



Occupational Health & Safety Authority

Media Release

Code of Practice and Checklist on Safety in Construction Sites launched for the World Day for Safety and Health at Work

25.04.06

- Everyday an average of 5000 persons in the world lose their life at their place of work.
- Every year in the world around 270 million occupational accidents and 160 million work-related diseases take place.

28 April is the World Day for Safety and Health at Work which commemorates those workers who would have sustained an injury or lost their life at their workplace. The theme for this year is *Decent Work – Safe Work – HIV/AIDS*.

‘Although it is a noble gesture to remember the victims of occupational accidents, the best way how we can show solidarity and genuine commitment to these people and to society in general is to seriously take on board the safeguarding of occupational health and safety,’ said Ms Roberta Messina, the Chairperson of the Occupational Health and Safety Authority (OHSA).

‘The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has estimated that occupational accidents cost countries an average of 4% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). If we were to apply this rate to Malta, the figure amounts to around Lm 76 million per year – monies which for sure can be utilised in a more effective way for the benefit of both workers and everyone else,’ Ms Messina stated.

The OHSA deemed this an opportune day to launch two publications on safety and health in the construction sector – one of the sectors where accidents are most prevalent.

'And not only in Malta. It is interesting to note that in the European Union, low standards of health and safety in the construction sector cost more than €75 billion each year,' Ms Messina concluded.

Code of Practice for the Construction Industry

Last year in Malta there were 652 reported accidents in the construction sector – a figure that is equivalent to 16.5 % of all occupational accidents.

'And one cannot exclude the fact that a number of accidents are not reported for a number of reasons. During 2005 as well, half the occupational fatalities also took place on construction sites. Although in the last few years the number of construction projects have in effect increased, this does not in any way mean that we accept these figures as justifiable and lower the health and safety standards,' said Dr Mark Gauci, the Chief Executive Officer of the OHSA.

The OHSA (at that time still a Commission) had issued the first code of practice for the construction industry in 1997. Since that time, a myriad of developments have taken place both in the legal system as well as in the construction trade that were not reflected in that code of practice, that the need for a new updated and comprehensive publication was felt.

The main aim of this Code of Practice is to serve as a practical guide on the technical, administrative and legal framework in the field of health and safety in construction. This is required to obtain improvement, especially in the working environment, to ensure a better level of protection of the health and safety of workers in this sector, and to obtain an improvement in people's attitudes and views towards occupational health and safety in the construction industry.

'This Code of Practice is aimed to be utilised in Court as a guide to determine whether or not negligence is an issue and to also aid stakeholders achieve compliance with their legal obligations in protecting workers' health and safety and third persons that can be affected by the work. One must not forget that the owner of a project (known as the client, for whom the work would be carried out), supervisors appointed by clients, employers, directors, managers and other supervisors all have responsibilities to put into place occupational health and safety control measures,' Dr Gauci added.

'We have seen through experience that although action targeting workers is positive, if it is done in isolation, it is definitely not enough. There is a need for occupational health and safety management systems to be in place at the workplaces to ensure that regulations are complied with and that high

standards of health and safety are safeguarded. This Code of Practice in fact puts a lot of emphasis on this concept,' Dr Gauci explained.

The Code of Practice contains various definitions and obligations pertaining to the different people involved in the construction project. There is also information about the client and how s/he can appoint supervisors for the project as well as what a health and safety file contains, the obligations of architects and designers and those of workers.

Information about the role of the supervisor for both the design and the construction stage is also found in the Code of Practice. There is also information about the general principles of prevention, the health and safety plan and the notification form to be sent to the OHSa, amongst others. Last but not least, there is a series of provisions that are of interest to contractors, sub-contractors and those who are self-employed such as risk assessments, joint responsibilities, training and supervision as well as the requirements of schedule IV of Legal Notice 281 of 2004 pertaining to construction.

'Today we are launching the first part of the Code of Practice and we are inviting all stakeholders and traders or whoever has an interest in the subject to send us their feedback. Once this is done, we plan to translate this Code of Practice into Maltese. Moreover, in the next few weeks, we will be launching the second part of the Code of Practice,' Dr Gauci said.

Checklist

Another publication that was launched today is guidance in the form of a checklist that builders, clients, contractors, sub-contractors and architects amongst others will for sure find useful. The aim of this checklist is to make it easier for those in the construction sector to check which health and safety measures they need to adopt.

This checklist is a graphic guideline about the main hazards found on construction sites. One can easily mark what measures have already been taken and thus easily check what steps s/he still needs to adopt to be on the right track. The guidance provides space for a person to fill in such practical information as the name and details of the contractor, the client and the sub-contractor for easy reference. There are also depicted the most important safety signs together with various other measures for different types of work being carried out such as demolition, excavation, construction or installation of services.

'These two publications will undoubtedly be helpful to all those who in one way or another work in the construction sector. The information one finds in them will help to reduce the number of accidents and fatalities at the workplace, ascertain that the law is observed more and also ameliorate the levels of health and safety in this sector. These publications are being distributed free of charge and thus nobody can say that there is no assistance in this sector. We encourage everyone to give their contribution for the Code of Practice while contacting the OHSa to get a copy of the other booklet, Dr Gauci concluded.

For further information, one can contact the OHSa on tel. 21 247677/8, email on ohsa.communications@gov.mt or visit the OHSa website: www.ohsa.org.mt

Notes for Editors:

1. The commemoration of the World Day for Safety and Health at Work emanates from the Workers Memorial Day started in America and Canada in 1989 to commemorate dead and injured workers annually. Since 2004, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) started observing this day both for its primary aims and to also endorse the concept of sustainable workplaces and work. Further information is available on the website: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/worldday/index.htm>

Media Contacts:

Romina Rieck Zahra, Occupational Health and Safety Authority, email: romina.riekzahra@gov.mt, tel: 21 247 677/8.

Other Information:

Occupational Health and Safety Authority, 17 Edgar Ferro Street, Pieta' MSD 07, email: ohsa@gov.mt, fax: 21 232 909.