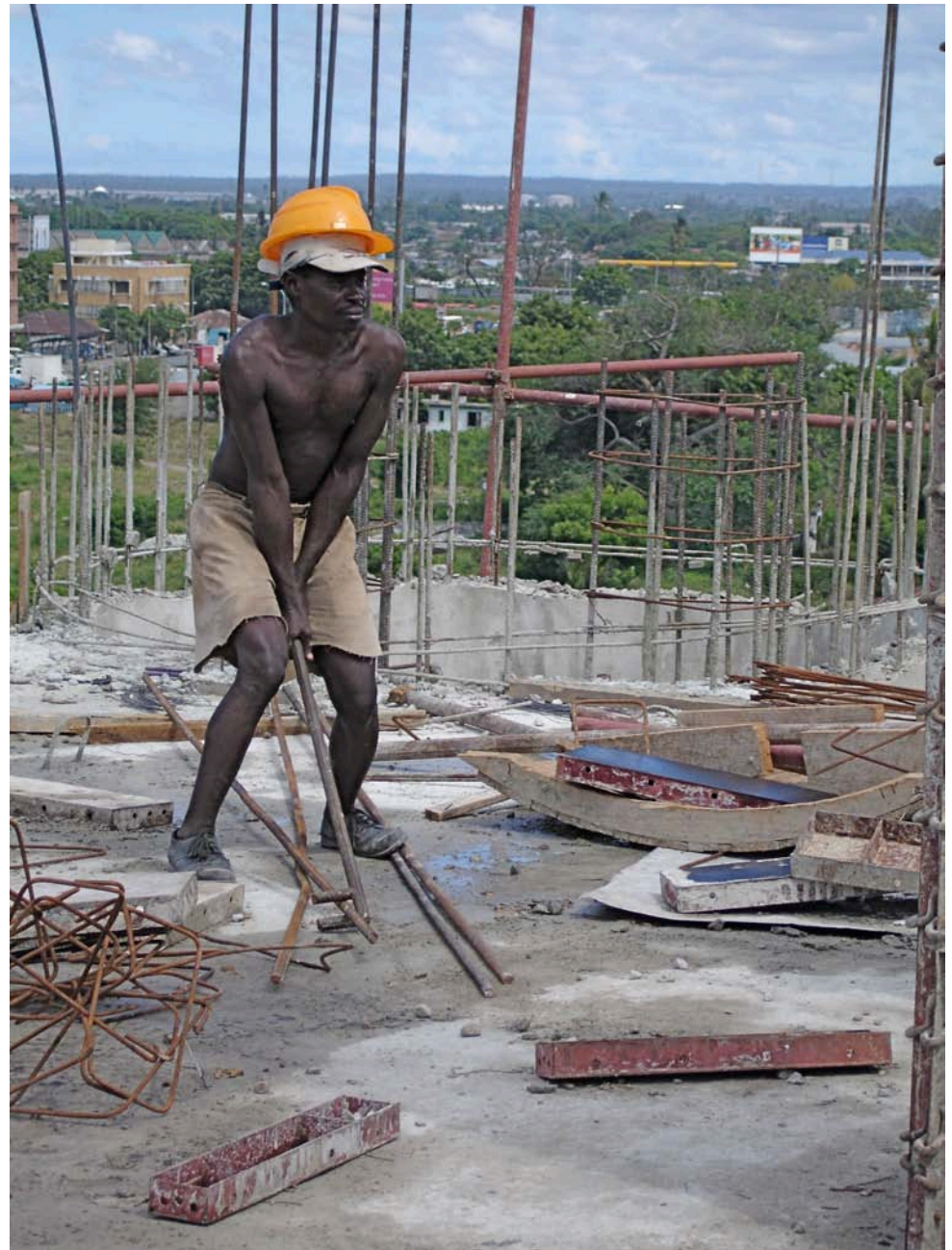


Construction OS&H

Workers' perspectives

Organising for a Healthy and Safe Workplace



The three sections of the workers' perspectives

The Trade Union Approach to Health and Safety
Organising for a Healthy and Safe Workplace
Getting Management to Make Improvements

Reminder of the aims

1. Identify the main health and safety problems in our workplaces
2. Develop a Trade Union approach to occupational health and safety
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.

OS&H Committees

A joint Union/management safety committee can be a good way of acting in partnership with the employer, and solving outstanding problems.

It is most important that health and safety activity is not just restricted to the health and safety committee.

Union representatives will need to decide whether they want a safety committee and how it should function, before any approach is made to the employer.

Composition of OS&H Committees

- Committees must be balanced
- There should never be less than two elected worker reps, and management reps must have authority to represent the company
- Chair should rotate
- Meet once a month and after incidents ('accidents')

Authority of OS&H Committees

- Executive decision-making and budget
- Advisory / can make recommendations, but no guarantee the company will comply
- Company should consider and give reasons if they do not accept proposals
- Procedure to resolve differences
- Collective bargaining demands

Functions

- Conduct regular inspections and surveys on safety and health
- Respond to workers concerns on OS&H
- Make reports and recommendations to improve compliance with law and standards
- Propose policies, work plans, projects and activities to reduce accidents and illness
- Propose and organise training programmes for the workforce
- Promote and support activities on OS&H
- Follow up progress of proposals
- Report on results achieved, point out obstacles and problems
- Investigate, record and report on all accidents, ill-health and near misses
- Propose regulations on health and safety
- Organise occupational health services

Union reps role

- Represent the interests and concerns of workers and promote the Union's policies
- Conduct inspections, interviews, surveys and meetings with workers, inform, communicate.
- Identify hazards, make proposals and negotiate improvements
- Push for high standards, ensure compliance with legal duties
- Make formal complaints
- Assist with representation and compensation

What makes a committee work?

- Have a plan and objectives and actively pursue them with the broadest support possible
- Communicate and educate to get that support
- Need facilities, time off, info and training
- Agendas in advance, proper minutes, decisions
- Prepare to negotiate. It's not a discussion it's a collective bargaining session between workers and management.
- Prepare the case, information, facts, support
- Anticipate management arguments
- List the arguments you will use and stick to the strong points
- Aim high and have your minimum demands

Checklist for OS&H Committees (1)

Level of management support

- Do they provide information promptly?
- Do they give facilities, time off for training?
- Are they responsive to worker proposals?

Responding to problems

- Do they prioritise?
- Do they really make improvements?
- Is the committee just a talking shop?

Worker confidence in the committee

- Do workers believe it's useful?
- Do workers see results?

Checklist for OS&H Committees (2)

Availability of records.

Is there transparency about decisions?

Limitations

- Low Union density, weak position of Unions
- Lack of recognition of TU from employer
- Informal sectors, sub-contracted labour and so called self-employed; hard to recruit and organise
- Non-compliance with law and hostility from employers
- Passivity and permissiveness from government authorities

Checklist for OS&H Committees

Possibilities

- Pick winners. Select workplaces where we have the best chance of organising
- Recruit workers into the Trade Union
- Be positive about the contribution that Trade Unions can make to the prevention of accidents and ill-health - solutions, training, etc
- Use the legal framework
- Use moral arguments
- Use argument of economic benefits