



Occupational Health & Safety Authority

Media Release

World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2005

Cultivating a Preventive Culture

28.04.05

- Each day, an average of 6,000 people die as a result of work-related accidents or diseases, totalling more than 2.2 million work-related deaths a year. Of these, about 350,000 deaths are from workplace accidents and more than 1.7 million are from work-related diseases. In addition, commuting accidents increase the burden with another 158,000 fatal accidents.
- Each year, workers suffer approximately 270 million occupational accidents that lead to absences from work for 3 days or more, and fall victim to some 160 million incidents of work-related disease.
- Approximately 4% of the world's gross domestic product is lost with the cost of injury, death and disease through absence from work, sickness treatment, disability and survivor benefits.

(International Labour Organisation, 2005)

With a focus on such and other statistical data, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is today marking the World Day for Safety and Health at Work with the theme 'A Preventive Safety and Health Culture'. It also particularly aims at highlighting the importance of the social partners in awareness-raising and in preventing work-related accidents and ill-health each year.

"As the adage goes, 'prevention is better than cure'. And this should be the way forward in occupational health and safety (OHS). It is a concept endorsed by all OHS professionals and entities at both national and international level. A preventive culture is not just about behaviour and attitudes but also about training, technical safety and improvements in management systems," Dr Louis Galea, Minister for Education, Youth and Employment said.

This concept has been at the forefront of the Occupational Health and Safety Authority (OHSA) in Malta since its inception. Indeed, the OHSA has been trying to strike a balance between the various functions assigned to it by law.

“The first approach was that of general awareness-raising, promotion and training, and from the feedback received and the coverage in the media, this initial phase has been a success. We have indeed done various campaigns tackling diverse subjects such as dangerous substances and stress at work. We have as well launched a campaign amongst school children to start nurturing the prevention culture from an early age. During this year the OHSA will also be benefiting from EU funding for the continuing educational programme of its officers as well as for the acquisition of monitoring equipment. The OHSA is currently focusing on enforcement and will in the very near future launch administrative fines as an effective and speedy educational deterrent against the breach of OHS legislation. Discussions are taking place with the social partners and constituted bodies about the standard operating procedure,” Dr Mark Gauci, the Chief Executive Officer of OHSA said.

Dr Gauci said that OHSA always believed in consultation and it is currently embarking on an exercise of extending this to the general public. Indeed there are draft regulations on vibrations open for consultation and which are accessible on the OHSA website (www.ohsa.org.mt). All interested parties are invited to send their comments on these regulations to OHSA.

The commemoration of the World Day emanates from the Workers Memorial Day started in America and Canada in 1989 to commemorate dead and injured workers annually on 28 April, a date which the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and Global Union Federations converted into a global event endorsing also the concept of sustainable workplaces and work. The ILO is this year also focusing on two main sectors: construction workers and younger and older workers.

“The OHSA has undertaken a one-year long campaign on construction safety last year, in line with the European Week for Safety and Health at Work, which included various publications, participation in fairs and exhibitions as well as the organisation of seminars and a construction blitz where OHS officers focused on construction sites. This year we will also focus on construction as a high-risk sector and are planning workshops for stakeholders in the sector, construction blitzes and publications which will be issued in the course of the next few months. Moreover, next year the OHSA will also focus on young persons, particularly those who would be entering the world of work for the first time. These campaigns will be carried out parallel to other initiatives and it is imperative that full participation from all stakeholders is achieved,” Dr Gauci concluded.

Minister Galea said that no employment contract should cost the worker his life or impair him in any way, sometimes for the rest of his days. The report ‘*Benchmarking Malta in Europe*’ published by the National Statistics Office last year shows that Malta has the third lowest rate of fatal accidents at the workplace when compared with the other 24 EU Member States.

“Commemorating people who have lost their lives at their place of work is indeed a noble gesture and I would like to give my deepest condolences to their families. It is however not enough to make a plea once a year and omit the practical implementation of measures to prevent such accidents and fatalities throughout the rest of the year. I am appalled whenever I read about how many occupational accidents could be prevented. The criminal justice system also needs to recognise the seriousness of these accidents and the perpetrators should be met with strong penalties,” Minister Galea added.

“The Occupational Health and Safety Authority has been very active and effective and I foresee that its operations will be strengthened in the future to enable it to continue in its role as the main enforcer of OHS legislation. However, there must be a real commitment by all, particularly the social partners, to maximise to the full the efforts and performance of the Authority. I hereby urge all stakeholders to get involved in the consultation procedures that the OHSA is carrying out,” he concluded.

