A Safe and Healthy Environment for Industrial Sector in India

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Abstract
"Every twenty seconds of every working minute of every hour throughout the world, someone dies as a result of an industrial accident." This was how the seriousness of industrial accidents was described by the Director –General of the British Council, in his message of good wishes to the Seventh National Conference on Industrial Safety and Health organized by the National Safety Council, India gives the major accidents in our country. The vignettes quoted above also demonstrate the good and bad about life in business establishments.

Introduction
Need for Safety
Eliminate the causes of accidents, and industrial safety is ensured. Why safety?

An accident - free plant enjoys certain benefits. Major ones are substantial savings in costs, increasedproductivity, and meeting legal and moral requirements. No surprise that ILO observes April 28 every year as World Day for Safety and Health at work.

Cost Saving
Two types of costs are incurred by the management when an accident occurs. There are the direct costs, in the form of compensation payable to the dependents of the victim if the accident is fatal, and medical expenses incurred in treating the patient if the accident is non-fatal. The management, however, is not liable to meet the direct costs if the victim is insured under the ESI scheme. When the victim is uninsured, compensation and medical expenses are the responsibility of the management. There is the cost of risk management, which the management must bear.

Increased Productivity
Safety plants are efficient plants. To a large extent, safety promotes productivity. Employees in safe plants can devote more time to improving the quality and quantity of their output and spend less time worrying about their safety and well-being.
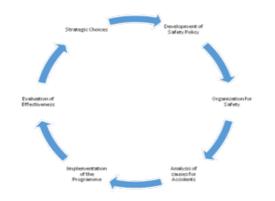
Moral

Safety is important on humane grounds too. Managers must undertake accident prevention measures to minimize the pain and suffering of the injured worker and his /her family is often exposed to as a result of the accident. An employee is a worker in the factory and the bread-winner for his/her family. The happiness of his /her family depends upon the health and well-being of the worker.

Legal

There are legal reasons too for undertaking safety measures. There are laws covering occupational health and safety, and penalties for non-compliance have become quite severe. The responsibility extends to the safety and health of the surrounding community, too.

The Supreme Court held

"An enterprise which is engaged in a hazardous or inherently dangerous industry which poses a potential threat to the health and safety of the persons working in the factory and industry in the surrounding areas, owes an absolute and non-delegable duty to the community to ensure that no harm results to anyone on account of the hazardous or inherently dangerous nature. This implies unlimited liability."

Safety Process

Strategic Choices

The first step in a safety programme is for managements to make decisions regarding the safety of their workers. Many of the decisions made are based on the strategic choices available to the organization. Some of these strategic choices are:

1. Managers must determine the level of protection the organization will provide for employees. Some companies, for financial or liability reasons, prefer a minimum level of protection, while other organizations choose a maximum level of protection.

2. Managers can decide whether a safety programme will be formal or informal. Formal programmes will have written regulations and are carefully monitored. Informal regulations are enforced through peer pressure or good training.

3. Managers can also be proactive or reactive in developing procedures or plans concerning employee safety. Proactive managers seek to improve the safety of employees before a need to do so, while reactive managers fix safety problems after they occur.

4. Managers can decide to use the safety of workers as a marketing tool for the organization. This type of strategy would involve publicizing what the company has done to promote safety and how safe the plant is to work with.

Safety Policy

The second step in evolving a safety programme is to have a safety policy. A policy specifies the company's goals and designates the responsibilities and authority for their achievement. It may also provide caveats and sanctions for failing to fulfill them. There are differences in the form and content of corporate policies. Their style, however, is not as important as the clarity with them identify functional responsibilities and authority.

Organization for Safety

The third step in evolving a safety programme is to constitute an organization for safety. Companies constitute safety committees which are, composed of employees from across the organization. Typically, safety committees serve advisory capacities and are responsible for such tasks as reviewing safety procedures, making recommendations for eliminating specific safety and health hazards, investigating accidents, fielding safety-related complaints from employees and monitoring statutory compliance.

SAIL has an exclusive safety organization at Ranchi.

Employees Safety Responsibilities Checklist
1. Know what constitutes a safety hazard.
2. Be constantly on the lookout for safety hazards.
3. Know and use safe work procedures.
4. Avoid unsafe acts.
5. Keep the work area clean and uncluttered.
6. Report accidents, injuries, illnesses, exposures to hazardous substances and near misses immediately.
7. Report acts and conditions that don't seem right even if you are not sure if they are hazards.
8. Cooperate with internal inspections and job hazard analyses.
9. Follow company safety rules.
10. Look for ways to make the job safer.
11. Participate actively in safety training.
12. Treat safety as one of your most important job responsibilities.

Safety Posters and Film Shows

Safety posters with poignant illustrations and penetrating slogans may be put up on the walls near workplaces. The National Safety Council has published a series of such slogans as,"Provide Guards –Avoid Tragedies", "Overconfidence leads to accidents," "No grip- No safe," "Speed thrills but kills," and so on.

Safety Week and Awards

A safety week is observed from the 1st to 7th of every March. Workers are given badges with green triangles printed on them and are asked to wear them while at work. Film shows are also arranged during the week.

Database

Data relating to accidents are not properly maintained and are not periodically updated. The government has contradictory data on industrial accidents, reflecting the lack of precise information needed to take policy decisions. Typical are the gaps in figures presented by two labor and employment ministry organizations. Data compiled by the Directorate General, Factory Advice Service and Labour Institutes (DGFASL) seem to indicate that industrial injuries are falling.

Programme Evaluation

Several methods exist and have been proposed for gauging the effectiveness of safety programmes. Broadly, they can be classified as systemic or organic.

Organic Measures

Organic methods attempt to evaluate how well the safety programme is designed and fulfilled. Of interest, in this case, is the merit of the programme's elements and their level of implementation. Three techniques are used to measure organic safety effectiveness, namely,
1. Safety inspection,
2. Safety audit,
3. Comparison.

Safety Inspection

In this, inspectors are given specifics to follow. These may include programme elements such as the formation of safety committees, how often they meet, as well as more customary items covering compliance with regulations. After inspection, a report of the findings is made to the management concerned. Inspection varies in intensity and scope, but the procedures and objectives remain the same. Inspection is universal in its application, too.

Safety Audit

The audit is an in-depth analysis of facilities, management and employees, attitude towards safety, managerial effectiveness in maintaining safety, and quality of the safety planning as well as the operation's conformity with safety regulations. In the latter case, the level of compliance is considered as an indicator of operating effectiveness, because the audit is not simply concerned with whether regulations are followed to the letter. Overall performance in controlling the operation's safety is the audit's quest, rather than simply determining existing safety oversights. The audit is comparable to inspection but differs ordinarily in intensity with which the examination is conducted.

Comparison

This is the third method of evaluating the company's safety efforts. The purpose here is to compare the experience of a plant or industry with that of another which is comparable. It is well-known that some operations have consistently better frequency (or severity) rates, often in spite of inherently high operating hazards. The question them is whether the operation is doing better than its counterparts, and over how long a span it has been improving or sliding.

Health

The well-being of the employee in an industrial establishment is affected by accidents and by ill-health physical as well as mental. In this section, we shall discuss the need for healthy workers and health services to be provided by the management to ensure the continuing good health of their employees. We propose to examine employee health from the following angles physical health, mental health, noise control, stress management, AIDS, alcoholism, drug abuse, and violence in work place.

Physical Health

Ill health of employees results in reduced productivity, high unsafe acts, and increased absenteeism. A healthy worker, on the other hand, produces results opposite to these. In other words, healthy employees are more productive, more safety conscious, and are more regular to work. The worker who is healthy is always cheerful, confident looking, and is an invaluable asset to the organization.

Health Services

A typical organization renders the following health services to its employees. It may be stated that these services, at best, offer first-aid treatment to the victims. For any major ailment, employees are advised to go to ESI or authorized clinics/ nursing homes,

a) Pre-hiring medical check-up for all employees.

b) Periodical physical, a check-up for all employees.Regular medical check-up of executives to detect early signs of tensions, ulcers, diabetes and the like.

c) First-aid treatment following an accident. Training in first-aid to all employees.

d) Treatment of minor complaints, such as cold, cough, fever and headaches.

e) Rehabilitation and job placement of seriously injured workers who have been cured but suffer from some disability.

Mental Health

In recent years, the mental health of employees, particularly that of executives, has engaged the attention of employers. Three reasons may be given for this development. First, mental breakdowns are common in modern days because of pressures and tensions.Second, mental disturbances of various types result in reduced productivity and lower profits for the organization. Third, mental illness takes its toll through alcoholism, high employee turnover, and poor human relationships. A mental health service is generally rendered in the following ways:

•   Psychiatric counseling,

•   Co-operation and consultation with outside psychiatrists and specialists.

•   Education of company personnel in nature and the importance of mental health,

•   Development and maintenance of an effective human relations programme.

Noise Control

An age-old problem, and not effectively tackled until now, is the noise in industrial establishments. The noise made its appearance in organizations when humans started working on mental. As civilization advanced, human being discovered more and more ways of having machines to do his /her work, and each new machine added to the problem. For quite some years, the noise was endured by all. But, in the recent past, the increasing use of machines of great speed is telling upon the health of the workers,

Control Methods

It is impossible to eliminate noise from industrial establishments. It is there as long as machinery is used in manufacturing operations. However; noise control can help minimize harmful effects on employees. Noise control can be achieved,

1.   At the source,

2. Through enclosures,
3. By absorption,
4. By ear protection,

Work Stress

Stress is an essential part of work life. Certain businesses are exposed to stress than others. A recent study by ASSOCHAM revealed that construction, shipping, banks, trading houses, electronic and print media, courier companies, small units, retail outlets, card franchise companies and government hospitals carry higher stress potential. Of course,BPO, call centers and IT companies top the chart of stress-prone businesses.

What is not Stress?

To make the meaning of stress more clear, it is useful to state what does not constitute stress. Each of the following does not amount to stress,
Stress is not simple anxiety or nervous tension,
Stress need not always be damaging,
Stress is not always due to overwork,
Stress cannot be avoided,
The body has a limited capacity to respond.

Conclusion

There is much that needs to be done to improve the health, safety and well-being of workers in India. To paraphrase the priorities of the National Plan of Action on Workers' Health: 1. policies must be developed and implemented at national and enterprise levels to support worker health; 2. health must be protected and promoted in the workplace. 3. evidence-based effective practices to improve worker health must be communicated. 4. worker health must be considered in the broader context of education, trade and commerce, and economic development.

This framework and model suggests ways that employers and workers and their representatives in collaboration can make significant contributions to these points. By developing and implementing policies that address the physical and psychosocial working environments, as well as promoting worker health and creating health-promoting work environments, enterprises can contribute to the first two points above. Larger enterprises that become involved in the enterprise community by providing

secondary and tertiary health care services for the community can thus contribute to the third point. The working group that developed this framework hopes that this background document contributes to the last two points, and will help to motivate enabling stakeholders in government, business and civil society to work together to create a world in which workers experience enhanced physical health and well-being as a result of their employment. It is hoped that the day will come when all workplaces are healthy ones, according to the WHO definition:

A healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and well-being of workers and the sustainability of the workplace by considering the following, based on identified needs:

• health and safety concerns in the physical work environment;
• health, safety and well-being concerns in the psychosocial work environment including the organization of work and workplace culture;
• personal health resources in the workplace; and
• ways of participating in the community to improve the health of workers, their families and other members of the community.

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