



International Commission on Occupational Health

Founded in 1906 as Permanent Commission

World Day for Safety and Health at Work: 28 April 2017

The International Commission on Occupational Health, ICOH, is proud to endorse the call of the International Labour Organization, ILO, to improve the capacity of countries, stakeholders and workplaces to collect and utilize reliable occupational safety and health data.

We would like to highlight the importance of the *World Day for Safety and Health at Work* with the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The day is called also the Workers' Memorial Day in many countries and trade unions. We believe that the ILO theme of this year "Optimize the Collection and Use of Occupational Safety and Health Data" is relevant all over the world, not only for better reporting and recording but for better practices based on concrete evidence.

Today we hear increasingly "fake news". One such non-true news is the lack of reliable data or no data at all on injuries including fatal injuries. We hear frequently that the number of injuries is very low or under-reported. Looking at the ILO's own statistics only a very limited number of world countries report their injury data to ILO even if it may exist in the files. Only data from a few countries is published and freely available. This does not reflect the reality and misleads public and decision makers.

More importantly, occupational and work-related diseases, which cause 10-20 times more deaths, are even more neglected in the reporting and recording processes. And we should not forget short and long-term absences from work, disability, lowered workability, long-latency diseases and disorders. How can you expect work organisations, industries and countries to take correct preventive action without proper evidence of the injuries, diseases and disorders caused by or made worse by work. Often this leads to "out of sight – out of mind" inaction. If we do not see anything, hear anything, say anything we will not do anything.

ICOH is very pleased to identify new methods with ILO, WHO and the scientific community to get a better picture of the dose-response relationship on critical pairs of risk data related to work-related diseases. We are unable to prevent and eliminate major illnesses and disorders at work with single measures. However, in identifying the multitude of individual factors and exposures causing these disorders, and by mapping them systematically in open and transparent registries and databases, prevention becomes possible. For example, we need a global CAREX, cancer exposure register covering the numbers of those exposed to various carcinogens at work.

We have supported measures – and will continue to do so – of ILO, WHO and the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation in mapping occupational risks and their consequences through

the Global Burden of Injury and Disease processes. Such efforts will establish real mass-scale “leading indicators”.

A foreseeable target is also to establish an index in occupational safety and health, in the same way as the human development index by United Nations. The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has 17 goals. Obviously, without a healthy, safe and productive workforce these goals would be very difficult to reach. Also the ILO will discuss the impact of ratification of ILO Conventions in occupational safety and health in the forthcoming International Labour Conference in June 2017. Decent work – one of the Sustainable Development Goals – can be efficiently contributed by the ILO’s own instruments. Ratification rate of the conventions is another indicator of measures taken and planned – and it needs to be enhanced and the processes leading to ratification need to be revitalized.

Economic costs of poor workplace safety and health are not properly measured either. The ILO and the European Union are estimating exactly now the *direct and indirect costs* caused by poor workplace safety and health. The likely results will be in the same order of magnitude as the past ILO estimates, or 4 % of the global gross national product (GDP). If all *intangible costs* are taken into account these estimates are still low. We may apply the value of statistical life (VSL) as in the EU impact assessments: € 4 million. This value is used for deaths caused by work-related cancer – the biggest workplace killer globally. As a result the total costs of poor workplace safety and health, including the intangible ones, will be close to € 9 * 10¹², or € 9 trillion and slightly higher in \$ terms, United States Dollar or USD. This would be about three times more than the ILO estimates covering the direct and indirect costs only.

Data and evidence on safety and health at work can and should be collected and compiled at all levels. Companies, offices, health and education institutions, and other work organisations may provide accurate information, and one can obtain a better picture through different sources. That could be done from reported cases and surveyed sources, work environment and workers’ health surveillance records, through occupational health services, absenteeism records, studies and research reports. Or combining these and analysing big data. All that form the baseline for action towards better health and safety at work, and beyond.

Think, look and do it!

April 28 is a Safe Day for Healthy Work Life!

Jukka Takala, President of ICOH