

Occupational Health & Safety 2022





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Introduction

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Workplace safety

For more than 100 years, the public perception of workplace safety and the respective roles and responsibilities of employers, employees and the government have shifted dramatically. It often seems that changes to workplace safety have been driven by significant workplace accidents or tragic events involving large losses of workers' lives. Improvements in protections in workplace safety are often the result of these incidents. And now, as the world begins its recovery from the unprecedented covid-19 pandemic, we may be in the beginning stages of further developments in the area of workplace safety. The aim of this publication is to examine the nature of workplace safety in countries across the world, spanning Asia, Europe and North America, to provide guidance to practitioners in understanding both the common elements and differences between workplace safety systems in this increasingly important area for employers everywhere. Ultimately, no matter the location or jurisdiction, one of the most important assets (if not the most important asset) of employers are their employees.

One hundred and ten years ago, at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in Greenwich Village, New York, management kept the doors to the stairwells and exits from the factory locked during the working day to prevent workers from taking unauthorised breaks and to reduce the risk of worker theft. On 25 March 1911, this decision tragically cost the lives of 146 employees who died after being unable to escape a fire that engulfed the facility. The horrors of that day are widely considered to be a turning point in the public perception of worker safety in the United States, leading directly to reforms to the Labor Code in the state of New York.

Across the world, deadly workplace disasters like that of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory resonate in the public mind long after they occur, leading to a communal sense of loss and shared questions about whether any measures could have been taken to prevent the loss of life. Worldwide, mining disasters have devastated local communities in particular, with the worst mining disaster in history claiming over 1,500 lives in 1942 after a gas and coal explosion destroyed the Honkeiko colliery in Benxi, Liaoning province, China. Accidents causing explosions have a particularly devastating impact. The deadliest industrial disaster in Canada happened on 6 December 1917 when French cargo ship SS Mont-Blanc, loaded with wartime explosives, collided with a Norwegian vessel in Halifax Harbour, causing a massive explosion killing and injuring thousands of people. On 4 October 1918, the TA Gillespie Shell Loading Plant in Sayreville, New Jersey exploded, setting off a series of detonations throughout central New Jersey, leaving an estimated 100 dead, several hundred injured and hundreds of buildings destroyed. Shockwaves were felt as far away as Newark and New York City. These events are not limited to the distant past; the worst industrial disaster in history occurred almost 40 years ago when, in 1984, a leak from a pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, released toxic gas exposing nearby communities to deadly chemical exposure and killing thousands. More recently, on 23 March 2005, a series of explosions occurred at the BP Texas City refinery during the restarting of a hydrocarbon isomerisation unit. Fifteen workers were killed and 180 others were injured.

In 1950, the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization adopted a common definition of occupational health:

- the maintenance and promotion of workers' health and capacity;
- the improvement of the working environment to become conducive to health and safety;
- the development of work organisations and cultures to support health and safety;
- a positive social climate; and
- smooth operation.

In the 20th century, many industrialised countries initiated and implemented national workplace safety regimes including processes to issue standards and policy guidelines to address workplace hazards and to improve workplace health and safety. This book will provide an overview of these various workplace health and safety systems in five countries.

One year ago, the covid-19 pandemic brought the world to a standstill. The protection of worker health and safety took centre stage globally as workers in healthcare, food service, retail, communications, transportation and other essential businesses served their communities and reported to their jobs at a time of crisis. Governments struggled to communicate rapidly changing guidelines and conditions in the early stages of the pandemic, especially when little was known about the transmission of the virus, but many organisations rose to the challenge to implement comprehensive and innovative policies to reduce the risk of virus exposure, including social distancing, masking, rotating shifts, improvements to ventilation, reducing in-person meetings and other contacts and transitioning positions to work remotely. This became a herculean task due to navigating the regulations and requirements across local, regional, national and international standards. Multinational corporations faced particular turmoil and uncertainty. In the same month, an organisation could witness some of their locations shut completely, others were able to remain open with restrictions, while some could open completely with no precautions in place, all due to the varied responses by different governmental and regulatory authorities.

The toll left by the covid-19 pandemic is not yet fully known, but recent global analysis suggests that at least 17,000 healthcare workers across the world died from coronavirus over the past year. In years to come, more data is expected to emerge showing the pandemic's ultimate toll across all sectors of global society. In addition to work-related covid-19 virus exposure, which sometimes led to severe injury or death, the pandemic damaged workplace morale, productivity, turnover and organisational reputation, causing many enterprises across the world, particularly small businesses, to permanently close.

The covid-19 pandemic demonstrated far more than ever that in today's world, workplace health and safety challenges transcend international borders, and organisations must remain vigilant and carefully review and implement safety requirements across jurisdictions. Workplace health and safety is a key factor in the prosperity of a business, and this publication aims to provide the tools for organisations to

navigate the many complex issues involved in implementing robust and compliant safety structures. This publication provides an introduction to the workplace health and safety regime in five countries, providing an overview for organisations to review and compare standards across jurisdictions. Each chapter will cover the enforcement framework in place, including the various laws, regulations and other requirements that organisations must follow. The different processes by which each country develops workplace health and safety requirements for all stakeholders to follow will be explored, ranging from regulations, statutes, guidance and otherwise. Each chapter also features country-specific information on issues that employers face on a daily basis, including developing a compliance strategy, workforce training, appropriate safety equipment provision, ensuring safe work-task

performance, accident reporting and reducing injury and illness. These types of health and safety policies offer wide-ranging protections that not only keep employees safe but also allow businesses to function optimally, even during challenging times and conditions. Proactive policies that identify and address workplace hazards before they cause injury or illness are not only required across many jurisdictions, but also provide value in increasing trust between employers and employees, improving safety, enhancing communication and leading to overall improvements in operations. As the world recovers from the covid-19 pandemic and attention turns to future global challenges, the successful implementation of workplace health and safety policies should continue to remain a top priority for employers, employees, other stakeholders and governments worldwide.



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