



PRESS RELEASE

SAFEGUARDING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – A HEALTHIER AND SAFER APPROACH

3rd December 2014

Today, 3rd December 2014, marks the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The annual observance of this day aims to promote and raise awareness on disability issues and to support the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. This day serves also to encourage and promote the positive impact that can be derived by integrating persons with disabilities in the world of work, thus enhancing equality at the place of work.

Equality at the place of work is an issue which OHSa fully supports and embrace within its structure. To this extent, OHSa is currently assisting two persons with learning disabilities by offering them the means and opportunity to integrate in the world of work, something which all employers should do. OHSa acknowledges and recognize the positive impact that such approach leaves both on the persons involved and on society as a whole - this is also a fundamental part of its social corporate responsibility.

Commenting on the relationship between workers with disabilities and health and safety at work, Dr. Mark Gauci, Chief Executive Officer, OHSa said *“Disability must not be viewed as a barrier or an additional cost; it must be viewed as an area which requires specific arrangements with the end result of achieving healthier and safer workplaces. Employers must develop and implement specific programmes through which persons with disabilities can work in a healthier and safer manner. Employers have the duty to take all necessary measures and precautions to protect sensitive and vulnerable groups against dangers that may be present at the place of work. While it may sound discriminatory to categorise workers with disability under sensitive and vulnerable groups, in reality, the intention of the legislator was to impose a specific provision on employers to ensure that disability issues are taken into account when assessing and subsequently implementing preventive and protective measures”*

Occupational health and safety is a multidisciplinary field which requires the collaboration of all duty holders including workers. Workers have the duty to safeguard their own health and safety and that of other persons who can be affected by their actions. Moreover, workers must also co-operate with their employer and their health and safety representatives.

There are various important provisions which must be included in any preventive and protective programme. These include but not limited to risk assessments, policies, training, information, consultation and workers’ participation. Risk assessments must take into account disability factors which may create or increase risks due to one’s disability, hence the importance of assessing the nature and extent of disability, the working environment and working activity. Workers with disabilities must be involved in the process of risk assessment.

The preventive and protective measures to be implemented at the place of work must be based on the principles of prevention as laid down in the OHS Act XXVII of 2000. Control measures must be implemented in a manner that addresses specific issues such as the design of work places, working methods and the choice of work equipment. Adapting the work to the worker is also a matter which can have a great impact on persons with disabilities. Working methods may need to be adjusted to one's needs.

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