

Occupational health and safety essay



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Health and safety is mainly about providing a safe and healthy workplace to the employees. The International Labour Organisation stated a definition of Health and Safety in 1950 “ Occupational health should aim at: the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations; the prevention amongst workers of departures from health caused by their working conditions; the protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health; the placing and maintenance of the worker in an occupational environment adapted to his physiological and psychological capabilities; and, to summarize, the adaptation of work to man and of each man to his job”.

Health and safety is done to ensure that risks to employee’s safety and health are precisely being controlled. Health and safety has become an important issue nowadays (Health and Safety Executive, 2008). Bill Callaghan in 2000 stated ‘ that good health and safety is good business’. Sadly, not every organisation understands that. This is an unbearable expense for them and we had seen that the numbers of accidents have increased greatly although the implementation of different laws.

Furthermore, as a secondary option as stated by the HSE in 2008, health and safety at the workplace should also “ protect co-workers, family members, employers, customers, suppliers, nearby communities, and other members of the public who are connected with the workplace environment’. In order to achieve this we have to engross interactions among many focus areas, including “ occupational medicine, industrial hygiene, public health, safety engineering, chemistry and health physics”.

Weskem LLC had written in 2007 that the main issue of Occupational Safety and Health is that accidents are costing a lot to the organisations and therefore laying more importance on the implementation of a good health and safety program. When accidents happen, the employer loses on two grounds; increased medical costs and employee absences (which are being paid as sick leaves). A safe work environment is not a ridiculous expectation from low class employees. From the labourer digging a hole to the office manager to the site manager-all foresee arriving home each evening without having been injured on the job.

Furthermore he added that, accidents do happen, but those can be avoided in many cases. Safety in some organisation (although rare) is given the first place and even minor injuries are unacceptable. A fatality can put pause to a project and initiate a long and complicated investigation that could hold-up a project for months. It will also create a negative publicity. Occupational health and safety also impacts upon the employment bond and outsourcing, and there is a need to guarantee that there is compliance with the regulations in force. There are numerous issues affecting the health and safety of workers, e. g. exposure to physical, biological, chemical, ergonomic hazards.

In his book published in 2002, Charles D. Reese made clear that in the fields of health and safety, there are three E's that prevail. Those are respectively:

- Engineering-entails awareness of safety issues when designing equipment

- Education-train employees in safety procedures and how to safely do their job.
- Enforcement-rules and policies should be firmly imposed.

He further stated that there are six good reasons to prevent accidents, injuries and deaths:

- Destruction of human life is ethically unfair.
- If employers do not take initial safety measures, this entitles them to be decently accountable for those accidents.
- Accidents limit efficiency and productivity.
- Occupational accidents produce far reaching social harm.
- Safety techniques can easily reduce occupational accidents.

There has been a lot of expansion in the legal domains in order to provide a safe and healthy workforce.

In totting up, he added that without exception all industries face health and safety issues which could have adverse effects upon their workforce and workplace. The employers need to recognise that there are hazards prevailing at their workplace and therefore take all the precautions that are necessary. Employers risk a lot when they perceive that safety is no longer a priority or when they divert all the resources made available for the health and safety department elsewhere. Hazard identification, prevention and mitigation are the most important elements in reducing occupational accidents and illness.

In order to make all these accessible, Charles D. Reese proposed that there is a need to put in place an approach which combines training of the workers

and their involvement, ergonomic job design, medical surveillance, competent supervisor and a corporate organisation that promotes safety. The organisation should put safety before production (i. e. at the bottom line). We had seen that nowadays, the noose is tightening, and frequent bad safety practice is now being regarded in the same way as drink-driving and high penalties are being awarded.

The evolution of health and safety

Concern for the protection of worker's health and safety is not new; it started from the early cavemen till now to the modern workers. History has shown that the Egyptians knew the danger from gold and silver fumes. They even had their own first manual of 1st aid. Ramses in 1500 B. C. hired a physician for quarry workers. Hippocrates the father of medicine realised in 400 B. C. that stone crushers were having breathing problems. The Romans even had a goddess of safety and health named, Salus and whose picture is usually found on their coins. As we go through the middle ages, we had witnessed that the working force around the world became more and more conscious about the importance of health and safety, an e. g. in the 1700s the English chimney sweeps and their ability to cause testicular cancer was discovered. During that period also the first unions made their apparitions by trying to improve the conditions of the workers. In the 1400's some physicians made their colleagues aware that there is a great need to avert the diseases of employment in mines (Charles D. Reese, 2001).

' The Hammurabi Codex (a code of law) was carved on a black stone monument on public display in ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia' and that was 1780 BC. The laws were namely:

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‘ If a builder built a house for someone, and does not construct it properly, and the house which he built falls in and kills its owner, then that builder shall be put to death’ [Law 229]

‘ If it kills the son of the owner, the son of that builder shall be put to death’ [Law 230]

‘ If it kills a slave of the owner, then he shall pay for a slave to the owner of the house’ [Law 231]

‘ If it ruins goods, he shall make compensation for all that has been ruined, and inasmuch as he did not construct properly this house which he built and it fell, he shall re-erect the house from his own means’ [Law 232] (Xmo Strata, 2011).

During the first part of the 1900s, compensation law was established and prior to this most employers passed the blame of accidents to their workers using the common laws which stated that:

- The employer was not responsible when one’s injury was caused by negligence of a fellow worker.
- The employer was not responsible if the worker was injured due to his own negligence.
- The employer was not responsible if when taking the job the employee was aware of the risk that it compromised (Xmo Strata, 2011).

On the other hand, Abermed limited stated on the 19th of October 2010 that in the 1900’s some companies became more conscious about the importance of health and safety and did not use the common laws as a

means of putting the faults on the workers. Another issue that they pointed out were that society is now responding to the rising levels of proof as to the associations between disease and certain work activities, by making employers responsible for the individual and social expenses incurred by poor workplace safety and health policies. According to them it occurred by the expansion of ‘ worker’s compensation and occupational health and safety regulatory programs’. Those efforts were done in order to decrease occupational accidents and diseases in organisation. And it was completed in 1970 by President Richard Nixon who signed the Occupational Safety and Health Act which established a nationwide enforcement-oriented health and safety program. This legislation called for the development of increasingly severe standards to be met by all employers.

Those Standards forced changes in engineering design and monitoring instrumentation were developed to assess industrial hazards. For example, air quality 15 years ago was measured by loss of visibility caused by airborne-suspended particulate materials. Now air quality is being evaluated by complicated sampling devices that measure qualitatively and quantitatively the levels of respirable-sized particles entering a workman’s lungs over an eight-hour work shift. Acceptable levels of pollutants have gone from thousands of micrograms of materials per cubic centimeter of air to hundreds of micrograms per cubic meter per day (Abermed limited, 2010).

From a moral and ethical standpoint, employers have the duty to grant a safe and protected atmosphere for their employees. In many contracts we have seen that nowadays they are inserting a clause that states “ that the employee will do their best for the company and that the company itself will

do all the best possible for its workers”. Then from an organisation perspective, we can see that employees are an enormous expense to the organisation. It’s not just about paying salaries but about recruitment and training. All this costs a lot of money. The more the industry is skilled the greater will be the cost to the company. The important aspect is that the employers at all cost tries to retain its best and brightest employee and that implies creating a safe and healthy workplace for them (Abermed limited, 2010).

This is done not only to protect the investment done into the employee, but also to ensure that the employee continues to contribute to the profits by being a productive member of the organisation. In this context, occupational health and safety can be considered as a retention tool. Another issue is that it is an effective public relations tool. Workplace accidents and incidents are not just a loss in terms of loss in lives and productivity, but also bad press. And in the litigious world that we are living in, awful press often makes very big law suits (Abermed limited, 2010).

Definitions and purpose of compliance audit

“ Audits undertaken to confirm whether a firm is following the terms of an agreement, or the rules and regulations applicable to an activity or practice prescribed by an external agency or authority” (Business dictionary).

However, it can further be elaborated into: A safety audit based on regulatory or other compliance. It helps to determine whether the organisation is giving a safe and healthful workplace to his employees. Compliance auditing became increasingly famous in the 20th century.

Paul A. Esposito explained in 2009 that compliance audits can be defined as a comprehensive review of organisation obedience to regulatory guidelines and that there are classically two levels of compliance-type audits. The first one is a department or equipment specific inspection. A more organized compliance evaluation would engage a wall-to-wall check of regulatory conformance. He added that audit is frequently performed in reply to regulatory needs. It is almost impossible to have a workplace free from perilous conditions all of the time, for the reason that conditions and people change every time and the potential for an unsafe condition always exists.

Inspections are usually done on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. Frequency depends on the nature of the control or how often surroundings, equipment or people change, plus legal requirements. A proper wall-to-wall compliance evaluation will classically include three gears: conformance, recordkeeping and training (Paul A. Esposito, 2009).

Physical surveys and inspection of plants are usually wrongly called audits according to Reesee (2001) and Auditing is a basis of information that has become very useful in present business especially with the continuous changes happening in the legal environment and thus the level of compliance should always be monitored. Today's organisations face greater regulatory inspection than ever before due to the propagation of laws and regulations in figure and difficulty as well as increased regulatory supervision and audit activity.

Arter (1998) settled the four universal principles of auditing:

- Audits demonstrate if sufficient controls are in place.

- Auditors must be skilled.
- Audits must be proficient, fact-based and performed professionally
- Audits must result in information that meets auditee desires and allows problems to be solved.

A far more simple definition is that it is designed to spot problems and therefore provide corrective action before there is any litigation. The audit mirrors what an employee could expect if an inspector walked through the door and an effective audit processes, verifies and identifies those fundamentals that build up health and safety (Jorgensen, Ernest B, 1998).

The key value of a safety audit is that it helps shift activities from reactive to proactive. The typical inspection is a reactive one-it identifies things that must be corrected. This means that non-compliance has been detected. On the contrary, a proactive approach strives to keep away the likelihood of litigation and therefore creating a safe and healthy workplace (Jorgensen, Ernest B, 1998).

The contents in the audit depend on the nature of the duties of the organisation. The overall definition remains the same but the different organisations adapt it to their respective works. Ideally, it is conducted annually and should include every part of the organisation. Such duty requires substantial preparation and a team of competent auditors; therefore an annual audit may not be feasible in many situations. Its main purpose is to identify gaps and make recommendations in order to be more efficient and to make compliance activities more effective. An audit is only a snapshot in time; it is not an alternative from ongoing management involvement (Paul

A. Esposito, 2009). We can further add that it provides a process to ensure that compliance continues.

Susan Burch gave a broader definition in 2008: ‘ Compliance audits are based on a compliance risk assessment and are designed to detect unintentional regulatory compliance violations by employees and other company representative’. Companies doing worldwide operations take on extra regulatory challenges, as they have to consider the changing regulatory environments and cultures with different business practices. Because of the elevated risk linked with non compliance, management are under amplified examination, not only from regulators, but also from clients, employees, stockholders and business partners. That’s why almost all the organisation is developing an incorporated approach to implement a regulatory compliance framework. (Susan Burch, 2008)

The standard ISO 19011 stated that auditing has three main importance’s namely:

- It forms part of the PDCA cycle, i. e. the plan, do, check, act cycle.
- It is a basis for self assessment of capabilities to comply to requirements
- It is a basis for 3rd Party Certification.

The use of safety audits have shown to have a positive effect on a company’s loss control initiative. In reality it has been proven that companies who perform safety and health compliance audits have fewer accidents/incidents than those who do not perform audits. Moreover, Charles D. Reese (2002) stated 9 main objectives of compliance audits:

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- Identify the existence of hazards.
- Check compliance company rules and regulations.
- Check compliance with OSHA rules.
- Determine the safety and health conditions of the workplace.
- Determine the safe condition of equipment and machinery.
- Evaluate supervisor safety and health performances.
- Evaluate workers safety and health performance.
- Evaluate progress regarding safety and health issues and progress.
- Determine the effectiveness of new processes or procedural changes.

Moreover, he added that the topics below are the most commonly used one in the conduction of an audit:

- Acids Fire extinguishers
- First aid Alarms
- Fire protection Power tools
- Atmosphere Fumes
- Radiation Barriers
- Gas cylinders Respirators
- Buildings Gases
- Safety devices Chemicals
- Hand tools Signs
- Compressed gas cylinders Horns and signals
- Scaffolds Confined spaces
- Hoses Shapers
- Docks House keeping
- PPE Dusts

- Ladders Storage facilities
- Electrical equipment Lifting
- Ventilation Emergency Procedures
- Lighting Unsafe condition
- Extinguishers Machines/Materials
- Unsafe act Fall protection
- Noise Warning devices

Organisation should not only allow themselves to do the bare minimum but should embark into a culture of probing, challenging, innovation and best practice implementation. The total audit approach is meant to encourage openness, acceptance that auditing is positive and important. An effective audit process measures and evaluate the relationship between task, environment and worker (Bill Glass, 1993).

A safety audit subjects each area of a company's safety activity to a systematic and very critical examination. Every single component is examined to verify its level of compliance. In this way strength and weaknesses are disclosed and areas of vulnerability are highlighted. It is extremely complex and time consuming. However it is a very worthwhile activity. (Charles D. Reese, 2002)

Compliance auditing poses serious dilemma to various organisations in the world according to the State of Queensland, Department of Industrial Relations (2005). Those can be summarised as follows:

- If the regulatory auditors do not find any violation on his regular visit that does mean that the organisation is safe because any employee or visitor can fill a case for non compliance against the organisation.
- If the organisation engages a third party for conducting the audit, the agency can at any point in time report the non compliance to the government and then further action can be taken if the organisation do not remedy to the violation.
- Although a private audit is conducted the government under special cases may the organisation to make the audit available to them.

Furthermore they added that , compliance audit do not guarantee that a workplace is free from violations as on a visit an auditor cannot inspect all the procedures and risks involved at the workplace. The hazards investigated by auditors during a compliance audit are determined by the workplace environment by the side of information obtained from specific workers data, relevant injury data and industry input.

Strength, weakness and appropriate solutions of onsite auditing

Compliance auditing compromise mostly of onsite auditing but those has many strength and weakness. It represents the strongest aspect of an audit. During the onsite visiting, trained and experienced professionals are expected to conduct vigorous evaluation of the site and work process. The onsite auditing is a very complex and intense process for both the auditors and the personnel. It consists mainly of the following:

- Talk with the site manager;
- Site orientation tour;

- Review of the health and safety management systems;
- Records review;
- Interview with personnel;
- Field observation;
- Meeting with site staff;

(Lawrence B. Cahill, 2005)

In support of it, he added that it is always difficult to achieve a perfect audit although the entire possible measures have been put in place in order to conduct it. He goes further by adding that the most common problems encountered are:

- Poor time management;
- Inadequate sampling and verification;
- Poor balance between interviews, record review and interviews;
- disorganized records review;
- Poor interviewing techniques and;
- Poor findings communication.

Walter Willborn (2000) on the other hand, proposed some solutions in order to cater for some of the gaps that have been found by Lawrence. Those are as follows:

- Poor time management;

The auditor should develop its own agenda accordingly and review his progress against the agenda daily make adjustments accordingly.

Developing an agenda well in advance helps the auditor to ensure that all topics are being covered.

- Inadequate sampling and verification;

Before an audit the auditor should define when the field activities are to be completed. Auditors often struggle to determine the appropriate sampling size. On the other hand, he cannot take one as a sample. The auditor can spend much time in document review that he may neglect other areas which are much as important as the other fields. Not all the sampling must be statistically representative but there must be a balance within it. There should be at least three areas of non compliance before the auditor can come to the conclusion that there is a finding. Balance between the different fields is vital. ‘ Eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears’ (Heraclitus, 2007). This is just to say that the auditor must be able to see all the slightest detail before reaching to any conclusion.

- Poor balance between among records review, interviews and observations

All auditors have a tendency to incline towards their activity comfort zone. For some, it’s record review. For others, its field observations and for a few it’s interviews. For this reason the auditor will spend more time in an activity and neglect the others. The auditors must keep track of the time they have to spend on one activity and then move to another area.

Occupational health and safety requirements generate thousands of paper each year and this can be one area that trips the auditor. They should recognise that although document review is very important to demonstrate compliance, it is not the whole story. If too much time is spent on this area it may compromise the efficacy of the audit. There should be a method to review and below are some steps that are easy to use:

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- Obtain all the records needed within the time limit.
- Records review must be your first on-site activity.
- Many auditable needs can be found in the documents.
- Don't get overwhelmed; stay organized.

Start with “ strategic” documents, such as written programs or procedures (many Occupational Safety and Health programs, such as confined space entry, actually require written procedures).

Ask for quiet time as needed. Nobody wants to be watched while they are reading.

While reviewing records, develop a list of requirements so as to verify later through interviews or observations (winter, 2007).

Process for compliance audit

The process can be clearly described through the following points developed by Aldona Cytraus:

- Conduct an opening meeting with the management, stake holders and representatives of the work force to state the different objectives of the audit and introduce also the members of the audit team.
- Follow a small tour of the work premises in order to be become familiar with the working environment.
- Study the laws that will be used as standard.

Develop the audit techniques which include a combination of observation of processes, examination of documents and records, and interview of management, staff members and consumers. This is mainly done to gather

audit evidence so as to make the audit findings more reliable as there will be different views.

All the data obtained must be reviewed by the audit team in order to present the information to the management and thus determine the level of compliance.

Presentation of the report to the management and other members in a closing meeting and also mentions the corrective action that needs to be undertaken.

Give the complete report to the management which includes all the facts and findings and in there clear distinction should be made between statements and observations.

But on the other hand Fargason James Scott from the Institute of Internal Auditors wrote in 1993 that the most important in compliance auditing is the competence of the auditors and that everything depends on that. The auditors must have a broad knowledge of the law in question. People observe the same thing but are able to make different conclusion as all those depends on the judgement on the person and that's why the findings must be repeatedly studied in order to detect any error. He also provided a simple audit process:

- An audit plan should be prepared from the beginning till the end (write the objectives of the audit, methodology and verification methods).
- Document review should be conducted to obtain all the necessary data.

- Physical inspection should be conducted (e. g. observation of workers, observation of processes).
- Conduct interviews with all levels of personnel.
- Once the report is being submitted the evaluation and corrective action should be undertaken.
- He added some conditions so that the audit can be conducted correctly and those are:
 - The audit team must comprise of at least one qualified person which should be the leader.
 - A report should be developed at the end so as to state the findings.
 - The employer should go through the report immediately after its submission in order to correct any deficiencies.
 - The two most up to date reports must be kept for documentation.

Global Perspectives on Health and Safety

Every year, around the world, there are 270 million occupational accidents, 160 million workers suffers from occupational diseases and 2. 2 million occupational deaths. The cost to society is several billion pounds. Britain has the lowest fatal injury rate in the European Union but although those 19. 5 million days were lost due to work related ill health in 1999 against 6. 5 in 1998. Musculoskeletal disorders and particularly back pain are the most frequently reported work related illness (Wilf Altman, 2000).

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE, 2005) places great emphasis on the requirement systems that cover inspection, monitoring and auditing as essential features of the action required by organisation to satisfy their regulatory duties. Such systems are designed to prevent any failures that

lead to accidents, incidents and prosecutions. According to them, Spain has the largest rates of accident in the European countries. The National survey of working conditions conducted in 2001 in Spain stated that 59% of the workers were exposed to hazards at work, 33% were exposed to noise while 32% were exposed to chemical pollutants and about 50% of the workers maintained static postures or perform repetitive movements during a quarter of their working time.

It further stated that 37% of male and 29% of the female workers consider that their work represent a risk to their health. For the men the greater amount of hazards is found in agriculture, construction, transport and communications whereas for women those are mainly found in agriculture, mineral processing and manufacturing industries. Uncomfortable postures and physical effort are the most common occupational risk for both women and men.

Some 86% of male workers interviewed believe that their health is excellent, very good or good. The state of health is worse among older workers, manual workers and women and above all among women in catering. Manual workers have a worse state of health as compared to non manual and women have a worse state of health as compared to men.

Factors of change

Examples of impact

Micro economy

Expansion of small and medium enterprises.

Demographic evolution

Ageing of the working population, increasing female participation rates and better qualified women. Increase in immigration.