Every day people wake up to go to work. Some people go to work because of their passion. Some people go to work for their livelihood. Some people go to work to assist in the maintenance of their families. Whatever the motivation for awaking and heading to work, most of us spend the better part of our lives at work. For a large proportion of us, that workplace is where we spend most of the hours of the day.

That workplace could be the garden, driving a passenger bus, spray painting a vehicle in a garage or teaching pupils at a school. The type of job you have will determine what kind of injury risks or health issues you are exposed to. Nonetheless, we are all at risk.

To protect workers from these potential health and safety risks, there is a field dedicated to that cause. Whenever you visit a workplace and you realize a culture and consciousness of health and safety, it is the result of a mammoth effort of those working in the field of occupational health and safety.

**What is occupational health and safety?**

According to the WHO, “occupational health deals with all aspects of health and safety in the workplace and has a strong focus on primary prevention of hazards.” Moreover, occupational health and safety is the field of public health that recommends and applies strategies and regulations to prevent them.

**Why is it essential to discuss?**

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in the workplace is a major problem faced all around the world. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), approximately 600,000 lives would be saved every year if safety practices were followed. According to their estimates, on a global scale, there is roughly 250 million accidents annually which cause absence from work, the equivalent of 685,000 accidents every day, 475 every minute, and 8 every second. In addition, there are 160 million occupational diseases, and over one million work related deaths each year.

Are there policies to guide the implementation of policies and strategies on occupational, health and safety?

The ILO has developed a number of standards aimed at governments, employers and workers to establish sound prevention, reporting and inspection practices for safety and health at work. Along with the WHO, International Commission on Occupational Health, and the United Nations, they have encouraged countries to facilitate occupational health services for all working people irrespective of type of employment. In Dominica, there is an advisory committee on Safety and Health which was established under the Employment Safety Act in 1997.

**Goals of OSH:**

- Lowering the numbers of accidents and diseases
- To minimize the costs of accidents and diseases
- Being more pro-active than re-active in OSH policy
- To decrease the number of incidents that hinder production
- To lower the amount of employers with sick leave or disabilities related to occupational safety and health

**What is the process to keep in mind in developing an OSH management system at my workplace?**

In every organization, the employer should equip employees with safety related information and training to ensure that they understand the risks associated with their respective jobs and the significance of the safety measures taken. However, health and safety in the workplace is a shared responsibility, and workers need to apply the safety measures put in place. Regardless of the size of the company, the employer has to:

- Make an OSH policy
- Identify the risks
- Make a plan of action
- Evaluate the plan of action
- Adopt the OSH policy
Whether you work in a spray paint shop, in the garden, on a construction site, in the landfill or in an office sitting at a computer all day, there are potential hazards for personal injury. We all want to feel safe, and it would not be surprising if our work morale decreases if the working environment is prone to safety and health hazards. Regardless of our field, we recommend the appropriate workplace policies and safety measures be adhered to. In high hazard industries such as construction, agriculture, health, this could include wearing protective apparel, wearing appropriate footwear, well-fitted helmets, full face respirators and protective eyewear. For those of us with jobs that require extended use of computers, and device screens, that includes prescription or non-prescription glasses, and special screens. Find out more about OHS policies at your workplace. Until next issue, remember, “Your health is your wealth, go the extra mile to preserve it.”

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