

Occupational Safety and Health: A Guide for Armenian Businesses

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Occupational Safety and Health: A Guide for Armenian Businesses

Disclaimer: This handbook is not a legal interpretation of the Labor Code of Armenia and does not place any additional requirements on employers or employees.

What is occupational health and safety?

The most important thing for a worker is to be safe at their place of work. While certain occupations are inherently dangerous and not all risks can be eliminated, employers and employees should strive to make work non-hazardous. In the words of the International Labor Organization,

“Occupational health should aim at: the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations; the prevention amongst workers of departures from health caused by their working conditions; the protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health; the placing and maintenance of the worker in an occupational environment adapted to his physiological and psychological capabilities; and, to summarize, the adaptation of work to man and of each man to his job.”

Employees and their families benefit from safety and health because:

- their incomes are protected;
- their family lives are not hindered by injury;
- their stress is not increased.

How is safety important for your business?

In addition to the benefit to the worker, safety and health systems at work also contribute to the health of the business. Lack of worker safety costs business money in lost workdays, lost investment, and lost capital. When workers stay whole and healthy, however, the direct cost-savings to businesses include:

- lower workers' compensation insurance costs;
- reduced medical expenditures;
- smaller expenditures for return-to-work programs;
- fewer faulty products;
- lower costs for job accommodations for injured workers; and
- less money spent for overtime

How much will injuries cost my business?

According to commonly accepted safety management concepts in the United States, for every \$1 in direct costs for a worker injury, \$5-50 more are likely to be spent on "indirect costs" to repair building, tool or equipment damage; to replace damage products or materials; and to make up for losses from production delays and interruptions. An additional \$1-3 in indirect costs will be spent for hiring and training replacements and for time to investigate the incident. These figures do not consider the impact of reduced commitment to work when employees operate in a situation in which injuries are common; because they frequently involve longer absences, the impact of job-related illnesses can be even greater.

benefits.

Safety and health also make big reductions in indirect costs, due to:

- increased productivity;
- higher quality products;
- Better reputation;
- increased morale;
- better labor/management relations;
- reduced turnover;
- better use of human resources.

Simply put, protecting people on the job is in everyone's best interest-our economy, our communities, our fellow workers and our families. Safety and health add value to businesses, workplaces and lives.

What are my obligations under the law for health and safety?

In addition to the economic benefits, there is a legal obligation for businesses to protect their workers. According to the Labor Code of Armenia, "It is the responsibility of an employer to ensure safety and health at work for the employees." As part of this process, employers are to assess potential risks to ensuring the safety and health of employees, report on accidents and injuries, and permit inspections from the State Labor Inspectorate to verify the presence of safety programs.

From 2008 onward, health and safety regulations will be enforced by the Labor Inspectorate, and firms must be aware of these regulations and their obligations as well.

Who is responsible for safety at work?

It is the responsibility of **everyone** involved in a workplace to ensure safety: the employer must provide safe working conditions, the employee must follow appropriate methods and techniques, and government must provide adequate guidance for those seeking it (and punishment for those who contravene laws and regulations).

What is the best approach to occupational safety?

PREVENTION. It is much easier to identify hazards before they occur and take appropriate steps than it is to deal with accidents after they occur. Workplace safety represents an investment in the future of the company, and money spent today on ensuring a safe workplace will save money and lives down the road.

How can I help to prevent workplace accidents?

Nobody wants accidents to happen in his or her business. A serious fire, a permanent injury, or the death of an employee or owner can cause the loss of profit or even an entire business. To prevent such losses, you don't have to turn your business upside

down. You may not have to spend a lot of money, either. You do need to use good business sense and apply recognized prevention principles.

The priorities outlined in below will help to focus the prevention objectives more sharply and target resources more effectively. These priorities account for a significant proportion of all work-related diseases and injuries. They also reflect a need to focus on emerging issues, and to help businesses and groups of workers who have particular needs or are at more risk. They are:

Airborne substances

Airborne substances include fumes, dusts, gases, mists, vapors, viruses, and bacteria that cause occupational cancers, respiratory diseases (including occupational asthma), and other work-related illnesses. Specific examples in the workplace include asbestos, wood dust, welding fumes, and solvents. Airborne substances are a priority for OSH prevention because they are the leading cause of premature death from occupational disease.

Workplace vehicles

Vehicles are one of the largest causes of work-related injury deaths. The average vehicle-related injury is often severe because of the violent forces involved. Workplace vehicles include trucks, cars, tractors, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), motorbikes, forklifts, boats, and aircraft.

Manual handling

Manual handling work requires a person to lift, lower, push, pull, carry, or otherwise handle an object. Examples include lifting boxes, packing in a supermarket, cleaning tasks, operating machinery, using hand tools, and handling hospital patients. Poor manual handling practice can lead to musculoskeletal diseases and injuries including sprains and strains, overuse disorders, and damaged spinal discs. These account for a large proportion of work-related insurance claims.

Slips, trips, and falls

Slips, trips and falls result in significant numbers of insurance claims for work-related injury, and are often caused by untidy work areas. Falls from heights are a common cause of death and serious injury in the workplace – and they are a major issue for the construction industry.

Psychosocial work factors

Psychosocial work factors include excessive workloads, low job control, and aggression and violence at work. In some people, exposures to these work factors can contribute to chronic fatigue, stress-related disorders (such as anxiety and depression), alcohol and drug abuse, heart disease, upper limb musculoskeletal disorders, and suicide. Personal

thorough analysis will generally reveal a number of deeper factors, which permitted or even encouraged an employee's action. Such factors may include a supervisor's allowing or pressuring the employee to take short cuts in the interest of production, inadequate equipment, or a work practice which is difficult for the employee to carry out safely. An effective analysis will identify actions to address each of the causal factors in an accident or "near miss" incident.

Not all dangers at your worksite depend on an accident to cause harm, of course. Worker exposure to toxic chemicals or harmful levels of noise or radiation may happen in conjunction with routine work as well as by accident. You may not realize the extent of the exposure or harm that you and your employees face. The effect may not be immediate. You need a plan that includes prevention of these health hazard exposures and accidents. You need a **safety and health management system**.

What are the components of a safety and health management system?

It is not difficult to develop such a system. Basically, your plan should address the types of accidents and health hazard exposures that could happen in your workplace. Because each workplace is different, your program should address your specific needs and requirements.

There are four basic elements to all good safety and health programs. These are:

1. **Management Commitment and Employee Involvement.** The manager or management team leads the way, by setting policy, assigning and supporting responsibility, setting an example and involving employees.
2. **Worksite Analysis.** The worksite is continually analyzed to identify all existing and potential hazards.
3. **Hazard Prevention and Control.** Methods to prevent or control existing or potential hazards are put in place and maintained.
4. **Training for Employees, Supervisors and Managers.** Managers, supervisors and employees are trained to understand and deal with worksite hazards.

Regardless of the size of your business, you should use each of these elements to prevent workplace accidents and possible injuries and illnesses.

Developing a workplace program following these four points is a key step in protecting you and your workers' safety and health. If you already have a program, reviewing it in relation to these elements should help you improve what you have.

Following this four-point approach to safety and health in your business may also improve efficiency. It may help you reduce insurance claims and other costs. While having a safety and health plan based on these four elements does not guarantee compliance with government standards, the approach will help you toward full

compliance and beyond. It will certainly give you a way to express and document your good faith and commitment to protecting your workers' health and safety.

Will implementing health and safety plans be expensive?

This approach usually does not involve large costs. Developing a health and safety protection plan does not have to be expensive and generally does not require additional employees, especially in smaller businesses. Safety and health can be integrated into your other business functions with modest effort on your part.

The key to the success of a safety and health plan is to see it as a part of your business operation and to see it reflected in your day-to-day operations. When safe work procedures are the means of protection, ensuring that they are followed becomes critical. Ensuring safe work practices involves discipline in both a positive sense and a corrective sense. Every



component of effective safety and health management is designed to create a disciplined environment in which all personnel act on the basic that worker safety and health protection is a fundamental value of the organization. This creates a cycle of continual improvement as shown above.

As mentioned above, such an environment depends on the credibility of management's involvement in safety and health matters, inclusion of employees in decisions which affect their safety and health, rigorous worksite analysis to identify hazards and potential hazards, stringent prevention and control measures, and thorough training. In such an environment, all personnel will understand the hazards to which they are exposed, why the hazards pose a threat, and how to protect themselves and others from the hazards. Training for the purpose is reinforced by encouragement of attempt to work safely and by positive recognition of safe behavior. This approach will allow safety and health awareness to become second nature to you and your employees.

How can I find more assistance in this field?

The State Labor Inspectorate is ready and willing to assist employers in establishing occupational health and safety information systems.

Additionally, many private sector firms work in the field of health and safety and can help your business become safer.

Finally, the internet offers many examples from abroad in terms of occupational safety, including such organizations as the ILO, the American Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and websites of Labor Inspectorates outside of Armenia.



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