



Occupational Health & Safety Authority

## Media Release

### World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2008

#### *My Life... My Work.... My Safe Work*

26.04.08

- Each day, an average of 5,000 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)*

The World Day for Safety and Health at Work is held on 28 April and the theme chosen by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is 'My Life, my work, my safe work – managing risks in the work environment'. It particularly aims at highlighting the importance of controlling and reducing risks in workplaces to prevent work-related accidents and ill-health.

"Decent work is a basic and fundamental human right; a prerequisite for this is working in a safe and healthy environment. An annual event that commemorates those who lost their lives at work should not just be a normal date in our calendar when we make our voices heard and seek media attention. It should serve as a point of reflection on what is going wrong and what still needs to be done to minimise this as much as possible. It should, above all, give the impetus to everyone to move from rhetorical lip-service to real and concrete action," John Dalli, Minister for Social Policy said.

A recent study conducted by the World Economic Forum and the International Labour Organisation (ILO/SafeWork) which compared the competitiveness of 31 industrial and developing countries clearly shows that better safety and health standards equal better national productivity.

"The results indicate that a low number of fatal occupational accidents and high competitiveness are directly proportional making the most competitive economies register the lowest number of fatal accidents. Based on this study, Malta, with an average annual fatality index of 4.6, would indicate a lower competitive index than a number of EU member states, demonstrating that there is still room for improvement in this sector," Minister Dalli said.

John Dalli reiterated the importance of concerted action in the field of occupational health and safety, starting from the enterprise level but including the wider participation of all social partners, including the government, employers' and workers' associations.

"As a government, we have always striven for and encouraged social dialogue and participation. Indeed, our electoral motto itself encompassed this. The Occupational Health and Safety Authority (OHSA) has been pivotal in bridging the gap and establishing effective networks on the matter. Indeed, in the near future, the OHSA will have further resources assigned to it to enable it to better fulfil its role in society," Minister Dalli concluded.

There has been a consistent downward trend in occupational accidents throughout the last years, particularly since the establishment of the OHSA and increased awareness and enforcement action. Nevertheless, one of the benchmarks that the OHSA is setting is in effect further reduction in the number of such accidents.

"The OHSA has recently launched a 5-year strategy with a number of progressive aims, including a 25 per cent decrease in reported occupational accidents. Albeit being ambitious, we are committed towards realising this objective at all costs," Dr Mark Gauci, the Chief Executive Officer of OHSA said.

"The strategy entails the continued development of an effective legislative framework with the full participation of the social partners, coupled with a transparent enforcement policy. It also foresees the continued creation of partnerships with all stakeholders to foster a greater prevention culture as well as further action to curb known and emerging risks, amongst others," Dr Gauci continued.

It has been proved in various countries that concrete social dialogue, collective bargaining between employers and unions, enterprise management and commitment coupled with effective legislation and a powerful enforcement authority all contribute towards high safety standards.

"Risking repeating myself to boredom, I cannot but reaffirm the dire need for concerted action. Achievable aims can only be realised if nobody shies away from responsibility," Dr Gauci concluded.

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.

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