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# Improving occupational health and workplace safety in Saudi Arabia

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## Abstract

Work-related safety and health in Saudi Arabia is an area that always have full consideration from the governmental and nongovernmental official to ensure the protection and health safety to all Saudi Arabia workers . The main objective of Saudi Arabia government is the promotion of safe and healthy work environment; the Saudi government views this as moral religious obligations to provide the protection of all workers and others stakeholders in the work related issues. The work safety and health in Saudi Arabia should have many organization and groups cooperate among them to accomplish three main different objectives: a) the protection and promotion of workers' health and working capability; b) the enhancement of working environment and work to become more safe and healthy; c) Create work groups and working traditions to ensure the safety at workplace. All of this will help develop a new and encouraging social environment which eventually will increase the efficiency of the Saudi workforce.

*Keywords:* Saudi Arabia, Occupational Health, Workplace safety, Working environment, HSE, Health and safety

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## 1. Introduction

This article covers the latest trends in workplace safety, including best practices on what some companies are doing above and beyond compliance. The philosophy of working to live, not living to work is well known, but despite it, if work is something that people are given the chance to enjoy, it has a positive ripple effect in all areas of life. As mention in the Confined Spaces (2012), if an old chair gives an employee a backache they absolutely have the right to ask for a new one and if an excessive workload or a catty colleague is having an impact on quality of life then these issues should be addressed as well.

The classic story behind work-related problems involves an unreasonable and demanding boss who makes an employee's life difficult, but it is not just those in positions of authority who can act as a negative presence in the workplace. Regardless of where someone works, their colleagues are one of the most important factors contributing to their happiness. Having people around to share triumphs and dissatisfaction with lessens the burden, while working in an isolated or competitive environment can create extra strain (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2007).

### 1.1. New occupational health policy trend in Saudi Arabia

The Saudi government has for many years been of the view that occupational health should be synchronized and deliver by the government in the same approach as any other safety and health related issue. Recently, there have been shift in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to take a far more holistic approach to workplace safety and health, focusing on the wider wellbeing and health program shifting towards adaptation of best practices for Saudi people. Ibrahim (2007) in his article said, the Saudi occupational health systems, have developed over last decades, by focus on health interventions to ensure that workers have suitable work-related health support, helping them adapt the psychological and physical demands which workplaces put on them specially as they get older.

The Saudi occupational health and safety has never been mainstreamed into the wider health agenda, to maintain the responsibility for occupational health and safety with the factories and employers. This situation continues to this day, however; Saudi ministry of health tries to implement occupational health services for all employees, with some exceptions to other private sector employers. At the same time other workers have taken the advantage of the growing number of private sector and taking decisions to outsource the issues of workplace health and safety on the grounds of cost.

All individual or agencies involve in this matters have to consider how to contribute to the debate on workplace health and safety, ensuring the issue of occupational health does not become confused in the wider health improvement agenda in Saudi Arabia, while, at the same time, recognizing the importance of improving Saudi's general health and the impact that both could have on the Saudi economy at large.

The Saudi ministry of health also keeps on working with a broad range of stakeholders to promote and improve workplace health and safety for working population. However, though these initiatives are welcome in the Saudi Kingdom, where as others think its still away from a comprehensive, occupational health service that should be delivered to working Saudi population. Given the wider ongoing attentions to health and

safety, it is a suitable time to examine health provision and how ministry of labor and ministry of Commerce and Industry can be involved in shaping the work-related health and safety of the future, besides an examination of current occupational health resources, and how the services can be developed.

## 1.2. Suggested of occupational health and safety provisions for Saudi

There are some principles that Saudi Ministry of health can be consider for any comprehensive, occupational Health and safety system they are planning to implement and develop the future:

- avoid and manage all health risks at workplace
- create high-quality health for workers
- diminish the effect of unhealthy practice at all workplaces
- offer assistant for workers who may have health work related injuries or illness
- make possible a return to workplace after work related illness or injuries

Everly (1986) in point out the liability for implementation of the workplace safety is employer duty. Also Roughton (2010) have the same opinion with idea that it is the employer main responsibility and obligation to prevent all workplace accidents and prevent such incident. Therefore, the employers have a legal responsibility to protect the safety and the health of their employees as been mention in the article of the Hazardous Work (2012). Unfortunately; pertaining to this issue many of Saudis' employers may perhaps ignoring, either unintentionally or otherwise, their legal and ethical obligations toward their employees.

## 2. Workplace and safety assessments

There are few essentials component that can be utilizing when assessing occupational health and workplace safety and their effectiveness as highlighted in the Health and Safety Executive (2009) Guide to Safety and Health Regulation includes:

- first hazards identification,
- second risk management and
- Third provision of information

The Saudi Ministry of health recognize the link between good health and productivity and the role that comprehensive and accessible occupational health and safety policy can play in ensuring individuals safety at workplace. It is crucially imperative that all Saudi companies and business be open to implement all the international occupational health and safety guideline, to create self-confidence and assurance to workers while protect the employer right for to regulate work related policies.

The Royal Decree No.M/21 dated 6 Ramadan 1389 (1969) , clearly pointed out that Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Commerce and Industry in Saudi Arabia are equally obligated to reduce the number of skilled workers loses their jobs every year due to the workplace injuries and safety to be at its minimum level possible. Ministry of Labor requesting Saudi employers to maintain and develop best and positive workplace health and safety practice to maintain their trained and experienced workers as the Royal Decree pointed

out. Therefore, Saudi companies should consult occupational health and safety experts and explore advice on reasonable adjustments or suitable alternative measure to ensure the safety of their employees, and recognize the cost effectiveness of implementing properly high-quality policies that are designed fair and constructive manner.

## 3. Saudi Arabia small businesses fire safety: What you need to know

One of the most vulnerable businesses to safety regulations in Saudi Arabia are the "small businesses", as they do not always have the monetary resources for employing a full time health and safety department. Nevertheless, health and safety has to be taken into account even in small businesses that are trying to grow in this hard economic climate. The reason that small businesses must adhere to occupational health safety procedures is because they could be liable by law if they do not comply with the severe regulations in place. Furthermore their employees need to be protected in the working place and again the regulations are there in place to protect them.

## 3.1. It's your business: Fire prevention and recovery

Fire safety is a big part of occupational health and safety in workplaces (such as small business, schools, daycares, shopping malls, restaurants coffees) as it is very important that the workers, students, and customers know how to go out the building in a safe and organized way when there is a fire alarm. This is something that workers have practiced since their school days, however there are many of Saudi employers think that fire drills can be a waste of businesses time and resources (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2007).

## 3.2. What do you need to do to when there is a fire drill?

In workplaces where personnel are constantly changing, the new staff needs to have familiarity about the location of fire exits and in the event of a fire they need to know how to proceed themselves.

### 3.2.1. The objectives of a fire drill

One of key concepts for effective emergency response is "preparation" (Health and Safety Executive, 2009). A Guide to Safety and Health Regulation in Great Britain indicate that "conducting effective fire drills helps building owners, property management and others responsible for fire safety within a building" (Office of the Fire Marshal, 2004). The objectives of a fire drill could be learning how to provide timely responses to fire. It can show whether the personnel have the confidence to deal with sudden firings. It is a way to assess the effectiveness of safety measures in workplace. It is also a way to understand whether the safety measures comply with mandatory safety regulations for working places.

## 3.3. Fire training for Saudi workplace

As a small business owner in Saudi Arabia, you are liable to make sure that all your employees know the following items.

- All your workers should know how to initiate a fire alarm in the fire events and also how to contact the safety department.
- The workers should be prepared to use firefighting tools and equipments.
- They should know where the emergency exits are located and who to report to guide others to those locations.

## 3.4. "Saudi employees leave bosses, not jobs"

It is a famous statement that "people leave people, not their jobs". It should be investigated why 40% of employees feel they work for "bad bosses" and how this feeling impact organizations productivity.

It's obvious and well confirmed that this is particularly pertinent to management and support staff. If line managers are sufficiently educated to manage, then there is a greater chance that workers stay and the suffering occupational ill-health will be eliminated or reduced drastically. Unfortunately it's not only the private sector line manager issues, but maybe some government, and other public workplace lack such trained manager.

It is essential to measure your staff in terms of how they feel about other worker and to their peers and managers. Safety and hazards free workplace is extremely important and can be the difference between keeping skilled employee and losing them. Staff development and training is a good way to increase confidence and furnish the workers with the proper skills. Investing in the workers to help them increase skill benefits both the company and the employees.

## 3.5. Centre for healthy working people

In Saudi Arabia there should be National Centre for Healthy Working people to Provide and have all data base information and advice employers and workers concerning workplace health And safety matters. the center also might provides access to data base occupational health specialists, counseling and complementary therapies.

However while it's the duties of the employer to provide employees "such health services as is appropriate Saudi Ministry of health labor, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, stakeholder in workforce and labor market should work toward establishing foundation of Occupational Health and safety. This institution in collaborating with other international organization and other partners and clients to achieve the following goals:

- The management of workplace hazards as a part of national practices and corporate risk management.
- Innovative, invigorate healthy work communities.
- Educate Saudi workers with the knowledge of occupational health and safety.

- Data base information for promoting National occupational safety and health.
- Developing workplaces training, consultation and safe and easy to use workplace safety methods and tools.
- Chemical Controlling occupational hazards while exploit new opportunities

To achieve these goal there should a

- Wider based campaign to focus on the issues of workplace health and safety and raise awareness of all hazards conditions, and the costs to Saudi economy and society.
- Involving the research group at the Saudis Universities to develop future workplace safety and preventative strategies.
- The Saudi Ministry of health and labor should engage with other academics and related groups to identify possible health and safety risks from new technologies, like as exposure to nonmaterial's and implement adequate health screening procedures

## 3.6. What works for Saudi Arabia?

There is no replacement to Saudi stakeholder capacity and engagement in developing comprehensive, occupational, workplace health and safety. Saudi stakeholder should embark on introducing a number of new modern regulations to develop a national occupational health service, involving investors, employers, government and health services.

Jannadi and Al-Sudairi (1995) in their research stated that the duty of providing health and safety on any construction places should be shared between the owner, the architect and the contractor. Therefore, Saudi stakeholder should focused on the changing work environment, identified the potential for rapid change in industrial map of the country cause by the introduction of nanotechnologies and a move to new industries era, and equally. Most importantly, recognized the important of the repercussions of the work environment that caused by rapid industrial permanent change.

## 4. Conclusion

There are important gaps in the coverage of workplace safety, training and services that are accessible to Saudis workers. This indicates the need to apply a safety code in Saudi Arabia to monitor health and safety requirements at workplace. It is important that Saudi employers not separate the important aspects of health interventions, from workplace health and safety. These are central to all stakeholders' group values and should not be over shadowed by the health and safety support agenda, even though this module on its own has a significant role to play in the wider occupational safety and wellbeing agenda.

The quality of private sector occupational health and safety should also be examined, along with a campaign to ensure that employers are involved in planning for occupational health and workplace safety services.

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