

# HERE WE WORK WELL

A SHORT ILLUSTRATED GLOSSARY



**General training on safety and health for Italian as well as migrant workers under the direction of the EBT Province of Venice**

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This brochure aims to illustrate, (in a way that we hope is clear and simple) some important concepts for prevention, health and safety in the workplaces as an introduction to more specific training sessions.

To make it more understandable by foreign workers, we translated the text in English and French and possibly it will be available in future in other languages too. The issues shortly discussed here are those also considered by the Agreement among the Ministry of labour and social policies, the Ministry of health, the Regions, the Provinces of Trento and Bolzano for the workers' general training on safety and health.

To be efficient in our workplaces doesn't mean only to accomplish well the duties of our work, but also to be able to take proper prevention and care to our health and if possible strengthen it.

First of all we will see what the word health really means .

## HEALTH

### **HEALTH: A STATE OF COMPLETE PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND SOCIAL WELLBEING AND NOT ONLY THE ABSENCE OF DISEASES OR IMPAIRMENTS**



This is the most authoritative and influential definition given by the World Health Organization: this is a definition that dates back to 1946, but which is still effective today: the recent Unique Text on work safety and health makes reference to it.

Health is the combination of all what we need to feel well, to enjoy a condition of well-being, which is maybe not quite perfect but anyway strong enough under three dimensions:

- the physical dimension, i.e. the efficiency of our body during the daily activities;
- the mental aspect, that consists essentially on the ability to stand the stressful situations we all must face almost every day;
- the social aspect, i.e. the pleasure to be socially active and to form part of the activities of a community.

To have a good education system, health care and a proper housing, to have our children focus on their studies

are the most important aspects of our social wellbeing and for foreign workers these terms and conditions might not be easily applicable.

## HAZARDS TO OUR HEALTH IN WORKPLACES

There are work-related factors which can be harmful to our health , i.e. all those factors such as noise, dangerous substances, an excessive workload which endangers our mental well-being etc.; all those things that can harm our health when we work. To avoid that our job comes into conflict with our health, first of all we need to realize the possible risks of the job we carry out. For this reason in the EU the so called risk assessment document is mandatory in all work sectors: this is a document where the occupational risks are identified and correctly analysed. This document should always be developed under the supervision of the employer who has to sign it.

## THE RISKS AT WORK

### **DEPENDING ON THE WORK BEING CARRIED OUT, A WORKER IS SUBJECTED TO A OCCUPATIONAL RISKS WHICH CAN BE HEALTH DAMAGING**

In every workplace there are risks that we may have to take into consideration to keep healthy; we must try to know them well and then to eliminate them or at least reduce them to a minimum level.

**An example:** Beppe is a store keeper at the restaurant "Il Gambero Rosso" and he is often engaged in the manual handling of loads, such as crates of mineral water and boxes of supplies. Beppe and his workmates are therefore exposed to an occupational hazard, the manual handling of loads, which can harm their health.

## THE DAMAGES TO HEALTH

### **ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES TO THE MENTAL AND/OR PHYSICAL WELLBEING OF A PERSON.**

How can this damage happen? It may be from a sudden or an acute traumatic injury like in the case of Beppe above. The result of his manoeuvring can be an episode of back pain due to the damage done to his back muscles or even can be something that brings health problems which may build up in the course of the time.

To continue with this example, if Beppe keeps on with this working approach he may suffer a chronic back pain .

Statistics show that the most frequent damages to our health at workplaces are those of occupational injuries.

## OCCUPATIONAL INJURY: A SUDDEN ACCIDENT WHICH CAN LEAD TO AN ACUTE INJURY



Beppe's low back pain after manually handling a heavy weight is a typical example of an occupational injury. Slips, trips and falls are the most frequent kind of accidents in our daily work. The use of machines, electricity, fire, working with forklifts and other self-propelled vehicles, the use of dangerous chemicals, etc., all of these risk factors can cause us even serious injuries.

### OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY: IT MEANS TO HAVE A RISK-FREE WORK ENVIRONMENT WHICH ALLOWS US TO WORK WITHOUT THE COSTANT WORRY OF PROTECTING OUR OWN HEALTH

To ensure work safety you must be always careful and not to create any condition of health risks for us or other employees.

To ensure work safety of foreign workers often requires additional efforts due to the fact that they do not fully know our language, our

culture and our social organization.

## THE WORK RELATED DISEASE IS A PHYSICAL AND/OR MENTAL DAMAGE TO HEALTH CAUSED BY CERTAIN WORKING CONDITIONS OR BEHAVIORS. IT NORMALLY STARTS SLOWLY AND GRADUALLY DEVELOPS IN SUBSEQUENT STAGES INSIDE THE VICTIM'S BODY.



As well as an improper nutrition or smoking, or a high alcohol consumption etc. working without safety can also have harmful consequences on our health.

These negative consequences can sometimes be very serious. An example is working with asbestos, a mineral that has been widely used for its extraordinary resistance to fire and which today is no longer manufactured in the European Union because of its high level of danger to human health. Asbestos caused thousands of cases of serious and deadly diseases of the respiratory system

worldwide. Today also noise and the repeated traumas to the joints, which can build up in case of manual work at an intense pace and overload of the musculo-skeletal system are common causes of work-related diseases.

**AN EXAMPLE** The very intense pace of work, the carts to be moved and the heavy vacuum caused -- as time went by- a strong elbow pain to Olga, who works as hotel cleaner at the "Albergo Stella d'Oro"; the occupational physician of the hotel diagnosed an epicondylitis, a non severe but painful disease linked to the repetitive use of the muscles of the forearm: this is an example of a work related disease.

## PREVENTION

**PREVENTION: PREVENT LITERALLY MEANS "STOP SOMETHING FROM HAPPENING". TO AVOID PREVENTION IT TO RISK DAMAGES TO OUR HEALTH.**

Sometimes it is easy to know the health risks at work, because they can easily be identified.

Noise, dangerous chemicals that have a pungent or acrid smell, an excessive heat are easy to identify, whereas in many other cases we may have many more difficulties.

To reduce/eliminate the risks of electricity and the possible negative effects of the contact with dangerous substances which are hardly perceptible by our sense of smell, but are nevertheless toxic or flammable, to ensure the safety of machinery, etc. we must rely on the skills of qualified personnel. That is why in the field of health and safety at work in all European countries many specialists, such as occupational physicians, engineers, graduates in chemistry or physics, architects, psychologists among others are engaged to carry out an in-depth analysis of the occupational risks.

By the risk assessment process, as we mentioned already, the employers can establish proper prevention and protection measures. We will deal first with preventive measures.

**PREVENTIVE MEASURES: THESE ARE MEASURES THAT WE MUST ADOPT AND MAINTAIN IN ORDER TO ELIMINATE OR AT LEAST REDUCE OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS.**

An example where we can prevent any hazards in our workplaces is the choice of less dangerous substances instead of more toxic ones. Also the use of mechanical tools to avoid the manual handling of heavy weights or to install a more efficient lighting in order to reduce the risks of falling down or tripping are examples of this.

When it is not possible to completely remove an occupational hazard with preventive measures, we must make use of different defensive measures, which even if do not eliminate the risks can anyway defend us from them. These are the protection measures.

## PROTECTION

### **PROTECTION: COLLECTIVE OR INDIVIDUAL DEFENCE AGAINST THE RISKS AT WORKPLACE**

An example are the railings the masons use to protect themselves against the risks of falling down from scaffolds. Another example are the sound barriers placed along the motorways, but also in certain workplaces, to protect people against noise or the safety devices that manufacturers place on wood carving machines to reduce the risks of injuries to hands.

These are examples of collective protection, because the protection measures are available to all those who may come into contact with these health risks.

In many activities people also use means of personal protection, i.e. safety equipment that workers must employ to protect themselves against the risks. The most common of such a kind of personal protection equipments are gloves, safety shoes, protective glasses, ear-plugs and ear-muffs.

Personal protective equipment may be in some cases more complex and then it is mandatory to undergo specific training sessions (this is the case of harnesses, respirators against airborne dusts or toxic gases etc.)



### THE LAW

#### **OUR LEGISLATION ESPECIALLY PROMOTES HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK AND IN CASES OF SERIOUS DAMAGES TO HEALTH THE EMPLOYER WILL BE SUBJECT TO CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS**

The law is also an important means of prevention.

We can have several examples. The legislation that prohibits smoking in public buildings, hotels, restaurants etc., the regulations that introduced the compulsory use of safety belts in vehicles, the establishment of a permitted maximum alcohol

content in drivers' blood to enforce road safety.

Similar changes happened also at workplace and in many cases workers' health has no doubt improved when sound regulations have been applied in the workplaces. The Italian legislation for health and safety at work -which is similar to that of the other European Union countries- is gathered for the most part in a single law known as the "Testo Unico" on health and safety.



## THE ORGANIZATION OF PREVENTION WITHIN COMPANIES

### THE SYSTEM OF PREVENTION WITHIN COMPANIES CONSISTS OF VARIOUS ORGANIC FIGURES WHO HAVE TO COLLABORATE FOR A GOOD HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK

The "Testo Unico" also establishes how the system of prevention within companies has to be



organised. In short, the important organic figures of prevention at workplace are:

- the employer, who is the first responsible for prevention;
- the personnel in charge of safety, who is part of the Service of Prevention and Protection (SPP); these can be company employees as well as external experts; this personnel helps the employer in assessing the risks and implementing the needed measures of prevention;
- the occupational physician

("the competent physician") who performs the health checks and also contributes to the risks assessment;

-the workers' representative for safety (RLS), appointed or elected by the workers themselves;

-the first aid attendants and the fire prevention attendants, who are employees trained in these tasks through specific training programmes.

Companies with many employees have also other people in charge of safety, i.e. the safety supervisors.

## WORKERS' RIGHTS AND DUTIES

### THE TESTO UNICO ALSO ESTABLISHES WORKERS' RIGHTS AND DUTIES ON HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK .

Let's start with the duties. In practice, we can say that first of all the workers must collaborate with the employer, the managers and their colleagues to keep the workplace always safe .Every worker must take care of her/his health and safety and all the others in the workplace. No one can remove or modify without permission safety devices or safety signs or perform operations or manoeuvres not pertaining to her/his task.



All workers must always properly use the work tools, the chemical products, the means of transport assigned to them and the personal protective equipment provided.

As far as rights are concerned, the first one is obviously that health, safety and well-being at workplace are properly guaranteed .

There is also the right to receive a proper training; in this regard all employees must have the opportunity to develop their skills by attending courses, at the beginning of their employment, when they have to change their tasks, in the case of introduction of new technologies, new chemical products, new machines .

All workers have also the right to elect or appoint their Safety Representative (RLS).

## HEALTH AND SAFETY ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES AND THE ASSISTANCE ON HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK

### HEALTH AND SAFETY ENFORCEMENT



In this field too it is important in order that the law is observed that enforcement agencies are effective in supervising the implementation of the regulations; in Italy two institutions are in charge of this: the Local Health Unit (Department of public health, "Spisal") of the City where the work activities are carried out and the City Fire Department .

**HEALTH AND SAFETY ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES  
THE SPISAL IS IN CHARGE FOR THE ENFORCEMENT OF ALL  
THE REGULATIONS ON HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK,  
WITH THE ONLY EXCEPTION OF THE ONES RELATED TO THE  
PREVENTION AND PROTECTION AGAINST FIRES, WHICH  
ARE UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF THE CITY FIRE  
DEPARTMENT.**

At both these public institutions there are labour inspectors who have access to every workplace at any time. If as a result of their investigations, they find situations which portrait offences to the regulations on health and safety at work, they send records to the judicial authority; should the offences be especially serious, after the inspectors' reports criminal proceedings start.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY ASSISTANCE

### **IN THIS FIELD OF PREVENTION TO GIVE ASSISTANCE MEANS TO HELP COMPANIES AND WORKERS TO TAKE PROPER MEASURES TO ENSURE HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK**

The agencies that are in charge of enforcement also provide a helpline: in our system of prevention, law enforcement and assistance are not separated.

We can obtain relevant documentation and information on the correct application of the regulations in many sectors at the Department of Public Health "Spisal" as well as at the City Fire Department. Training courses are organised by these agencies and a few of these courses are also available online. Trade Unions offers a service of patronage (Patronato) especially useful when a worker having had an occupational injury has to issue a request of compensation for the health damage.

Should a worker suspects that he is affected by a work-related disease and wants to be certain the competent doctor of the company can be consulted; it is also possible to ask the support of a Patronato, whose staff very often includes occupational physicians.

There are local offices of the "Patronati" in all the major Italian cities and their assistance is free.



If something is not clear or you still need more information about these issues, please contact the person who is in charge of safety at your company/organization (SPP, RLS, competent physician); if you're unable to contact any of them, then you should talk to your employer, the person legally bound to ensure a safe and healthy work environment<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This is Napo, the character of the cartoon series of the European Agency for health and safety at work . Napo represents symbolically the figure of the worker, regardless of industrial branch, professional sector, by its ethnic and cultural background <http://www.napofilm.net/en/who-is-napo>