

Construction OS&H

Workers' perspectives

Organising for a Healthy and Safe Workplace Part 1



Reminder of the aims

1. Identify the main health and safety problems in our workplaces
2. Develop a Trade Union approach to occupational safety and health
3. Investigate hazards at work
4. Build workers' involvement, awareness, and support on occupational safety and health
5. Develop Trade Union organisation to ensure that employers eliminate or control risks
6. Develop confidence, knowledge and skills

Which will:

- Lead to practical action in the workplace
- Improve health and safety conditions for workers

Getting organised as a Union

We have given some initial thought to how we can tackle priority risks, and we have begun to look at the Trade Union approach to health and safety.

If we want to achieve successes and improve health and safety standards, we must be effectively organised as a Trade Union.

This section is all about getting organised.

Organising in the workplace

AIMS:

Share experience of Trade Union organisation in the workplace

Provide ideas for improvement

TASK:

In your small workplace group discuss and provide a summary report of:

- The number of people working at your workplace, and the percentage in the Union
- How the Union keeps workers and Union members informed and involved on OS&H
- Do Trade Union representatives have a special responsibility for health and safety?
- The way Union representatives co-ordinate their approach to health and safety matters
- Is your employer organised for health and safety and preventing injuries/ill-health?
- How do you think you can convince more workers to join the Union?

Elect a spokesperson to report back.

Key factors for good Union organisation for OS&H (1)

Getting workers' and Union members' support

Without the support of workers and the Trade Union, Union reps can become isolated, and it is difficult to get things done.

Employers are more likely to act if they know that workers are well informed, active and fully involved in Union action.

Union health and safety representatives

Trade Union reps need to have a clear role in dealing with occupational health and safety.

They may be an existing rep who adds health and safety to their duties, or a rep specifically elected to deal with health and safety issues.

Key factors for good Union organisation for OS&H (2)

Support from the Union

Senior Union reps and full time Union officials are vital to the strength of local Union workplace representatives.

All parties must keep each other fully informed.

It is essential that the employer knows that the local representative has the full support of her or his Union.

Key factors for good Union organisation for OS&H (3)

The response from management

Some employers are well organised for safety and health. However, the majority are not.

A strong Union organisation can ensure that the employer will act on health and safety even if they are reluctant.

Special safety procedures; safety policies, grievance procedures; Collective Bargaining Agreements which include occupational health and safety; and joint safety committees all help to get things done.

Building Support with Workers & Union Members

AIMS:

- Consider the ways we involve workers and Union members
- Share new ideas for getting support

TASK:

In your small group:

- List the ways that you currently consult, involve and inform workers and Union members, on occupational health and safety
- Identify ways you could improve communications.

Elect a spokesperson to report back.

Some of the things you can do

- Involve workers and Union members in identifying risks through your workplace inspections
- Ask workers about health effects and risks that they think are important
- Decide on priorities and strategies in consultation with workers and Union members
- Take the time to talk to workers and Union members, particularly if they are not convinced about the Trade Union approach to health and safety
- Hold regular meetings with workers and Union members to keep them informed
- Make sure that workers and Union members know what you have done about health and safety problems, and what the employer's response is
- Always report back after meetings, and decide on the next steps with workers and Union members

The role of the Union rep on safety and health

AIMS:

- Share experiences of dealing with safety and health
- Identify the role of the Union rep on safety and health

TASK

In your small group, discuss:

- Whether you have specific Union reps for health and safety, or do existing Union reps take on this responsibility as well as their other duties?
- What role you and other Union representatives play in the workplace on occupational health and safety matters
- Draw up a list of the most important functions of the safety representative

Elect a spokesperson to report back

Job of Union OS&H Representatives includes ...

- Talking to workers and Union members, and taking up their complaints with management
- Involving, informing, and consulting workers and Union members on their priorities, and agreeing strategies for tackling risks
- Systematically inspecting the workplace on a regular basis
- Investigating accidents, ill-health and near misses
- Consulting with management
- Monitoring the employer's performance on health and safety
- Making representations, and negotiating with the employer to ensure the safety and health of workers
- Talking to Government health and safety inspectors
- Participating in joint management-Union safety committees in the workplace

Facilities for Union OS&H Representatives

Some of the facilities that we could negotiate for include:

- Manufacturer's and supplier's information
- Secure filing cabinets for storing correspondence, inspection records, and confidential information
- Access to internal and external telephones
- A room and desk at the workplace
- A camera
- Access to a photocopier
- Time off with pay to carry out the agreed functions
- Time off with pay for training

Facilities for the OS&H rep

AIMS:

Identify facilities needed by the Safety Rep

Draw up an action plan to improve our facilities

TASK:

In your small group:

Discuss the facilities that you have in the workplace, to help you to do your job as a safety representative, and the extra facilities that you need. This should include facilities from your employer and your Union.

List the facilities you have

List the facilities you need

Prepare a short action plan of how you intend to obtain better facilities. Include the arguments that you would use in discussions with your employer

Elect a spokesperson to report back using a chart.