



## Standards in organizational health and safety

It's not just companies working with obvious hazards or in unusual operating environments that need to prioritize occupational health and safety (OH&S). Every business has clear responsibilities. Standards deliver a platform from which to address these evolving needs effectively in today's workplace.

Regardless of sector or structure, every organization must ensure its working conditions minimize risk and protect staff, in compliance with all relevant legislation. Aside from financial penalties, poor management of OH&S risks business interruption and reduced productivity, as well as reputational damage.

Because every company is different – processes, operational environment, staff demographics and typical demands for example. Therefore, every organization has an individual situation to consider in terms of OH&S.

Today's workplace is radically different to that of just ten years ago. Changing economic, social and political circumstances across the globe have thrown up unique sets of challenges and new areas of risk.

In many parts of the world, there has been a decrease in heavy industry and a rise in office-based and service jobs. Various industrial diseases, associated with exposure to hazardous

materials, are now better understood and today's workers accordingly enjoy better protection, earlier detection and more effective treatments than those who came before them.

Equally, emerging technologies have introduced new material applications with their own potential for health issues. New job roles and tasks have amplified conditions that previously received little attention. Stress-related complaints cost economies millions each year; musculoskeletal conditions, repetitive strain injury (RSI), eye strain and other chronic health issues are also widespread.

A further consideration for corporate management teams is that flexible and remote working practices have added another layer of complexity, especially given an organization's employees tended to work at designated locations in the past.

Despite this, companies of all sizes can take a standards-based approach to managing OH&S.

The process by which both large and small organizations can begin to manage workplace psychological health is also the same – by identifying primary risk factors and assessing what can be done to change the current working environment.

Corporations can use the international standard ISO 45001 which provides a clear framework to benchmark and improve OH&S performance, as well as laying the ground for continuous improvement.

Developed by experts from around 70 countries in liaison with representatives from the International Labour Organization (ILO), International Trades Union Confederation (ITUC) and International Organisation of Employers (IOE), ISO 45001 aims to tackle the needs of many different cultures.

Taking a risk-based approach dependent on each user's individual situation, the standard is designed to make organizations think broadly about anything that can have a detrimental effect and create the right structures to efficiently manage OH&S and comply with the law. ISO 45001 also integrates seamlessly with other

management systems standards, such as ISO 9001 (quality management) and ISO 14001 (environmental management).

Like many other management system standards, ISO 45001 uses a simple 'plan-do-check-act' (PDCA) model to help systematically minimize the risk of harm to all workers. It addresses factors which can lead to long-term health issues and absence from work, as well as those that give rise to accidents.

Momentum has also been gathering in recent years to better recognize the issue of workplace mental health. Improved transparency and increased mainstream awareness, means organizational leadership can't ignore its responsibility when it comes establishing a culture in which staff feel able to discuss depression, stress, anxiety and other related concerns.

Workplace mental health covers anything from an individual's work schedule, timescales and how tasks are organized, to flexibility and work-life balance, as well as the human relationships involved. A healthy workplace manages all these dimensions to promote sustainable staff





wellbeing.

Standards development has also been active in this area. A new standard – ISO 45003 – is under development and will be the first to tackle psychological health in the workplace. Expected by mid-2021, it will supplement ISO 45001 to help small business owners appraise their current situation and guide the introduction of a management system for psychological health and safety in the workplace.

With all this in place, organizations can respond effectively to a transforming workplace culture, managing risk by promoting a safe and healthy workforce that reflects on society as a whole.

## Summary

- Standards deliver a platform from which to address evolving organizational OH&S responsibility. Aside from financial penalties, poor management of OH&S risks business interruption and reduced productivity, as well as reputational damage.

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- Corporations can use the international standard ISO 45001 which provides a clear framework to benchmark and improve OH&S performance, as well as laying the ground for continuous improvement.
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