

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

Final report

Meeting of Experts on ILO Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems

Geneva, 19-27 April 2001



**InFocus Programme on Safety and Health at Work
and the Environment (SafeWork)**

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE GENEVA

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on Occupational Safety and Health
Management Systems**

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Report

Introduction

1. At its 278th Session (June 2000), the Governing Body decided to convene a Meeting of Experts on ILO Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems and approved the Meeting's agenda. The Meeting was held in Geneva from 19 to 27 April 2001.
2. The agenda of the Meeting consisted of a single item: Examination and adoption of technical guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems.

Participants

3. Twenty-one experts were invited to the Meeting, seven of them appointed by the Governments of Brazil, Germany, Guinea, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand and Poland, seven after consultation with the Employers' group and seven after consultation with the Workers' group of the Governing Body.
4. Several observers also attended the Meeting, representing: the World Health Organization (WHO); the European Union (EU); the International Organisation of Employers (IOE); the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU); the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF); the International Social Security Association (ISSA); the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA); the International Construction Institute (ICI); the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH); the International Council of Nurses (ICN); the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA); the Korea Occupational Safety and Health Agency (KOSHA); the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) of the United States Department of Labor; the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) of the United Kingdom; and the International Head College of Experts (IHCE).
5. The list of participants is annexed to this report.

Opening address

6. The Meeting was opened by Mr. Assane Diop, Executive Director of the Social Protection Sector of the ILO. He welcomed the participants to the Meeting and expressed his appreciation to them for making their time and experience available for the examination and adoption of the technical guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems. He further expressed appreciation for the attendance of observers from governments, international governmental and non-governmental organizations. He explained the initiation of the ILO's work for the preparation of the guidelines. He noted that the ISO International Workshop on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems (OSH-MS), held in Geneva in 1996, decided that the ISO should discontinue its efforts in elaborating OSH-MS standards, and that the ILO would be a more appropriate body to elaborate international documents on the subject. The draft guidelines were prepared based on a series of discussions and consultations with constituents and other interested parties. He emphasized the importance of developing practical guidelines as many governments, employers and workers and safety and health practitioners were waiting for the ILO guidelines.

Election of the Chairperson

7. Dr. Karl-Ernst Poppendick, the expert nominated by the Government of Germany, was unanimously elected as Chairperson of the Meeting. Dr. Daniel Podgórski, the expert nominated by the Government of Poland, was unanimously elected as Reporter of the Meeting.

Presentation of the working documents

8. Dr. Jukka Takala, Director of the InFocus Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment (SafeWork), explained the background and steps taken by the Office in preparing the draft guidelines. He introduced the structure of the draft guidelines and the role of ILO guidelines in relation to the development of national guidelines on OSH-MS and tailored guidelines on OSH-MS. The draft guidelines recognized a range of OSH management-related programmes which were in use internationally and nationally, such as responsible care, private voluntary initiatives, good practice in OSH, and the existence of the ISO Standards on Quality and Environment Management. The guidelines should be flexible enough to accommodate different approaches to implementing safety and health management systems. This would include tailored systems for small and medium-sized organizations, professional contributions of labour inspection and occupational safety and health services, and the recognition of the existence of successful OSH management systems. He explained that ILO guidelines had no binding force and carried no legal obligations. Their purpose was to serve as practical guides and not to replace laws, regulations or international labour standards.
9. He presented the framework at the organizational level, which is based on the internationally accepted management model of plan-do-check-act. Sixteen fundamental elements of an OSH management system formed the basis for continual improvement in ensuring the protection and well-being of workers. The draft had been sent to all member States for comments. A considerable number of comments and suggestions had been received from governments and employers' and workers' organizations as well as professional institutions. He highlighted the main issues of the comments, and informed the Meeting that a summary of the comments was included in the folder distributed to the participants and that the full text of the comments was also available.

Examination of the draft guidelines

10. During the general discussion, the experts commended the Office for preparing a comprehensive and flexible draft technical guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems, which provided a good basis for finalization by the Meeting. They expressed their appreciation to those who were involved in the preparation of the draft guidelines which proposed a new approach to occupational safety and health. The Workers' experts stressed the importance of the further strengthening of worker participation at national and organization levels. Several experts and observers emphasized the need for strengthening occupational health aspects and psychosocial factors and the involvement of occupational safety and health professionals, while an observer commented that the draft addressed occupational health better than most existing OSH-MS documents.
11. The definition of the terms used in the document was considered important. The experts agreed to have substantive discussions on the glossary after the completion of the review of the main text, while the discussion of some terms could be advanced, as appropriate.
12. Several Government experts highlighted the need for the preparation of implementation documents by the ILO supplementing the technical guidelines. Some other experts considered that such implementation documents should be left to each country to elaborate. The Workers' experts expressed their views that the elaboration of implementation documents should require tripartite review before finalization. The Office explained that there was no allocation of the budget for holding another tripartite meeting for such purpose during the current and next bienniums. However, at the conclusion of the Meeting, it was the view of experts that it was not necessary for the ILO to develop implementation guidelines.
13. Many experts expressed their concern regarding the application of OSH management systems to small and medium-sized organizations and considered the need for special consideration. In response to a request for explanation, the Office clarified the structure strategy of the draft guidelines, including flexibility in the establishment of national guidelines on OSH-MS based on the ILO guidelines and further development of tailored guidelines responding to the needs of specific groups or types of organizations such as small organizations. Such flexibility in the application of the ILO guidelines through adaptation to local conditions and needs was considered a major advantage over the ISO approach which used a single management standard approach.
14. An Employers' expert expressed that the document addressed a field with a large number of competitors and therefore the text should be straightforward and engage people at the workplace. The Chairperson expressed his view that there was a need to avoid unnecessary repetitions in the guidelines, including the cross-references to other parts of the document.
15. The Meeting agreed to highlight in the objectives the importance of OSH management systems in contributing to the protection of workers and the elimination of hazards to work-related injuries, illness, disease, incidents and death. The Meeting also decided to emphasize the concept of continual improvement in the objectives. It was considered that the guidelines should aim at motivating all the members of the organization. The Workers' experts underlined the need for specifying employers and owners as target groups for motivating.
16. Several Workers' experts suggested that the competent institution should be tripartite. However, noting that competent institutions would often be ministries responsible for labour issues, the Meeting decided not to put "tripartite nature" as a condition for competent institution. Tripartite consultation should be ensured in the formulation and implementation of a national policy for the establishment and promotion of OSH

management systems. While consultation with OSH professional organizations would be useful in formulating a national policy, the Meeting considered that there was no need to highlight such organizations and preferred the wording used in the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155).

17. The Workers' experts proposed a rewriting of the section of the Workers' participation and this was accepted as a basis for discussion on that section.
18. The use of the term non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was considered not appropriate in the context of the guidelines as the term could be understood differently in different countries, for example one possible meaning of an NGO could be a public pressure group. It was decided to use the term "agencies and institutions dealing with OSH" in place of NGOs.
19. The Employers' experts highlighted the importance of ensuring consistency between the ILO guidelines and the national and tailored guidelines, while allowing sufficient flexibility for direct or tailored application at the organization level. It was expressed that the diagram presented at the end of Chapter 2 provided a clear picture on the relation between these guidelines at different levels.
20. The development of tailored guidelines was considered an important element of a national framework on OSH management systems. However, several experts suggested that there was no need to list criteria for the selection of target groups for tailored guidelines, as they should be elaborated based on local needs. After an extensive discussion, the Meeting concluded to include some guidance on this, recognizing the importance of providing guidance to the national authorities since the ILO guidelines would be used throughout the world including in many developing countries.
21. Before the examination of Chapter 3, the ILO consultant explained that the objective of the chapter was to put down the structure and functions of the OSH management system at the organization level. He emphasized the importance of providing adequate information in the chapter so as to provide guidance to a wide range of users, including those in developing countries. The proposed ILO model was unique, but compatible with other management system standards and guides.
22. The Meeting felt that it was important to confirm, at the beginning of Chapter 3, that occupational safety and health was the responsibility and duty of the employer. The recognition of this responsibility provided a firm basis for establishing OSH management systems at organizations. The leadership and commitment of the employer were also considered essential for the success in the establishment and implementation of OSH management systems. The diagram on continual improvement was considered useful as it provided a clear illustration of the key elements of OSH management systems. The Meeting agreed to simplify the diagram to highlight the key components.
23. The Workers' experts proposed that the employer should consult workers and their representatives in setting out the OSH policy of the organization. The Employers' experts and the Government experts supported the proposal, recognizing that the collaboration of the employer and workers was critical for all OSH activities at the organization level including particularly OSH policy formulation.
24. In the elaboration of key principles to be included in the OSH policy, the Workers' experts proposed to insert the words "as a minimum" in order to ensure the incorporation of all key elements in the policy. Bearing in mind this proposal, the Meeting reviewed 11 elements in the draft and decided to limit these to four points related to protection of safety and health of workers, compliance with OSH requirements, worker participation and continual

improvement. Other elements such as those related to health promotion, the defining of objectives, ensuring competence and allocation of resources, while considered useful, were dropped from the list of “minimum” requirements. Subsequently the Meeting agreed on the inclusion of the words “as a minimum”.

25. The Meeting considered that the integration of the OSH management system with other management systems of the organization was essential for its success. Recognizing the different ways and extent of integration depending particularly on the size of the organization, it was agreed to emphasize the need for ensuring compatibility of the OSH management system with other management systems of the organization.
26. The Workers’ experts submitted a proposal to replace the existing section on “Worker participation” with a view to facilitating smooth discussion. The Employers’ experts considered that the proposal provided the basis for a sensible scheme, while expressing concern at the involvement of workers’ representatives from outside the organization. The Meeting used this proposal as the basis for the discussion.
27. The Meeting confirmed that worker participation was essential for the effective planning and implementation of the OSH management system at the organization level. Workers and their representatives should be consulted, informed and trained on all aspects of OSH associated with their work. Arrangements had to be made for workers and their representatives to have the time and resources to actively participate in all aspects of the OSH management system. The Meeting considered that joint safety and health committees and workers’ safety and health representatives were important for facilitating the participation of workers and their representatives. In this connection, the Workers’ experts held the view that reference should be made to relevant ILO Conventions. After a substantive discussion, the Meeting preferred that the text of the guidelines should stand on its own and decided not to make references to any of the ILO Conventions, Recommendations, codes of practice and other documents. However, the Meeting agreed that the arrangements for joint safety and health committees and workers’ safety and health representatives should be in accordance with national laws and practice.
28. The Meeting had an extensive discussion on the term “control hazards and risks”. The concept of hazard control was well developed and understood in English-speaking countries, whereas such a concept was not clear in French and Spanish. These differences in technical terms were often the cause of confusion. Some experts considered the notion of “identification of hazards” important and others proposed that “prevention” should be clearly added. The Meeting decided to use the term “to identify, eliminate or control work-related hazards and risks”.
29. During the discussions on responsibility and accountability, the Meeting underlined the importance of ensuring OSH as a line management responsibility and defining and communicating responsibility and accountability. It was also agreed to include an item on supervision.
30. The Office explained about the principles in the recent ILO approach on OSH which included prevention, protection and promotion. Health promotion at work was becoming an increasingly important aspect covering such issues as HIV/AIDS and psychosocial factors including stress. Several experts emphasized the importance of health promotion and the Meeting decided to include an item on health promotion at work.
31. The Meeting decided that the organization should have, or should have access to, sufficient OSH competence to implement the OSH management system, particularly to identify, eliminate or control work-related hazards and risks. The necessary OSH competence requirements should be defined by the employer and arrangements established and

maintained to ensure that all persons were competent to carry out the safety and health aspects of their duties and responsibilities. The Workers' experts emphasized the need for clarifying that the initial and refresher training should be arranged at no cost to the participants and during working hours, if possible.

32. While documentation was considered a very important aspect of the OSH management system, it should be established according to the size and nature of the organization. The arrangement for documentation in different languages was a concern for employers as it might not be practicable. It was clarified that the intention was to address the complexity of one language and not foreign languages. The Meeting agreed that OSH management system documentation should be written in a way that was understood by those who have to use it, but without referring to the language requirement.
33. OSH records should be kept properly and locally. These should include records generated from the implementation of the OSH management system, such as those related to work-related injuries and diseases, worker exposures, health surveillance and the surveillance of the working environment. The Workers' experts underlined the importance of recording worker exposures to hazards and risks, though these might be generally covered by the surveillance of the working environment. Workers should have the right to access records relevant to their working environment and health while respecting the need for confidentiality.
34. The Meeting underlined that the initial review was an important basis for the establishment of OSH management systems or for the reinforcement of the existing system. The result of the initial review and subsequent reviews would also provide a baseline for the measurement of improvements to be achieved by OSH management systems.
35. The Meeting highlighted the importance of the establishment of OSH objectives consistent with the OSH policy. While the objectives should be realistic and consistent with the relevant legal obligations, they should aim at achieving best OSH performance. The proposal to specify that objectives should be outcome-oriented was considered valid, but the Meeting concluded that this concept was covered by the idea of striving for best OSH performance.
36. The Meeting confirmed that the purpose of the planning should be to create an OSH management system that supports: (1) as a minimum, compliance with national laws and regulations; (2) the organization's OSH management system elements; and (3) continual improvements in OSH performance.
37. In controlling hazards and risks, the Meeting underlined the importance of highlighting the principle of taking preventive measures in the order of priority including elimination, engineering control, organizational measures and personal protective measures. The concept of collective protective measures was discussed and incorporated. In providing personal protective equipment, it was considered important to make sure that the equipment was appropriate and provided at no cost, and should be maintained properly. Information and reports from organizations, such as labour inspectorates and OSH services should be considered. This evaluation should lead to preventive action prior to the introduction of changes.
38. In the management of change, the "prior to change" evaluation should be carried out in consultation with workers and their representatives and the safety and health committee as appropriate.
39. In the section on emergencies, a Workers' expert introduced the concept of emergency prevention. While several experts argued that such a term was not generally used, the

Meeting agreed to include this term, based on the experience in North America, together with an additional sentence in the section, which underlines the importance of prevention. The provision of information and training on emergency procedures to all members of the organization including regular exercises was emphasized. Additional modification in the earlier section on worker participation was agreed to incorporate the issues related to emergency prevention, preparedness and response.

40. The Meeting agreed to highlight the OSH arrangements for contractors and decided to create a section on contracting separating it from the issues on procurement. The Workers' experts argued that the organization's OSH requirements should be applied to contractors. However, the Employers' experts explained that in some cases the contractor's OSH standards could be higher or different but could achieve the same level of protection. Noting this, the Meeting agreed to allow flexibility by using a term "ensuring that the organization's safety and health standards or at least the equivalent are applied". An essential step was to establish OSH criteria in procedures for evaluating and selecting contractors. The effective communication and coordination between the organization and the contractor was considered critical.
41. Workers' health surveillance was considered as an important element of active monitoring to determine the effectiveness of prevention and control measures through medical monitoring for early detection of signs and symptoms of harm to health. An Employers' expert commented that health surveillance by the employer might not always be an effective means of monitoring particularly where sufficient control measures were in place and where good public health programmes were available. In order to reflect this Employers' expert's view, the Meeting agreed to add a conditional phrase of "where appropriate" for the use of workers' health surveillance.
42. The Workers' experts proposed the inclusion of worker rehabilitation and health restoration programmes as an element of reactive monitoring. Several Employers' experts and the Government experts stated that these were usually the responsibility of social security systems and should not be included in the OSH management system. After several exchanges of views, the Meeting decided to include the proposed element.
43. The investigation of work-related injuries, ill health, diseases and incidents was regarded as an important basis for identifying any failures of the OSH management systems. Such investigations should be carried out with appropriate participation of workers and their representatives. The results of investigations should be communicated to the safety and health committee for recommendations. Investigations should also result in the implementation of corrective actions to avoid the recurrences respecting medical confidentiality.
44. Regarding the section on audit, the Workers' experts submitted a proposal to replace the whole section. The purpose of the proposal was to make this section more complete and highlight key components while allowing flexibility. The proposal included sentences without the term "should" to avoid the possible negative reception by auditors. Audit was perceived as a critical aspect of ensuring effective functioning and improvement of the OSH management system and the guidelines should not allow misinterpretation. The Employers' experts proposed modification to the Workers' proposal, while agreeing to the basic ideas of the proposal by the Workers' experts. The major difference in the Employers' proposal was the introduction of a section on "audit conclusion" to avoid "checklist audit" calling for conclusions in relation to effective functioning of OSH management systems.
45. The Meeting used the Workers' proposal, as modified by the Employers' experts, as the basis for discussion. Regarding the areas of audit, it was agreed to list all the headings of

Chapter 3, while allowing the flexibility to conduct audit covering the whole system or selected elements. The Meeting agreed to the inclusion of “any other audit criteria or elements that may be appropriate” as an additional area for audit. The communication of audit results and conclusions to those people responsible for corrective action was considered as an essential aspect of audit arrangements. The Meeting confirmed the importance of worker participation including the selection of auditors, as appropriate.

46. The independence of auditors was considered as a key factor. The original draft had a clear statement on this, while stating in a footnote that this does not necessarily mean an external audit. The Employers’ experts proposed to insert the words “as far as possible” recognizing the difficulties for small enterprises to have internal independent auditors and with a view to not insisting on the use of external auditors. After an exchange of views, the Meeting decided to use the wording “competent persons, internal or external to the organization, who are independent from the activity being audited”.
47. The Workers’ experts highlighted the importance of the management review particularly its nature of evaluating the overall strategy of the OSH management system. The Meeting agreed that the management review should be carried out by “the employer or the most senior accountable person”. The Workers’ experts proposed the inclusion of “workforce input” as an item to be considered by the management review. The Employers’ experts expressed their view that the worker participation section sufficiently addressed the issue and the guidelines should avoid excessive repetitions concerning worker participation. They stressed the need for simple and precise guidelines, otherwise people would prefer to use other standards, such as the OHSAS 18000 series. In the face of strong opposition, the Workers’ experts withdrew their proposal while maintaining their opinion that the worker inputs in the management review were important.
48. Communication of the findings of the management review to relevant persons and the OSH management system elements were considered important. Recognizing the important role of the workers, the Meeting decided to clarify that the findings should be shared with the OSH committee, workers and their representatives.
49. In the section on “Corrective and preventive action”, a Government expert proposed to include a paragraph highlighting two levels of interventions including immediate action to eliminate or mitigate imminent danger; and action based on the analysis of the root causes. The Workers’ experts opposed the inclusion of the action to eliminate imminent danger, arguing that such action was not necessary in this section. After exchanges of views on the proposal, the Government expert reluctantly accepted the dropping of the first part of the proposal.
50. The Workers’ experts emphasized the importance of the continual improvement of the OSH management system, particularly through corrective actions of the elements of the system and the system as a whole. As additional aspects to be taken into account in the arrangements for continual review, the Meeting agreed to include: changes in laws, regulations, voluntary agreements and collective agreements; and new relevant information.
51. The Employers’ experts proposed the deletion of the appendix on risk assessment. They agreed that risk assessment was important but considered that the ILO guidelines should not list one of many approaches. The Workers’ and Government experts also supported the proposal and the Meeting decided to drop the appendix. Further, the Meeting agreed to limit the reference documents to ILO standards and publications including the forthcoming Convention and Recommendation on safety and health in agriculture. It was considered not appropriate to list only some of the relevant documents available from many international and national organizations, and from professional institutions.

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52. The Office explained that the intention of the introduction was to provide the background of the development of the guidelines including ILO Conventions and Recommendations and various codes and guides and the importance of occupational safety and health programmes. The Office text was examined together with the amendment proposed by the Employers' experts. The Meeting considered that the introduction should be short and concise. The paragraph referring to the ILO standards should be transferred to the reference section as a covering paragraph. The Meeting decided to start the introduction with the reference to the positive impact of introducing OSH management systems. The importance of tripartite consultation should be emphasized in this ILO document. The Employers' experts highlighted the importance of clarification that these guidelines were a non-binding ILO document and that certification was not required. Based on these ideas on the introduction, the Employers' experts proposed a new text. It was adopted with minor modifications.
53. The Meeting formed two working parties, one to discuss the glossary and another to review the revised text of the guidelines. The two working parties worked in parallel.
54. The working party on the review of the revised text reported to the experts that they agreed on several editorial changes. These included the consistent use of terms including "work-related injuries, ill health, diseases and incidents", "national laws and regulations", and "voluntary programmes" throughout the text. The Meeting agreed to such proposals by the working party to introduce additional changes for consistency and better reading.
55. Terms to be included in the glossary were discussed based on the proposals by the working party on the glossary. The Meeting decided to use existing ILO definitions as far as they fitted the issues addressed in the guidelines. New agreed definitions included "contractor", "hazard", "risk", "risk assessment", "safety and health representative", "surveillance of the working environment", "workers' health surveillance", "work-related injuries, ill health and diseases" and "worksite".
56. The Workers' experts suggested to include the definition of the term "hazard assessment" to reflect the different approach to risk and hazard control in Europe and in North America. Instead of "hazard assessment", a Government expert proposed to develop the definition of "hazard identification" noting that such a term, in connection with risk assessment, was used regularly throughout the text. The Workers' experts opposed the proposal and, after an exchange of views, the Government expert reluctantly accepted the inclusion of the term "hazard assessment". The technical discussions were concluded by the Chair.
57. There was discussion on the consultation process which occurred prior to the production of the draft guidelines and the Meeting asked the ILO secretariat to review the nature and the usefulness of this procedure.

Adoption of the guidelines and of the report

58. After examining the text of the draft Technical Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems, the experts adopted the Technical Guidelines as amended and decided to rename the document "Guidelines on Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems".

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- 59.** After examination of the draft report, the experts adopted it as amended. Thereafter, the experts adopted the report and the guidelines as a whole.

Geneva, 27 April 2001.

(Signed) Dr. Karl-Ernst POPPENDICK,
Chairperson.

(Signed) Dr. Daniel PODGÓRSKI,
Reporter.