Occupational Safety & Health (OSH)

Occupational Safety and Health: maintain healthy and productive workforce and minimize risks to business

Make occupational health and safety a priority for your business as, after all, healthy and motivated people will be more productive and loyal to your business, helping you to succeed. Use the need for COVID-19 preventive measures as a starting point for systematically reviewing risks to workers' health and safety, and manage and minimize these and their possible impacts through prevention, protection and preparedness.

Background

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) concerns health, safety, well being and welfare of people at work. It is embedded in laws and standards as a right of employees and an obligation for employers. OSH is being promoted through programs that are aimed at making the workplace better for workers, along with co-workers, family members, customers, and other stakeholders. Improving a company's OSH performance is good for business – higher employee morale aids productivity and quality and attracts and retains talented staff, it builds and maintains brand image and minimizes liabilities. Employees and their families benefit from staying healthy and productive, free of fear for injury and other suffering, and resilient for realization of their own future.

In India, the National Policy on Safety, Health and Environment at Work Place specifies following directive principles:

1. To secure the health and strength of employees, men and women;
2. that the tender age of children are not abused;
3. that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength;
4. Just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief are provided; and that the Government shall take steps, by suitable legislation or in any other way, to secure the participation of employee in the management of undertakings, establishments or other organisations engaged in any industry.

On the basis of these Directive Principles as well as international instruments, Government is committed to regulate all economic activities for management of safety and health risks at workplaces and to provide measures so as to ensure safe and healthy working conditions for every working man and woman in the nation.

Every enterprise, micro, small, medium or large, in any sector, has both the legal and moral obligation to manage OSH. The necessary management efforts can match the scale and complexity of hazards and risks present in or affecting the workplace. The prevention principle prevails, in that enterprises work towards removal, reduction or containment of all hazards. OHS programs also include efforts and provisions that help minimize the effects in the case of incident.

The bottomline is that healthy and satisfied people are productive and useful in workplace, and a conducive workplace will attract good staff. Therefore, OSH makes good business sense as well as being a legal and societal obligation. Over time, more and more enterprises have started to appreciate that OSH prevents people from being harmed or fallingill through work and that is essential to any successful business.

OSH Business Benefits
- Employee motivation and commitment
- Lower costs of accidents and illness
- Managed insurance costs and liabilities
- Investor confidence
- Brand value and good will
- Winning and retaining business customers
- Corporate social responsibility

Every enterprise can enjoy significant benefits by investing in OSH. Simple improvements can increase competitiveness, profitability and the motivation of employees. The implementation of an OSH management system (through ISO45001 standard as elaborated below) provides an effective framework to prevent or minimize accidents and ill health. Reputable companies have long recognized the importance of their image and reputation. Large organizations are expected to demonstrate ever-higher standards of corporate governance and greater transparency in reporting practices. The combination of operating in a market-driven

economy alongside a society that is more aware of risks means that many enterprises now realize the significant gains that can be made from integrating OSH performance into their wider business model.

Approach

The most successful organizations recognize that a healthy workplace is a happy and productive one. Employers and managers have a leading role in preventing ill health and promoting good health. Individuals also recognize how important their health is; older workers need to stay fit and healthy to keep working and enjoy their later years; younger generations are more informed on health and they expect their employers to actively provide healthy workplaces, not ones that merely give them a pay package. Physical and mental occupational disease and illness can be prevented. There is no excuse for workers to compromise their health – for example suffer hearing damage, develop asthma or die from cancer from uncontrolled exposures at work. Working conditions should not create environments that increase the likelihood of physical or mental ill-health, such as those associated with occupational stress.

Employers, employees and governments globally are converging on the notion that the ultimate OSH goal is zero harm to people. It is the right of each and every member of your staff and workforce to retain their good health and well being. Nobody should have to enter any workplace with a fear to get hurt, fall sick, incur life-changing injury or even risk their lives.

OSH should target all factors that influence health and well being in the workplace. As a first proxy, this involves preventing and controlling disease, reducing hazards and risks and maintaining a comfortable working environment free of avoidable stress of any kind. However, specifically to the sector and location, other factors may need to be included both in workplace as well as external with potential to impact your people.

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has put special emphasis on preventing and controlling the spread of disease. Immediate measures are needed to address the COVID-19 threat through improved hygiene and sanitization, keeping 6 feet physical distance, avoiding common touch points and health screening (as addressed in the module **ready the workplace**). This immediate need can be taken as a starting point for an all round inclusive approach to improve OSH.

Disease Prevention and Control

This covers communicable and other diseases common in the community. MSMEs and other organizations have obligation to ensure that people reporting for work are healthy and fit for work and to prevent the spread of disease in the workplace. This requires strategy and planning to include health monitoring, vaccination, infection and disease treatment and follow up, non-pharmaceutical measures as well as emergency planning.

Diseases and other health issues are common in the community and hence also among your workforce, and most commonly neither directly nor indirectly linked to work. The OSH effort can focus on managing this community burden of disease, where possible, slowing down its spread and caring for affected patients.

Sick people should take rest and recover, and not report for work, as that puts their own health and well being as well as that of fellow workers at risk. Their concentration and focus will generally be down, resulting in increased risks for accidents or plainly lower quality and productivity of their work. Health screening and self declarations are important mechanisms and can be done on intermittent basis by health professional, supported by routine checks on temperature (with thermoscanners) or for other signs of disease or discomfort on entering and exiting work premises. Moreover, a business should cater for a place to isolate a person that may fall sick in the course of work, for immediate care, prior to leaving the worksite.

Linked to health monitoring, organizations may support the fight against communicable diseases, like TB, typhoid, hepatitis, malaria etc., with protective measues, early diagnosis and support for immunization. Most importantly, organizations should commit to taking non-pharmaceutical measures that help slowing and possible stopping the spread of disease. These include in particular:

✓ Cleaning and disinfection of all workplaces, machinery, equipment, tools, stationery, storage areas, etc. on a regular basis

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✓ Maintaining high levels of overall hygiene particularly through provision of adequate number of toilets, hand washing facilities and in food preparation and eating areas

✓ Supporting specific hygiene initiatives, such as provision of soap, disinfectants/sanitizers and – disposable – tissues

✓ Promoting and facilitating healthy behaviours

✓ Availing Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs), such as gloves, boots, masks, etc., commensurate with exposure risk of the job.

Hazard and Risk Reduction

This pillar addresses risks for incurring injury and/or other negative health impacts in the workplace, as a result of business activities and operations. This starts with thorough identification of hazards in and/or to the workplace and the risks these pose to employees. As a first priority, risks should be mitigated and minimized, through technical and operational measures. These are to be complemented with provision of protective equipment and preparation of response measures.

Hazard is a term used to define a substance or situation that has a likelihood to cause an injury in a given environment or situation. Industrial hazards may be defined as any condition produced by industries that may cause injury or death to personnel (and/or in community) or loss of product or property. An industrial risk assessment usually includes identification of major hazards or operability issues related to the process and its design. Major process hazards usually include the release of hazardous materials and/or energy. Common equipment hazards are moving machinery and vehicles, cold and hot surfaces, high and low working pressures, overhead loads and cranes, to mention a few.

The identified hazards are to be prioritized on the basis of assigned risk, where risk is governed by probability (how likely a particular hazard may happen) and impact (how big would be its impact on people and property). High risks are those that are most likely to happen (are plausible at any point in time) and/or would have a high impact (in terms of number of people affected as well as severity of the health impact).

Risks are to be minimized and managed. First priority is risk mimimization, reducing the likelihood that something untoward happens through technical and related measures. E.g. placing covers and guards around all moving parts, insulating all hot and cold surfaces, or improving process controls. Second priority is impact minimization, through measures that would reduce impacts, which may include the provision of protective equipment, either at the premises (screens, shielding, bunds etc.) or through personal protective equipment, such as gloves, helmets, goggles, etc. Third priority is emergency preparedness – make sure to be prepared to take

care of people and property in case of an accident. This may be as simple as having adequate first aid box or room and fire fighting equipment, or involve complex planning and preparation when dealing for example with hazardous chemicals.

Few of common hazards and appropriate risk management and emergency preparedness are as follows:

Fire Safety:

- ✓ Ensure that a team for emergencies, such as fire, explosion, natural disaster, accident or others are organized and that all its members are trained on required actions.
- ✓ Ensure fire prevention groups are formed and fire drills are conducted once every six months.
- ✓ Ensure access to medical treatment and communication devices such as mobile phone in case of an emergency.
- ✓ Ensure that combustible and flammable materials are stored in a safe and systematic way.

Electrical Safety:

- ✓ Ensure power tools, generators, and transformers are properly maintained.
- ✓ All live electrical equipment must be insulated.
- ✓ Ensure that only trained authorized employees are conducting electrical work. Check with your utility's electrical inspection department to know the trained professional in each factory.
- ✓ Lock-out procedures or danger tags must be in place when conducting electrical maintenance.

Machine Safety:

- ✓ Ensure that operators are informed, instructed and trained on how to operate the machinery safely and correctly, including the checking of machinery prior to use.
- ✓ Plant and machinery must be kept maintained.
- ✓ Ensure that there is an adequate work space for the operators around the machinery.
- ✓ Ensure that workers are empowered and are aware that they should inform supervisors if a machinery breaks down or guards become dislodged.
- ✓ Ensure that emergency stops are easy to access and are visible in case of an emergency.

Chemical Safety:

- ✓ Communicate on hazardous substances workers handle
- ✓ Inform employees on the exposure of chemical substances
- ✓ Make awareness on how to use chemical substances safely
- ✓ Safe storage and disposal of chemical

Working Environment

This pillar concerns the avoidance of stress factors in the work environment, that make work strenuous and thereby may cause negative impacts on health and well being particularly in the longer run. Stress factors reduce attention to work tasks and unavoidably result in lower productivity and quality, and errors that could trigger incidents. Stress factors are both physical (temperature, noise, light, etc.) as well as physo-social (workplace relations, working hours, bullying, harassment, etc.). Stress reduction is a joint responsibility of both employer and employees.

Wellbeing in the workplace has different meanings within and across organizations and countries. This may be influenced by complex cultural and societal beliefs, attitudes, constraints and regulatory and social systems. The International Labour Organization (ILO) found that: "*Workplace wellbeing relates to all aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and work organization. The aim of measures for workplace well-being is to complement Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) measures to make sure workers are safe, healthy, satisfied and engaged at work. Workers' wellbeing is a key factor in determining an organization's long term effectiveness. Many studies show a direct link between productivity levels and the general health and well-being of the workforce*".

The best workplace wellbeing programmes recognize that there are inter-related elements; the individual, the work environment/job, the organization and social engagement/values. Done properly, wellbeing programmes are more than just a few '*healthy life*' initiatives. They are about creating an organizational culture which promotes strong, ethical workplace relationships based on trust and respect; a collaborative and communicative management style; and a culture in which learning and development is encouraged so that people can fulfill their potential, as well as promoting good physical and psychological health, whilst enabling broader social engagement.

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Major aspects that impact the physical working environment are :

Temperature:

- ✓ Ensure effective ventilation
- ✓ Ensure availability of clean drinking water

Ergonomics:

- ✓ Passage routes clearly marked
- ✓ Ensure mechanical lifting wherever possible
- ✓ Ensure work stations are adjustable
- ✓ Ensure ease of work

Noise:

- ✓ Ensure safe noise level
- ✓ Reduce length of exposure
- ✓ Ensure appropriate use of hearing protection

Health and Welfare Facilities

- ✓ Ensure adequate medical care for employees
- ✓ Ensure clean drinking water and clean toilets
- ✓ Ensure availability of first aid kit

OSH Strategy

OSH requires systematic approach and trust and cooperation between employers and employees. World Health Organization (WHO) summed up its findings on good practices for healthy workplaces in the following healthy workplace framework.
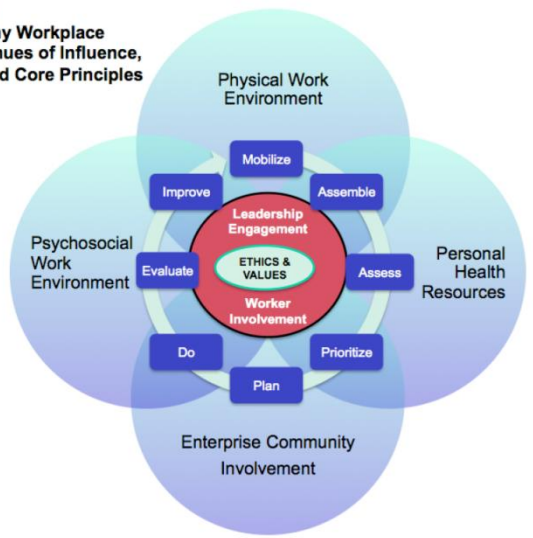
At its core, a healthy workplace starts with ethics and values that safety, health and well being are important and harm to people is to be avoided to the maximum levels possible. The ethics and values are to be recognized as a joint responsibility by both employer and employees. Moreover the framework recognizes that the health and well being is influenced by factors in the workplace, particularly physical and psycho-social work environment, and by factors outside the strict workplace, particularly the personal health and associated behaviors of individuals and the relationships between the enterprise and the community.

This sets the context for management processes, a cycle running from mobilization/commitment, assembling of resources, assessment of workplace, prioritization of health and risk factors, planning of reduction and management

initiatives, their execution and evaluation, feeding into management review to improve overall performance of the management system.

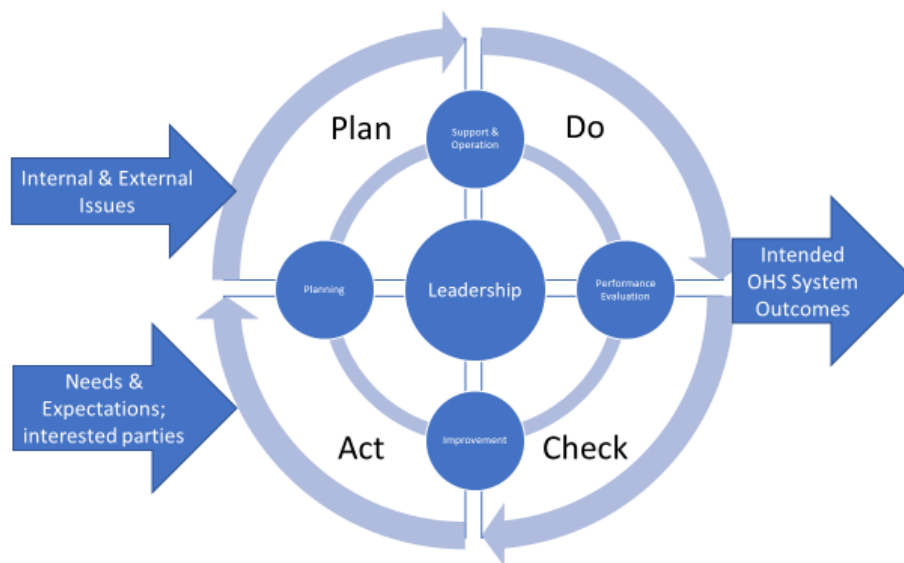*WHO Healthy Workplace Model ([1])*

ISO 45001: Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) management systems

ISO 45001 (2018), the new global management system standard on occupational health and safety puts health - physical, mental and cognitive - at its core, while continuing to drive high safety standards. The standard reflects that occupational ill-health can and should be prevented and that in doing so, it will bring measurable benefits to workers and the organization.

ISO 45001 explicitly requires that health hazards are identified and controlled, including those classed as 'psychosocial' (workload, work hours, bullying etc.), as well as those arising from other hazards such as chemical or biological and physical/ergonomics. Moreover, needs and expectations of interested parties need to be considered, as per below summary diagram.

Adapted from: WHO (2010), *Healthy Workplace Framework: background and supporting literature and practices*, World Health Organization, Geneva: https://www.who.int/occupational_health/healthy_workplace_framework.pdf

Components of ISO 45001 (2018)

ISO 45001 incorporated the principles embedded in the healthy workplace model of the World Health Organization, i.e. that and effective occupational health and safety management system requires:

✓ Leadership commitment
✓ Involvement of workers
✓ Compliance with legal and other requirements
✓ Comprehensive processes focussed on continual improvement
✓ Integration with the overall strategic direction of the business

Overall with its holistic management system's framework, ISO 45001 offers organizations the option to make a bold commitment to the health and safety of its people, whether in a pandemic or a normal situation. The management system allows for systematic follow up to indeed improve efficiency and performance of OHS system, with positive spin offs in terms of employee satisfaction, market and stakeholders relations, and reduced liabilities.

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