 283 working groups and technical committees for OH&S all share a basic framework for ensuring workers can work safely. Even if your organization is not considering full adoption, the ISO standards can provide a road map for organizations to consider when thinking how to keep their workers safe and improving the overall health and safety culture. All of the ISO standards work using a continual improvement model, based on the Plan, Do, Check, Act model. At its most basic, this includes:

- Identifying existing hazards, or new hazards created by changing circumstances;
- Removing or reducing the likelihood of exposure to those hazards through controls; and
- Continually inspecting and reviewing controls to ensure that they remain viable

Standards can help show the path

In most organizations, workers know their job best, or are at least able to point out where deficiencies exist. ISO standards and guidelines around make it clear that participation and consultation of workers is one of the best paths for ensuring healthy and safe work. Organizations are best served when they provide the time, training and encouragement for worker to identify and report hazards and allow them to participate in developing solutions to keep workers safe, enabling them to do their jobs well and keep businesses running effectively.

All organizations are expected to ensure their workers can work in a way that is physically and psychologically healthy and safe. To help prevent injuries and illnesses related to work, employers can adopt four basic practices into their workplace culture that will help keep workers safe and increase participation around health and safety:

- Ensure workers are not required to perform a task that they believe is unsafe until an investigation can be carried out to determine the risk and ensure it is controlled.
- Ensure workers have information hazards in the workplace that may cause harm, and how to prevent that harm.
- Provide assurances that workers will not face reprisals for carrying out any duty related to health and safety, including reporting incidents or concerns.
- Include workers when deciding what is safe in the workplace and ensure they feel able to report hazards.

Though full adoption of an ISO standard is an excellent and achievable goal, don’t be paralyzed by the fear of making mistakes, or worrying about what will be uncovered when you start. ISO OH&S standards and guidance are built around the principle of continual improvement, meaning an organization can always meet targets and goals, but they should never think of themselves as perfect, or that the work of health and safety is ever ‘done’. Regardless of the size or complexity or your organization, you can engage and consult the workforce, review operations and remedy unsafe conditions as they are discovered. By involving your workers in this effort, your workers will be safer and healthier, and your organization will be a better place to work.