

# Construction health and safety overview construction essay



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Health and safety is a very important factor not only in human terms but also at occupational point of view. Health and safety at any workplace helps to reduce or even avoid workers' pain, injury and other sufferings. What is more, it is a way of ensuring that company is successful and sustainable. Any company has certain goals, to achieve it, it is necessary to ensure cost effective work which can be gained through subordinates.

Health and safety (further H&S) of the workers guarantee the Company's 'brand image' and 'brand value'. In this way, the motivation and the commitment of employees to the business is increased, company enables to meet customer expectations. Good image and high interest into workers safety reduce absences and increase the productivity of the workers. In other words, H&S at workplace reduces the costs of accidents and ill-health, as a result, business is successful and makes profit. Otherwise, H&S problems might lead to irreversible consequences. The business deals with disruption, damage of the machinery, insurance costs, claims for damages and loss of confidence in management may lead to collapse or even bankruptcy. For the individual, there are the costs of care, loss of earnings etc. The research shows that investing in safety and health leads to better company performance.

This report concentrates mainly on the Health and safety at the Construction area. The paper presents the major threats that appear in the construction workplace, what steps might be made to improve H&S in the workplace and what systems, in outline, might be implemented. What is more, two more questions should be discussed, such as, effective communication as a stakeholders in the group and the changes of the culture of the workplace to

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one that is H&S positive. The report is based on several books and internet sources.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEMS**

Major threats to H&S in modern workplace (construction).

The statistics about various accidents show that H&S issue is taken into consideration. Companies' are encouraged to use precautions, assess the risks and avoid injuries. The book Essentials of health and safety at work summarizes the major threats at the construction workplace. It is stated that over 200 people are killed at work every year; several hundred thousand more are injured and suffer ill health, however, there are more other risks at workplace.

Slips and trips. Most injuries from slips and trips occur because of poor housekeeping. Many items such as cables, hand tools, lengths pipe or timber etc. left on the ground will trip someone if not deposited in safe place. Spilt substances such as oils and greases will form a slip hazard if not immediately cleaned up. General debris such as brick or block fragments etc can quickly accumulate and form a tripping hazard if not cleaned up as it is created. Trailing cables are another frequent cause of tripping. Mud left on the rungs of the ladder by the previous user will represent a slipping and falling hazard for the next person. Reduced level of natural light, for example during winter afternoons, can easily increase the tripping hazards if adequate access lighting is not provided. Tools, equipment and materials which are visible in full daylight might be hidden in semi darkness. How to avoid all these mentioned hazards? Clear up waste materials as you create

them. Do not leave tools, equipment lying about on the floor. If you are using substances which could possibly spill, ensure that you have a means of clearing up the spillage. If the site is muddy, scrape mud off your boots before climbing ladders or walking anywhere else where it might be danger to others.

Aches and pains such as back problems and stress are the biggest causes. Heavy and repetitive lifting, bending, long working hours, uncomfortable working position may affect back, hands, arms or neck. The stress is very common factor of many health problems. The employee must introduce the workers with the working plan, tools and all dangerous machinery, plan and not make pressure on the workers. Construction area is quite dangerous place and statistics about injuries and accidents do not make the workers job easier or safer, so especially the stress should be avoided. Ensured health and safety manages to avoid smaller injuries, such as already mentioned aches, pains, because the workers are more concentrated and cautioned.

The two mentioned threats at construction area are listed as most common but not necessarily causing death; however, there are more other risks that should be assessed as well because they may cause more serious consequences.

Falls from a height (see Chapter 5). Falls from heights over 2 metres account for over 50% of deaths in the construction industry. The percentage might be lower if the employee uses all possible precautions. The workers should be working on the working platforms, such as, cradles, scaffolding, and mobile elevating work platforms. The accidents happen on the scaffolds because of

incompetent person who erected it, works on scaffold carelessness. For example someone decides to use shorter but inappropriate way to get on the next level of scaffold. Moreover, loading heavy loads in places where it was not designed for it. Moreover, the safe systems should be ensured in order to avoid fall causing injury, for example, instruction, information and training about the equipments at workplace (such as ladders or kick stools). The falls from heights are also related with slips and trips which are caused by the slippery or dirty, muddy surface especially during winter or autumn. As a result, it is necessary to check if the surfaces are clean and stable, assess if the weather conditions are suitable for working in heights, instruct the workers with the working conditions and group work, and provide protection against falls.

One more risk is being stuck by the vehicles. The construction work uses a variety of different heavy machinery, such as lifting, driving, moving which may cause damageable injuries. The employee first of all has to lead the training with all the machinery and provide with protective structures. The machinery needs to be carefully examined, maintained in good repair. The work with lifting machines should be especially careful because underestimated weight or unstable tools may lead to losing lives and serious damages to the business. In addition, the electrical devices can be causing death because the constructions need high voltage electricity, many wires. Unfortunately, electrical devices are dangerous when damaged or misused. There are specific electrical standards that employers must adhere to in order for employees to remain safe on the job. This includes testing electrical equipment to make sure it is running properly and immediately

fixing damaged cords and wires. This will help prevent electrical injuries, such as shocks and electrocutions.

## **Essentials of health and safety at work (Fourth edition, published 2006)**

[http://ezinearticles.com/?The-Dangers-of-Construction-Site-](http://ezinearticles.com/?The-Dangers-of-Construction-Site-Injuries)

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the more common injury risks involved with construction sites.

What practical steps we as a group can make to improve H&S in the workplace and what systems, in outline, we should be thinking of implementing?

Health and safety executive presents 5 main practical steps how to improve H&S in the workplace and implement them. 5 main steps and implementation:

Step 1 - Identify the hazards. It is stated that a hazard is “ anything that may cause harm, such as chemicals, electricity, working from ladders, an open drawer etc; (page 2)”. Firstly it is necessary to do an assessment of the general premises and identify what is likely to cause a problem. This includes looking for hazards that could reasonably be expected to result in significant harm, such as electricity wires, poorly maintained floors or stairs or unstable machinery. It’s also a good idea to consult with members of staff so don’t miss anything when drawing up the list. The labourers might notice open

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wires or dysfunctional machinery. Moreover, it is important to look not only for the visible hazards but check the chemicals of other materials, such as, expire date, manufacturer's instructions, and long-term hazards to health.

Step 2 Decide who might be harmed and how. When all the hazards are identified it is important to name people, in other words, people who work with that equipment and how they might be affected (plumbers, electricians, labourers, passers-by and etc). Pay attention to people who may be particularly more vulnerable like staff with disabilities or lone workers. There can be temporary workers, such as, cleaners, maintenance workers who do not use some kind of tools and how they must be protected. The help can be get from the aside if the employee cooperates with the workers who can identify groups of people and protect them in such a way. If every of them are named, it is easier to protect and avoid injuries.

Step 3 Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions. When dangerous things and groups of people are identified it is necessary to use reasonable precautions. If available, try avoiding the dangerous hazards or less risky option, such as, newer modern equipments or less poisonous chemicals. If the identified risk cannot be removed, then measures need to be taken to make harm unlikely. The first aid must be provided, as well as special protective clothing – goggles, gloves, footwear and etc.

Step 4 Record findings and implement them. The steps that have been taken should be done in written form as risk assessment form which is like an alibi to the inspectors about the staff, precautions and general order of the workplace. The recordings are not very useful for small companies of several

people, however, after it grows, the notes might be effective to control the work and hazards. Moreover, remarks help to control the work, organise the trainings, inform about expiring dates of certain chemicals, cleanings of workplace or even renewal of substances and tools.

Step 5 Review the assessment and update if necessary. As it was mentioned before, the recordings are useful for accurate work, safe workers and successful business. However, it is always necessary to update it because of the labourers change, company's growth, new tools or the change of the workplace. It is advised to check the risk assessment at certain intervals; it depends from the employee but can be made seasonally or annually. Otherwise, it might be too late to take any precautions to save lives or injuries.

How we can effectively communicate this to the stakeholders in the group?

Kotze, Verster and Berry talk about the effective communication in the construction area in their article "Construction Industry Standardization and Effective Communication". Effective communication means that the labourers perform their jobs correspondently; the staff and workers understand each other, the business is successful and work goes as planned without accidents and injuries. The authors state that effective communication should start from the standardization of the documents because it will be easier to administrate the projects. The standardization process means simpler dealing with documents, trainings, communication planning, because every new project, new building means the beginning of the same processes.

First of all, the plan should be stated – who, when (schedule), what, how (e-mail, telephone, fax), feedback, filing. Then there is formal and informal communication. In the formal communication, people are on the same level of hierarchy, provide information, strategies. While informal communication means that people can share any information (both managerial and non-managerial).

The main two effective communication instruments are internal and external communication.

Internal communication is classified into:

oral communication (talks, interviews, conversations, both face to face and over the telephone);

Written communication (letters, reports, seminars);

Non-verbal communication (gestures, appearance or attitudes);

Electronic communication (electronic mail (e-mail) and fax facilities).

External communication – members of a project communicate with customers, shareholders, the media, the government, labour unions, the community and members of the general public, on a daily basis.

(<http://www.cib2007.com/papers/CIDB2008%20Final%20paper%20No29.pdf>)

How we, as a group, can change the culture of the workplace to one that is H&S positive?

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<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/who/cr/workplace>

[http://www.healthandsafetytips.co.uk/Downloads/Andy\\_Brazier/Promoting%20a%20positive%20culture.pdf](http://www.healthandsafetytips.co.uk/Downloads/Andy_Brazier/Promoting%20a%20positive%20culture.pdf)

<http://www.ewi.org.uk/files/news/What%20is%20a%20safety%20culture%20and%20how%20do%20we%20develop%20one%20-%20David%20Asker%20Brown.pdf>

## SUMMARY

Health and safety is very important factors both in workplace and any business because it ensures effective job, relations between employers and its workers.

The analysis was made on 4 different problems concerning health and safety in modern workplace.

The first analysis part deals with major threats identified in the construction workplace. The major threats are slips and trips which happen because of slippery untidy surface, of split oils, cables, mud. Moreover, most common are aches, pains and stress because labourers work under difficult job conditions, have to lift bricks, boards and bags of sand. Workers suffer back, hand and leg pain, as well as, they are under the stress. Another threat causing death is falling from heights that usually happen because of careless or slippery or unstable scaffolding. Finally, labourers sometimes got stuck under the vehicles because they lack training or the transportation is technically in good condition.

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