

ILO Guidelines on OSH Management Systems

Author(s)

Seiji Machida, MSc, Coordinator, Occupational Safety and Management Systems, SafeWork, ILO, Geneva, Switzerland, machida@ilo.org

Abstract

The OSH management systems approach has become popular as an effective means to improve safety and health. The ILO Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management System (ILO-OSH 2001) provide national and enterprise level framework and guidance. The ILO-OSH 2001 calls for the development of tailored guidelines for specific targets such as small enterprises. The development of tailored guidelines for small enterprises would facilitate nation-wide application of this approach. It is important to establish a national policy, based on tripartite consultations, on the use of OSH management systems approach as a key element of national OSH strategy and programmes. There is a need for developing mechanisms for supporting the establishment and implementation of OSH management systems nation-wide including small enterprises. Such mechanisms should include the arrangements to improve capacity for risk assessment and taking practical control measures. The ILO guidelines and experiences underline the importance of active worker participation for effective functioning of OSH management systems.

Key words:

ILO Guidelines on OSH management systems, ILO-OSH 2001, worker participation, support systems, risk assessment

Introduction

In recent years, occupational safety and health management systems (OSH-MS) approach has been promoted and implemented in many countries as an effective way to improve working conditions and environment. It is ideal to apply OSH-MS widely including small enterprises. This paper discusses the OSH-MS approach and its wide application based on the ILO instruments and from a broad perspective of national OSH strategy.

Decent work – SafeWork

The magnitude of the global impact of occupational accidents and diseases, as well as major industrial disasters, in terms of human suffering and related economic costs, have been a long-standing source of concern at workplace, national and international levels. Significant efforts have been made at all levels, nevertheless ILO estimates are that about 2.2 million workers die each year from work-related accidents and diseases. Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) has been a central issue for the ILO ever since its creation in 1919 and continues to be a fundamental requirement for achieving the objectives of the Decent Work Agenda.

Although effective legal and technical tools, methodologies and measures to prevent occupational accidents and diseases exist, there is a need for an increased general awareness of the importance of OSH as well as a high level of political commitment for effective implementation of national OSH systems. Efforts to tackle OSH problems, whether at international or national levels, are often dispersed and fragmented and as a result do not have the level of coherence necessary to produce effective impact. There is thus a need to give higher priority to OSH at international, national and enterprise levels and to engage all social partners to initiate and sustain mechanisms for a continued improvement of national OSH systems.

Against this background, Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No.187) and Recommendation (No.197) were adopted in June 2006 with a view to promoting systems approach to occupational safety and health at the national level. The texts of the Convention and Recommendation are available at

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/promoframe.htm>. These standards are also expected to support national tripartite efforts to place OSH high at national agendas and to improve application and ratification of existing ILO OSH Conventions. The management systems approach to OSH is a key concept of these standards and refer to ILO-OSH 2001.

A management systems approach

One of the main pillars for the Global Strategy on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2003 (full text available at http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/globstrat_e.pdf) is the application of a management systems approach to OSH. A model for such an approach at the enterprise level has been described in the ILO *Guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems (ILO-OSH 2001)*. As suggested in the Global Strategy on OSH, the application of this management systems approach at the national level builds on this concept and related methodology. This approach at the national level is the core element of the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No.187).

ILO Guidelines on OSH Management Systems (ILO-OSH 2001)

ILO-OSH 2001 provides a unique international model, compatible with other management system standards and guides. It reflects ILO values such as tripartism and relevant international standards

including the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155). Its application does not require certification, but it does not exclude certification as a means of recognition of good practice if this is the wish of the country implementing the Guidelines.

OSH-MS at the Enterprise Level

Chapter 3 of ILO-OSH 2001 deals with the occupational safety and health management system at the *organizational* level. The Guidelines stress that compliance to national laws and regulations are the responsibility of the employer. ILO-OSH 2001 encourages the integration of OSH management system elements into overall policy and management arrangements, as well as stressing the importance that at *organizational* level, OSH should be a line management responsibility, and should not be seen as a task for OSH departments and/or specialists.

The OSH management systems in the *organization* has five main sections which follow the internationally accepted Demming cycle of Plan-Do-Check-Act, which is the basis to the “system” approach to management. These sections are namely Policy, Organizing, Planning and implementation, Evaluation and Action for improvement

Policy contains the elements of OSH policy and worker participation. It is the basis of the OSH management system as it sets the direction for the *organization* to follow. Organizing contains the elements of responsibility and accountability, competence and training, documentation and communication. It makes sure that the management structure is in place, as well as the necessary responsibilities allocated for delivering the OSH policy. Planning and implementation contains the elements of initial review, system planning, development and implementation, OSH objectives and hazard prevention. Through the initial review, it shows where the *organization* stands concerning OSH, and uses this as the baseline to implement the OSH policy. Evaluation contains the elements

of performance monitoring and measurement, investigation of work-related injuries, ill-health, diseases and incidents, audit and management review. It shows how the OSH management system functions and identifies any weaknesses that need improvement. It includes the very important element of auditing, which should be undertaken for each stage. Action for improvement includes the elements of preventive and corrective action and continual improvement. It emphasizes the need for continual improvement of OSH performance through the constant development of policies, systems and techniques to prevent and control work-related injuries, ill-health, diseases and incidents.

National occupational safety and health management system framework

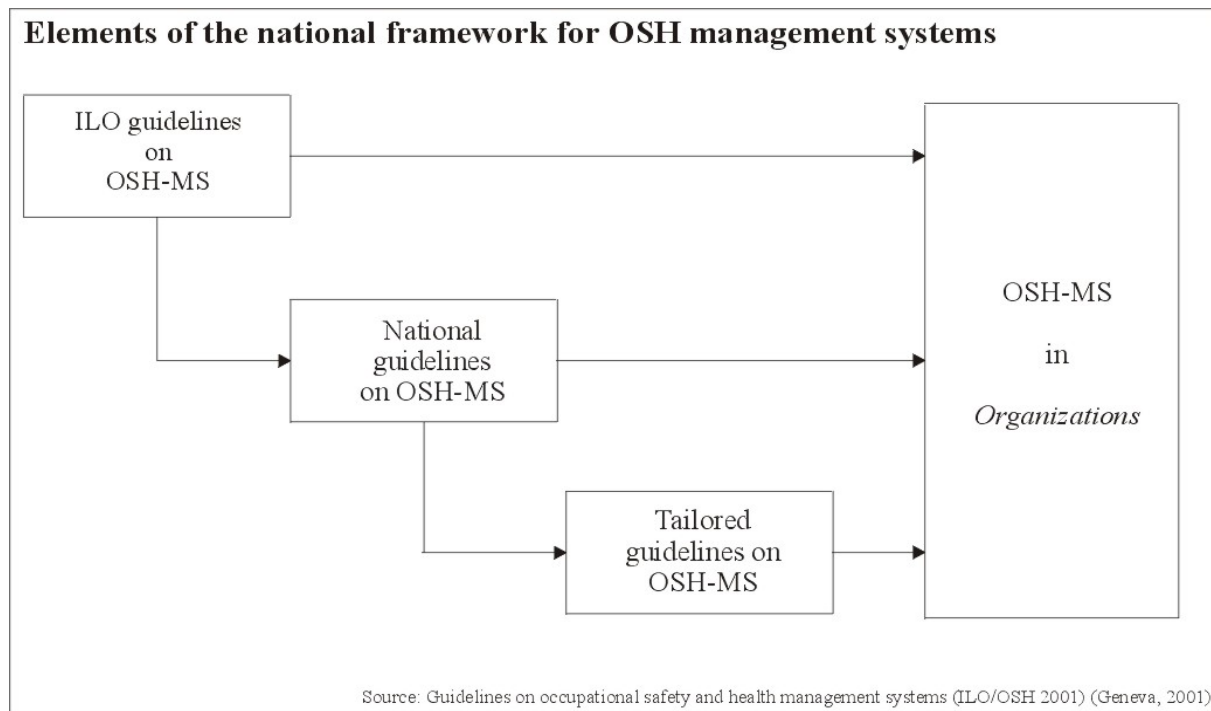
Action at national level includes the nomination of (a) competent institution(s) for OSH-MS, the formulation of a coherent national policy and the establishment of a framework for an effective national application of ILO-OSH 2001. The National Policy for OSH-MS should be formulated by competent institution(s) in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations, and should consider:

- Promotion of OSH-MS as part of overall management
- Developing mechanisms for wide application
- Avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy, administration and costs
- Support by the government inspectorate and other OSH services

The functions and responsibilities of institutions involved should be clearly defined as well. While different approaches could be taken reflecting local needs and practices, it is important to decide whether regulatory approach will be taken or not for wide application of OSH-MS, whether third-party certification will be promoted or not, and what incentive measures to be taken.

Figure 1 of the Guidelines describes the elements of the national framework for OSH management systems.

Figure 1.



Wide application of OSH management systems particularly to small enterprises

An essential aspect of effective implementation of OSH-MS as a part of national OSH strategy is the arrangement for wide application of OSH-MS including small enterprises. As small enterprises have difficulties in securing enough human and financial resources, it is important to provide supports and incentives for the application of OSH-MS. If a country opt to place a legal requirement for implementing OSH-MS in small enterprises, that would provide a basis for nation wide application. However, the requirements should be specified reflecting the existing capacity of small enterprises.

Regardless of the national decision to take regulatory approach or not, it is important to develop tailored guidelines on OSH-MS for small enterprises supplemented by practical guidance. While practical tailored guidelines will provide a ground for wide application of OSH-MS, a series of support mechanisms and programmes are required for effective implementation of OSH-MS in small enterprises. These could include training, technical support, financial support, incentive schemes, and sharing of best practices.

Training on OSH-MS

Commitment of top management and worker participation are critical factors for successful implementation of OSH-MS. In this connection, training of both management and workers are necessary. It is important to have proper understanding of the OSH-MS approach as well as key elements of the system particularly risk assessment and taking preventive measures. These training could be integrated into existing training courses/requirements such as Safety Officer training, Safety Representative training, and OSH supervisors training. Further the development of training courses/programmes for OSH-MS, risk assessment, OSH-MS auditors should be considered.

Technical Support

For effective implementation of OSH-MS, it would be useful to make available technical support services on various aspects of OSH. Among others, technical support could be provided on the setting of OSH-MS, risk assessment and prevention measures as well as training of people involved in OSH-MS at the enterprises. The establishment of nationwide network of technical support services on OSH-MS is important particularly for small enterprises. Such support services could be provided by government institutions or private service providers.

Financial Support

In order to promote the application of OSH-MS approach nation-wide, the government may consider the provision of financial support particularly to small enterprises. Such a support could take the form of subsidy for participation in OSH-MS training courses and for obtaining technical support on OSH-MS. In a number of countries, some kind of financial support has been introduced particularly at the initial stage of OSH-MS introduction. Those enterprises obtained supports could become model workplaces for the effective use of OSH-MS.

Incentives

As a means to promote the application of OSH-MS, many countries have introduced incentives such as exempting government OSH inspection for enterprises which have effective OSH-MS, exempting certain legal obligations on OSH, reducing work injury insurance premium, and official recognition of establishing sound OSH management system at the workplace. Proper implementation of OSH-MS is also often considered as preconditions for national awards on OSH.

Sharing Best Practices

With a view to promoting wide application of OSH-MS, it is essential to share successful implementation of OSH-MS. This could be arranged through presentations at OSH conferences, web-pages, integration of success cases in training materials, and special OSH awards. In addition to the sharing of best practices on OSH management systems, we should promote the exchange of experiences on various elements of OSH management systems such as formulating OSH policy, worker participation, risk assessment, practical prevention measures, and economic benefit obtained through OSH improvements.

Conclusions

The OSH management system approach facilitates continuous improvements in the performance of safety and health programmes at the enterprises. Thus wide application of this approach is critical in order to improving national safety and health conditions. In this connection, the extension of application of OSH-MS to small enterprises is essential as majority of workplaces are small. Together with the development of tailored guidelines on OSH-MS for small enterprises, strategic provision of support services to small enterprises and the arrangement for incentives and sharing best practices are necessary for effective implementation of OSH-SM.

References

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