

## OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY POLICY AND HEALTH IN NIGERIAN INDUSTRIES

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### Abstract

This paper aimed at assessing the problem of hazards posed by changes in technological advancement in our industries. The paper discussed occupational accidents and diseases in the industries, safety and importance of safety policy in industries. Although factory inspection to ensure compliance with safety regulations is not effective by the ministry of labour, each factory must have its own safety policy and endeavour to implement it, for the mutual benefit of the organization and workers. Implementation could be done through a safety committee in conjunction with the personnel management department.

**Key words:** Occupational Health, Safety, safety policy.

### Introduction

Safety at work place is an essential ingredient for improving human performance. The Industrial Training Fund (ITF, 2013) stated that the problem of hazards posed by changes in technological advancement in our industries call for radical approach to industrial health and safety. Also, according to the ITF, the need to train and re-train supervisors and all workers on the techniques of promoting and encouraging safe habits and attitudes among the workforce is very crucial.

Today, modern industries rely on the use of machines driven by powerful technology with emphasis on mass production. However, the moving parts of machines poor installations at the plant, lack of safety policies in the industries or ineffective enforcement of the policies are some of the causes of accidents and diseases which are major problems in Nigerian industries. Working hours in unphysiological postures is known to cause fatigue, back ache, diseases of joints and muscles may impair workers general health and efficiency. The Nigerian Social Insurance Trust (NSITF)

cited by Ahamdu-suka (2012), reported that two million Nigerian workers lose their lives due to occupational accidents every year.

Since work-related deaths and serious injury occur in almost all sectors of industry and commerce, it is therefore appropriate to ask: just how safe are workers in our industries in Nigeria? What are the situations that threaten workers health and lives? Despite laws on occupational health and safety, injury and death at work still constitute a major problem (Awake, 2002). Obviously, safety in the workplace cannot simply be legislated. Employers and employees must take a measure of responsibility for their own safety and that of others. It is therefore important to continually equip and update employees with general information regarding the recognition, evaluation and control of occupational health problems in their environment through workshops and periodic trainings. It is regarded as a workers' right in all countries to be well informed, educated, and trained in safety and health at work (Van Dijk et al, 2015). Generally, in ensuring that personnel effectively contribute to the achievement of

organizational goals, the personnel department must be proactive in pursuing programmes and policies that promote safety and health in the organization. This is a good way in establishing a safety-conscious work environment; this can be achieved with the support of the entire management team of the organization. Werther and Davis (1985) stressed that the success of a personnel department's programme depends heavily on top management's support and commitment to employee safety and health. Although there are legal provisions and labour-management arrangements for occupational health and compensation for accidents, the best approach to employee health and safety is prevention rather than treatment (Fajana, 2002). Also according to him employees must be involved in the planning and implementation of the safety programme, through a safety committee. The committee would conduct regular safety inspection and collect relevant information for its regular meetings. Puplampu and Quartey cited by Mrema et al, (2015) observed that improving occupational health and safety services is one of the key interventions in pursuance of improved health and safety outcomes for the populations in African region.

### **Occupational accidents and diseases in the industries**

Occupational health is the promotive health care of men when working on machines or in projects and creating awareness about importance of health and techniques to remain healthy (Sharma and Kumar, 2013). It aims at identifying occupational diseases at an early preventive stage. Industrial Hygiene aims at identifying, evaluating and control of hazards at work environment. Alakija (2000) reported that years ago the health of workers in the factories and mines were considered and the term industrial

health or industrial hygiene was used. In recent times, health of workers in other occupations e.g. commercial, house, agriculture etc were included and hence occupational health. It is important to understand the hazards involved in the work environment, take preventive measures and also to prepare for first-aid measures to handle emergencies. Also, Sharma and Kumar (2013) posit that the main concern of occupational and work related diseases is by improving working conditions and environment. Special attention needs to be given to particular hazardous sectors and activities in which occupational health problems are either predominantly wide-spread or severe.

According to Bdliya cited by Fanimu and Olayinka (2009), occupational injuries could result from over exertion, slipping, tripping, poor ventilation, and wrong applications of operational procedure, poor visuals, displays on machines or vehicles and many others. Back injuries and injuries to the hands and fingers predominate. Also, other associated injuries are injuries of musculoskeletal system which may produce abdominal herniation, circulatory and respiratory disorders etc. Bdliya maintain that a safe and healthier working environment should result in decrease in lost of wages, absenteeism, reduced insurance costs, lower medical expenses and higher productivity. Fanimu and Olayinka (2009) declared that "specifically the issue of safety in work places is yet to get due attention, unlike in the developed world, where labour laws are tilted towards protecting workers and are enforced. In Nigeria existing laws to protect workers are hardly enforced which tend to favour more the employer, to the extent that companies owned by Asians in the private sector has turned night mares to workers". Fanimu and Olayinka (2009) also reported that a whole factory could house between

400 and 600 workers in a shift with only one or two exits; some with no single fire extinguisher or expired one which are of no use in case of fire disaster, or the humiliation and assault on womanhood through the installation of closed circuit television cameras in ladies cloak room, while the managers relish their nudity via television monitors in their offices. In the face of all these, the harmless worker has no where to turn for redress. It is important to

note that the way to ensure that the workers give their best is to guarantee their safety at work. Not only that, workers health and safety must be assured in the work place, but that the work environment must be made conducive enough for maximum concentration and without inhibition. Alakija (2000) presented methods available for personal protection against industrial hazards; injury or accidents shown on Table 1 below:

**Table 1 Methods for personal protection**

Area of the body	Methods used/available for protection
1. Head	1. a) Safety hat or helmet (against penetrating injury). b) Cap (against getting hair caught in machines or contaminating pharmaceutical products).
2. Eyes/Face	2. a) goggles and filter type glass (against radiation). b) protective face shield (against flying objects of flash of particles c) Hood (for protecting whole head and fact).
3. Hands/Arms	3. a) Mittens or gloves to protect against chemicals ionizing radiation, cut by glass.
4. Foot/leg	4. Plastic or leader boots with puncture proof sole to protect against nail and sharp objects.
5. Ear	5. Ear muffs or ear plugs (to protect against excessive noise).
6. Respiration tract	6. Face mask, breathing apparatus, respirators

Adapted from Alakijo (2000).

### Safety in the Industries

The industrial sector today is placed in a highly complicated environment which is getting more complicated as man is becoming more ingenious. However, the key to preventing harm to industrial workers and the environment is to establish a good occupational safety and health and environmental programme. Mkpandiok (2006) posit that every organization and institution should place premium on health and safety in the working environment. What then is safety? To Jain and Roa (2008), safety is freedom from harm or danger of harm. The word safety also refers to the precautions people take to prevent

accident, harm, danger, damage, loss of air/water/environmental pollution (Jain and Rao 2008; Sharma and Kumar 2013). Safety also deals with improvement in working conditions for better health. Safety is important to every one and at every stage of activities and at all times safety first. Management is responsible to provide safe working conditions and individuals' safety. A lapse on the part of management and individuals may result in an accident or disease. Despite the importance of safety in industries, very often management of these organizations seems to under-estimate its importance.

### Importance of Safety Policy in Industries

Sharma and Kumar (2013) argued that safety policy should be part of a company's management policy. A company must have a written safety policy and implement it. Policy refers to the principles and directive for course of action to be adopted and followed by the company. Sharma and Kumar (2013) assert that safety, health and environment (SHE) policy should have the following features;

1. Organizations SHE (also known as Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) policy is a public statement declaring top managements commitment and intent to manage its SHE responsibilities. In publishing policy the organization is sending a clear message that it has a vision for SHE management within the whole organization.
2. It should spell out long range objective of the company.
3. The policy should indicate the scope for decisions and description at lower management levels.
4. The policy should be relevant to the organizations overall vision and objectives
5. It should be dynamic and set the frame work for review and continual improvement, especially in decision making.
6. It should set out a programme of action for the whole organization, ensuring accountability and linking SHE to the overall organizational values objectives and processes.
7. The policy is implemented through planning.

Safety management is an essential and mandatory function of industrial management. The question then to ask is do industries in the country have written safety policies? Does the ministry of labour tasked

with the responsibility of supervising and enforcing safety regulations in the factories performing its duty effectively? Fanimu and Olavinka (2009) argued that as at the year 2008 factory inspection officers in the federal ministry of labour were not up to 20 and who equally contend with lack of operational equipment to function. Even if all 20 factory inspection officers were deployed in Lagos alone, it will not be adequate to cover the state.

Furthermore, Fanimu and Olayinka (2009) pointed out that section 35 (1) of the factories Act states that "In every factory, there shall be correctly installed, in appropriate places, effective means for detecting fire and such means shall be provided and maintained so as to be readily accessible, in case of an unusual device, for alerting occupants their in the occurrence of a fire and for extinguishing same, which means shall be adequate, suitable and approved by the directors of factories having regard to the circumstances of each factory". Subsection 3 of the Act further states that "Every owner or occupier of a factory shall ensure that persons employed in the factory are adequately trained to enable them operate the extinguishing apparatus provided in the factory". Whether these laws are observed or not, coupled with inadequate enforcement by the ministry of labour are some of the reasons for the many accidents and injuries in our industries today.

### Recommendations

Even though there may be shortage and inadequate factory inspection manpower in the ministry of labor to enforce safety regulations at the factories, each factory must have its own safety policy and make deliberate efforts to implement the policy for the benefit of both the employer and employee with little or no supervision from the ministry of labour. Implementation of a

safety policy could be done through a safety committee in conjunction with the personnel management department to ensure that employees are periodically equip with the techniques of job hazard analysis, to be able to identify and report potential hazards to supervisory safety officers or management, since employees share ownership in their safety and health programmes.

Alakija (2000) stated that the functions of a works safety committee of an industrial establishment include the following:

1. Inspection of plants and machines to make sure there are no defects and if defects are found to take immediate action to correct them.
2. Organization of continuing health education, especially, on safety problems of workers through lectures, seminars and symposium.
3. Making sure that new machines conform to required standard.
4. Production of safety leaflets from time to time to remind works of possible dangers and precautions.
5. Investigation of all reported accidents and making appropriate recommendations for prevention of future occurrence.

The trade union must also make sure that management takes interest in the welfare of the workers. The union must ensure that staff have job satisfaction e.g. staff rotation, shift etc, so that repetitive job does not lead to frustration.

## **Conclusion**

To ensure that workers give their best is to guarantee their safety at work. Although there are law's on occupational health and safety death and injury at work is still a major problem. There is also inadequate factory inspection by the ministry of labour which must be addressed. However each factory must put in place a safety policy and implement it, that way the factories will show that they have placed high premium on health and safety in the working environment.

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