

Chapter 9

Occupational Health and Safety in SMEs: Overview as a Part of Management System

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ABSTRACT

Employees of Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) are exposed to higher risks than the employees of larger ones, and SMEs have difficulties in controlling risk. Many countries have noticed the potential of the SMEs, and they judge employment and economic growth to a great extent based on these enterprises. The studies regarding this subject have increased during the last decade, parallel to the political and economic interests in occupational health and safety in SMEs. The objective of this chapter is to reveal general conclusions on effective approaches to prevent occupational diseases and injuries in SMEs and to gain information related to employment, welfare and health facilities, health education, legislation, occupational health, and safety management as a part of integrated management systems and other safety activities. The chapter also aims to facilitate developing an informative perspective about Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems (OHSMS) in SMEs by emphasizing the drivers, benefits, and barriers of SMEs trying to adopt these systems.

INTRODUCTION

OHSMS has been developed as a mean of controlling risks of hazards at workplaces. Such development occurs in many organizations because of the tightening regulations about occupational health and safety and the need for effective and efficient management of health and safety.

Considering the fact that SMEs generate employment to majority of the workforce, they need to be pointed out as an important element

of countries' economical structures. The great majority of businesses in the European Union and elsewhere are smaller businesses (European Union 2006). In the United States, 97% of all firms employed less than 500 employees in 2003 (US Bureau of the Census 2006).

Another example is China, where SMEs are playing more and more important roles in the national economy and the social development of the country. With the significant contribution of SMEs, China has become one of the world's largest

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developing countries. The SMEs have become an important driving force of economic growth. In China, more than half of gross domestic product per capita (GDP) and social sales, more than 70% of the newly added industrial output value, more than 40% of tax and more than 60% of total exports are created by SMEs (Jingdong, & Han, 2012).

SMEs create and provide jobs and have become sources of innovation. They create competition between enterprises and employees. It also has to be noted that employers have responsibilities to ensure the safety of their workers. As long as accidents and injuries occur at work, responsible organizations will try to improve workplace safety. However, the existing legislation are not sufficient to protect millions of employees (Clarke, 2006; Clarke&Robertson, 2008; Seneviratne & Phoon, 2006). Nevertheless McCallum, Schofield and Reeve (2013) indicated that judges in their study did see employers as centrally responsible for failures in workplace safety; however, some judges also struggled with the complex nature of occupational health and safety breaches, which they also thought could be attributed to worker carelessness in some instances. Legislation and regulation are used by governments around the world aim to protect workers against health and safety risks at work. A government can propose new legislation which needs to be passed as law by a legislative body. Enforcement of occupational health and safety legislation is conducted in most countries by special government enforcement agencies. Additionally, there are many agencies which help to implement occupational health and safety standards and regulations, such as social insurance agencies, private insurers, or certifiers of management systems. Only specific agencies have the power to enforce compliance, however. In many European countries the so-called “labour inspectorate” is responsible for occupational health and safety legislation enforcement. In the United Kingdom, it is the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive. In the United States it is the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s responsibility. Even though the agencies’

names differentiate, their duties and instruments are essentially the same (Mischke et. al., 2012).

A small firm was defined as employing between 5 and 19 workers and a medium firm as having between 20 and 199 employees (Kotey & Folker, 2007). Based on this definition, firms with 5-199 employees can be specified as SMEs. European Union Commission has provided a different perspective, stating that the category of SMEs is made up of enterprises which employ less than 250 people and have an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million (Official Journal of the European Union, 2003). Furthermore, in the “Annual report on small and medium-sized enterprises in the EU, 2011/12” SMEs are emphasized as they form the backbone of the EU economy –accounting for 99.8% of non-financial enterprises in 2012, which equates to approximately 20.7 million enterprises. The overwhelming majority (92.2%) are micro-enterprises, defined as those with fewer than ten employees. Small enterprises (employing between 10 and 49 employees) account for 6.5% of SMEs in the EU and 1.1% are medium-sized (50-249 employees). Large businesses, with more than 250 employees, comprise only 0.2% of enterprises in the EU’s nonfinancial sector (Wymenga, Spanikova, Barker, Konings, & Canton, 2012).

SMEs form a major proportion of the companies all around the world. SMEs often lack the facilities, resources and work systems that characterize larger firms (Gardner, Cross, Fonteyn, Carlopio, & Shikdar, 1999). There is lower participation in the prevention of occupational hazards in such organizations, because financial costs and time are often a problem for the companies. The lack of skilled personnel and the lack of access to necessary information are also one of the reasons resulting in poor occupational health and safety practices.

To set guidelines for good health and safety management practices, national frameworks for each country have to be considered. Implementation of health and safety management systems can

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