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Prevention the best cure for workplace dangers, senior UN official says



28 April 2011 – Preventive measures are central to ensuring people worldwide have safer workplaces, the head of the United Nations International Labour Organization ([ILO](#)) said today, stressing the need for better measures given that an estimated 337 million people are injured each year while on the job and more than 2 million others die from mishaps or occupational illnesses.

“The tragedy is that so many accidents, illnesses and deaths could be prevented with appropriate managerial measures,” said Juan Somavia, the ILO Director-General, in a [message](#) to mark the World Day for Safety and Health at Work, which is observed today.

“It is a matter of respecting the dignity of the human being through the dignity of work; of shaping policies that reflect the central role of work in people’s lives, in peaceful communities, in stable societies and in resilient economies.”

Mr. Somavia stressed that building a strong preventative safety and health culture depended on strong commitment, collaboration and concerted action by governments, employers and workers, adding that safety was a matter of respecting human dignity and the dignity of work, and ensuring that decent work for all is part of the framework for sustainable growth.

He said the ILO had guidelines for developing national standards and programmes at enterprise level and that many countries had started to implement them through voluntary or regulatory mechanisms.

Technical assistance on the application of the guidelines and courses are also offered by the ILO International Training Centre in Turin, Italy, he said.

“Given the importance of prevention, and the financial and human resource constraints of many countries, occupational safety and health is a critical area for new cooperation initiatives including South-South and triangular cooperation initiatives,” Mr. Somavia added.

He also urged the world not to forget those working in the informal economy, where adequate participatory training, awareness raising and low-cost measures based on local development approaches and good practices could save lives and contribute to better workplaces.

He pointed that new technologies and new forms of work organization had come with new challenges, noting that risks associated with chemicals and bio-technologies were on the rise.

“So too are psychosocial risks as workers deal with the pressures of modern working life, exacerbated in times of economic crisis. This complex situation has an adverse impact on human lives, health-care costs and on economic performance.

“Occupational safety and health must be integral components of strategies for productive employment and decent work. It will involve striking the right balance between voluntary and mandatory approaches reflecting local needs and practice. But above all, occupational safety and health must become a reflex of all.”

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