

FUNDAMENTAL PRECEPTS FOR MANAGING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY AT WORK

In recognition of the significance of safety and health of workers at work, **April 28th** of every year has been designated as ***World Safety and Health Day***. It's to observe the significance of safety and health at work and promote suitable measures to prevent and reduce incidents and accidents at work.

On 20th June, 2017, Mathew, a young and brilliant engineer was picked up by his driver (Quashie) from his house to his office at Cantonments. On arrival at the office, the driver, while waiting for Mathew, was alerted by Thomas a colleague driver of the bad nature of his (Quashie) vehicle's tires. The driver urgently sent the vehicle to the company's workshop for the tires to be changed after going through the normal bureaucratic procedures for requisition and approval (approximately 50 minutes). Just as tires were to be changed, Mathew called his driver to urgently pick him up because he (Mathew) had been assigned to meet customers in an hour and half time for a project sign off which involved the presence of top management team of their customers with media coverage.

The driver asked the mechanics to postpone the tire change and continue on their return from the sign off. He picked Mathew and on their way, Mathew asked the driver to speed above the regulatory speed limit in order for him to arrive on time as they were 45 minutes behind actual time required to drive to the project site. The driver plugged out the tracking device and did as he was told without hesitation. About 40 km to the site, the driver, while changing radio stations, commended the government for asphaltting the road on which they were traveling on and making it motorable. He however lost control and run over the curbs, causing the car to somersault 4 times and landed upside-down in a ditch. The driver died on the spot but Mathew died a week after from internal bleeding. The driver left behind 2 kids (3yrs and 9 months). Mathew left behind a 4-month pregnant wife, 2-year-old son, unemployed and schooling siblings who depended on him.

Due to the accident, Mathew didn't arrive to handover the sites to the customers as planned, the customer blacklisted the company for the delay; cost of postponing the official handover with media arrangement and its corporate health and safety Policies of which late Mathew's company had signed to as part of contractual agreement between the two companies. Quashie's wife suffered nervous shock from the negligent reportage of Quashie's death by the PRO of the company.

At management meeting to review and discuss incident investigation reports and improvement plan, the HR submitted that due to claims made, the company's insurance premium is expected to increase by 30 – 40 percent, cost of recruiting and selection of competent replacement of the "brilliant" Mathew is highly expensive as suitable qualified candidates required only have to be poached from their competitors among others. The legal team also submits that several legal actions have been instituted against the company from the family of the deceased and regulatory bodies. The finance team submit that the company has lost huge sums of money for addressing consequential effects of this accident. The company is unable to secure new projects due to the negative publicity it suffered as a result of this accident. The Health and Safety manager submit, his advocacy and implementation of effective health and safety policies couldn't prevent the accident and death because of lack leadership and management commitment.

From the above exposition, it's evident and imperative for every organization to understand and commit to effective management of sound health and safety policies and practices at the work place. The author of this article seeks to highlight the rational and principles for global advancement of safety and health of employees at work, these includes - Reasons, Limitations, legal & other requirements and duties of employers and employees per global supranational organizations and standards *ILO, World bank-IFC, and IMF* among others.

Reasons for implementing Health and Safety at work.

The ILO estimates that some 2.3 million women and men around the world succumb to work-related accidents or diseases every year. This corresponds to over 6000 deaths every single day. Worldwide, there are around 340 million occupational accidents and 160 million victims of work-related illnesses annually. The ILO updates these estimates at intervals, and the updates indicate an increase of accidents and ill health.

In Ghana, 6 fatalities have been recorded in the telecom infrastructure industry involving 3 riggers, 2 aerial fiber engineers and 1 interested party within the last 3 years.

A National Road Safety Commission Ghana report indicates that 6,844 road crashes, involving 11,167 vehicles, 1,252 fatalities and 7,043 injuries recorded between January to June 2019. These included persons on their way to work, from work and or work related assignments in the formal and informal sectors. Its therefore worth mentioning that the scope of health and safety is not limited to the formal work environment.

From the above facts and exposition, it's imperative to implement effective and efficient health and safety principles for the reasons stated herein;

1.Moral Obligations: It is the expectation of society that employers put in place, measures to safeguard the safety and health of workers and employees likewise comply to such measures to ensure their individual safety and that of others. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" as quoted in the Bible (Mathew 22:39).

2.Legal Expectations. Several statutory, regulatory and contractual requirements prescribe for suitable and effective health and safety measures to be complied with. Failure to adhere to such requirements may cause legal prosecutions, fines, imprisonments and contract cancellations. **April, 2019, an Accra High Court ordered AngloGold Ashanti to pay GHC 9million cedis to the family of a deceased employee on site.**

Legal instruments which prescribes for establishment of sound health and safety requirements at the workplace includes the constitution 1992, Labour Law Act 2003 (ACT 651), Factories, offices and Shops Act 1970 (ACT 328), Civil Liability Act 1963, ACT 176. Health, Safety, Security and Environment manual for energy sector organizations.

3.Financial Consequences. As a result of accidents and incidents, organizations pay huge sums of money as compensation for insured and uninsured compensations. In October, 2015, the high court ordered B5 Plus to pay **GHC4,417,600 to an employee who lost 10 of his fingers for negligence on the part of the employers and not providing PPEs coupled with inadequate supervision.**

Implementation of effective health and safety policies at the work place is hindered by the following; cultural orientation of workers and employers in relation to safety and health, nature and size of the organization and its activities, individual behavioral patterns and beliefs, competing and conflicting demands of roles, resources, under-resourced enforcement and regulatory agencies, cost and project timelines among others.

Generally, employers are to undertake the following:

- a) Provide safe workplace, safe operating plants & machines, working environment & system of work.
- b) Provide PPEs, training at no cost to employees.

- c) Employ and use adequate and qualified personnel.
- d) Provide consistent awareness and effective supervision.

Duties of Employees general include:

- a) Responsibility to ensure their own safety and the safety of others.
- b) Maintenance and good use of Personal Protective Equipment assigned to them.
- c) Report unsafe acts and maintain safe conditions.
- d) Attend trainings and apply knowledge and skills acquired.

Among other things, there should be clearly demonstrable commitment and leadership from top management to lower level employees. There should be adequate provision of resources (human, technological, financial, and logistics). There is a need to appoint health and safety committee and/or champions whose basic role is to advocate for best health and safety practices and facilitate the utmost achievement of Health and safety objectives.

Furthermore, its recommended for all organizations which seek to prevent similar incidents as stated above from the introductory paragraphs and other known work-related incidents to implement the following in addition to the above and suitable policies for their organizations, industry and jurisdiction:

- a) Appointment of qualified and competent occupational health and Safety personnel
- b) Establish and maintain effective and efficient health and safety management system integrated in the corporate governance of the organization.
- c) Develop and sustain safety culture within the organization.

In a nutshell, the health, safety and wellbeing of workers are of equal importance which require maximum consideration and attention by all persons in the working environment.

The above write-up is the opinion of the author in his quest to create awareness on the necessity of organizations taking keen interest of its employees' health and safety.

Isaac Nana Apenteng

Environmental Health and Safety Practitioner, NEBOSH, IRCA/CQI certified ISO 9001:2015, 45001:2018 implementer and lead auditor. ISO 14001:2015 Internal Auditor.

Member of Ghana Institute of Safety and Environmental Professionals (GHISEP).