



Occupational Health & Safety Authority

## Media Release

### **‘Healthy Workplaces’ OHS Campaign to focus on Risk Assessment**

### **OHS Awards Launched**

13.06.08

- **Every 3.5 minutes, somebody in the EU-27 dies from work-related causes.**
- **Every 4.5 seconds, a worker in the EU-27 is involved in an accident that forces him/her to stay at home for at least three working days.**
- **The number of accidents at work causing three or more days of absence is huge: over 7 million every year.** *(Source: European Agency for Safety and Health at Work)*

With the theme ‘Healthy Workplaces - Good for You. Good for Business’, the European Safety and Health at Work campaign was launched today in Malta as part of a pan-European campaign to raise awareness about the importance of risk assessments at the place of work. The campaign will run over a period of two years, culminating in the organisation of two European Weeks in October of each year, this year being held between 20 and 26 October.

The Hon. John Dalli, Minister for Social Policy said that this initiative intended to increase awareness about the importance of risk assessments in the place of work is part of the government’s strategy to make the work environment a better place for the worker. The Minister stressed that the theme of this initiative ‘Healthy Workplaces

- Good for You. Good for Business', must not only be a campaign slogan but the common mentality of the employer and the employee.

The Minister argued that the safer and the healthier the place of work is, the more productive the business is. The Hon. John Dalli concluded that investing in health and safety measures will in the long run be beneficial for the worker and the employer.

**Dr Mark Gauci**, the Chief Executive Officer of the Occupational Health and Safety Authority said that risk assessment was one of the pillars of systematic occupational health and safety (OHS) management.

'Occupational accidents can be reduced significantly by carrying out a risk assessment and adopting safe systems of work that in the majority of cases are inexpensive to implement. When a risk assessment is not undertaken or is not carried out properly, the appropriate preventive measures are unlikely to be in place', Dr Gauci said.

'Although the latest statistics indicate that there has been a reduction in the number of occupational accidents, these are still too high for comfort. Each accident, far from being just a statistical figure, carries social, economic and financial costs, some of which are not immediately apparent. This encourages ignorance and helps to create a culture of complacency', Dr Gauci added

Many employers mistakenly believe that their insurance will cover all expenses. In reality, many policies do not cover losses such as reduced production, replacement labour and legal fees. Smaller firms usually suffer a higher impact since they are often operating on tight margins. They may not have experienced many accidents or cases of ill health, but when they do these can often have a disproportionate impact on the business and insurance policies may not cover the bill.

One simple way to curb accidents is to carry out a risk assessment. A risk assessment is a careful analysis of what could injure or harm people in a way that the employer can determine whether enough precautions have been taken and what else should be done to improve the situation. Employers are duty-bound by law to carry out such risk assessments, to update them on a regular basis and to present them to occupational health and safety officers during an inspection.

'The OHSA is working in close collaboration with various entities and social partners to ensure that the message gets across as wide an audience as possible. I would like to invite all those who might deal with young people to get involved in this campaign" Dr Gauci concluded.

Amongst the events being organised locally as part of this campaign, the Malta Focal Point of the European Agency within the Occupational Health and Safety Authority will be organising three seminars in the first part of this campaign. The first seminar will target stakeholders to better explain the campaign and form campaign partnerships. One of the other two seminars will target employers and focus on OHS and competitiveness, while the

second one will be aimed at unions and at health and safety representatives and focus on consultation and participation of workers in OHS matters.

### **A European Campaign**

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, in consultation and agreement with the member states deemed it fit to launch this campaign about the need for improvement in risk assessment and its practical implementation following an EU policy review of the European Framework Directive 89/391, and the five 'daughter' directives. The review found that there was general lack of awareness of what is required and how to carry out a risk assessment. Moreover, many considered risk assessment as a one-off' action, with no review and update while the risks were not analysed and evaluated collectively; consequently, separate measures were being set in place with no coordinated approach to the analysis of conditions in the workplace.

It was also established that superficial risk assessments only identified 'obvious and immediate risks' whereas long-term effects were either not considered or were neglected, such as those caused by chemical substances. Moreover psychosocial risks and work organisation were also rarely considered in a risk assessment. On the other hand, the implementation of the measures taken is very often not monitored properly by the employer.

Putting their weight behind the campaign were the Director of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work and the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

Further information about the campaign is available online at <http://hw.osha.europa.eu>

### **OHS Good Practice Awards 2008**

The Occupational Health and Safety Authority (OHSA) in Malta also launched the annual OHS Good Practice Awards scheme and Dr Gauci invited all interested parties to submit their nominations. In line with the European theme, the Awards this year will focus on risk assessments. The closing date is **1 September 2008**. Application forms are available from OHSA.

The awards aim to demonstrate, by example, to all employers and workers the benefits of conducting risk assessments and promoting healthy workplaces to safeguard the occupational health and safety of workers.

The nominations will be adjudicated by a panel of independent judges and the winners will be announced in a ceremony held by the Occupational Health and Safety Authority. The awards will provide those selected with national recognition for their role in improving working conditions in Malta. In addition the winner will then participate at a European level together with the winners from the other EU member states. The award ceremony will be held in Bilbao (Spain).

"We would like all safety and health institutions and organisations, trade unions, companies, managers, employees and safety representatives, amongst others, to organise their own events up until and particularly during the European Week for Safety and Health at Work in October. I also encourage all interested parties to submit their nominations for the OHS Awards," Dr Gauci concluded.

*Further information about the campaign and application forms for the Good Practice Awards can be obtained by phoning 21 247677/8 or sending an email to [ohsa.communications@gov.mt](mailto:ohsa.communications@gov.mt)*