

Occupational Health and Safety in Hotels and Restaurants: A Preliminary Survey

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Abstract

In the latest Occupational Injuries Survey (OIS, 2000), the hotel and restaurant industry figured second among the list of industries that reported injuries and illnesses. Types of injuries commonly reported are cuts, burns and scalds, sprains and strains. The nature of tasks that workers carry out, the working conditions and the hazards that emanate from the conditions are rather specific. Moreover, the industry operates for twenty-four hours such that workers are burdened by working in shifts which may put them at risk to work-related problems. Areas of great concern are the front desk services, housekeeping, accommodation, food and beverage service area, kitchen, purchasing and stockroom areas. As far as the industry is concerned, there is a need to understand and analyze its OSH culture as a basis for providing guideline for its improvement and in the prevention and control of work-related injuries and accidents.

This survey determined the existing occupational safety and health (OSH) practices of five star hotels specifically with the purpose of developing a technical guideline on OSH in the industry.

This survey is descriptive and purposely focused on selected five star and first class hotels in the country to find out how these large businesses practice OSH. The inclusion of the respondent establishments in the study was

purely voluntary and purposeful in nature. The survey was in two parts; initially a focus group discussion was conducted among managers, human resource practitioners and school administrators of hotels and restaurants, to analyze the extent of health and safety status of this industry. The second phase of the survey made use of a structured questionnaire addressed to program enforcers and implementers of the participating establishments. The questionnaire elicited information on the following: health, safety policy and programs, safe work procedures, education and training for workers, handling of hazardous substances, manual handling of materials and equipment. Other relevant information obtained was on the emerging problems in the workplace such as violence, drugs and alcohol, infection control and HIV/AIDS, and accident investigation. It covered the different sections of hotels namely: front desk office, accommodations, housekeeping, food and beverage, purchasing and storage security services.

With the sharing of insights and knowledge from the focus group discussion and validated by the structured questionnaire, the current state of safety and health culture of the industry was uncovered. The industry has a specific areas considered high risk for accidents and these include the kitchen, laundry area and housekeeping. Prevalent accidents and illnesses mentioned were burns and scalds, cuts, strains/ sprains, and other musculoskeletal complaints. Workers particularly those in the accommodation, kitchen and housekeeping services are at most risk from violence, from their clientele, co-workers and supervisors. Their work involves extreme pressure due to time, unusual working hours and the presence of physical and ergonomic hazards.

In addition, the majority of workers is young and has yet to recognize safety and health prevention. Woman workers also predominate and their specific gender concerns such as stress and other psychosocial problems have to be addressed. Workers in the industry have limited understanding of the concepts of occupational safety and health because of its inadequate inclusion in the curricula of schools offering hotel and restaurant subjects. Topics on safety and health in schools are mostly focused on public safety, food safety and sanitation. In general the survey showed that the respondent establishments do have OSH policy and programs. However, the policies and programs are not well coordinated and need to be integrated in a comprehensive approach. Training, education and information programs are often focused on work and emergency procedures. Safety concerns that are prioritized are limited to specific matters such as loss prevention, fire and bomb safety procedures.

Accidents and illnesses in the hotel and restaurant industry can affect primarily the workers, their clients and the establishment itself. To build up a culture of OSH and promote workers well-being and prevent occupational accidents and illnesses, workers and employers shall commit to practice safety and health in all areas. The outcome of the survey may suggest that even among first class and five star hotels; there is a need to establish a comprehensive health and safety policy and programs. The structured questionnaire may be modified to take the form of a checklist that can be used by hotels and restaurants as a guide in developing or improving policies and programs on safety and health. The OSHC is currently preparing a technical guideline on OSH for the hotels and restaurants, the technical guideline and

checklist can be used by program implementers in the industry. It will address the areas at high risk for accidents and illnesses and will also cover specific hazards such as violence, infection control, stress, ergonomics, physical hazards and other psychosocial problems among others.