Principle 5: Working Conditions Are Safe and Healthy

Workers have a safe and healthy work environment, subject to a robust health and safety management system that is compliant with all governing health and safety laws and regulations and is aligned with applicable international standards and industry best-practice. This includes access to safe and clean transportation and welfare amenities on project sites; and the promotion of transparent and external reporting regarding health and safety incidents.

Introduction

Applying the Building Responsibly principles in practice will be unique in every instance. This guidance note offers discussion around the potential issues and challenges faced and offers suggested good practice options for the implementation of each principle in the Key Components for Consideration section.

By nature, engineering and construction involve a range of inherently hazardous activities, presenting risks that must be carefully controlled to prevent serious injuries and fatalities. Construction is recognized by the ILO as one of the most hazardous sectors for workers: one-sixth of all fatal accidents at work occur in construction. Ensuring the health and safety of workers is therefore a key challenge for the construction sector.

Key Terms and Definitions

» **Well-being**: Relates to all aspects of workers’ lives, from the quality and safety of their physical working environment to the conditions of their accommodations and personal well-being.

» **Welfare Amenities**: Amenities that are necessary and adequate for the well-being of workers, such as washing, toilets, rest and leisure, changing facilities, and somewhere clean to eat and drink during breaks.

» **Health and Safety Incident**: An unplanned or unwanted event that results in an injury or illness to an employee.

» **Health, Safety, Security, and Environment (HSSE)**: HSSE covers the range of issues that are generally addressed in dedicated management systems that aim at providing a safe and healthy environment for workers.

» **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**: Equipment worn by an employee to reduce exposure to hazards that cause workplace injuries and illnesses.

Key Challenges

**Intrinsically Hazardous and Physically Demanding Nature of the Work**

By nature, construction involves activities that may expose workers to physically demanding work as well as risks, including work at height, vehicle movement, heavy lifting, fall of materials, and excavations. Construction work may involve exposure to high temperatures, extreme weather, high noise levels, and potentially harmful substances like dust, fumes, chemicals, or biological agents. Musculoskeletal stress is also a risk.

**Excessive Working Hours and Insufficient Rest Periods**

Given the nature of construction work and demanding delivery schedules, employers may require workers to work more or longer shifts, with limited breaks or time off. The associated cumulative sleep
deprivation can cause worker fatigue and lead to accidents on the work site. Transportation of the workforce to and from the work site can compound the issue of worker fatigue by adding hours of unpaid, non-rest time for the workforce. Moreover, workers may request overtime to augment their wages or to obtain a preferred shift rotation.

Managing HSSE Standards within the Subcontracting and Supply Chain
Outsourcing and subcontracting have become more common across the engineering and construction sectors, making it more challenging to efficiently manage the risks associated with the workforce. This is particularly true regarding smaller subcontractors, who may not have fully developed health and safety management systems and increasingly rely on indirect, temporary, or casual workers, who may speak a variety of languages.

Insufficient Laws and Limited Worker Involvement
In many developing countries where large infrastructure development is taking place, the occupational health and safety laws and practices are limited, leaving workers, in particular the most vulnerable, with few legal protections.

Key Components for Consideration

- Companies should develop and implement an appropriate management system and supporting processes to prevent, identify and mitigate HSSE risks.
- Companies should ensure each workplace complies at minimum with local laws and industry standards and best practices.
- Companies should ensure provision of clean and sufficient welfare amenities.
- Companies should allocate clear responsibilities and resources to implement HSSE management systems at all levels.
- Companies should conduct regular risk assessments to identify potential HSSE hazards.
- Companies should provide information and frequent training to workers on issues such as basic hazard awareness, site-specific hazards, safe work practices, and emergency procedures. This information and training should align with identified risks and be tailored to workers’ education levels and language. Specific attention should be given to new and migrant workers.
- Companies should provide adequate preventive and protective measures, standard PPE, and specialized PPE where required, free of charge.
- Companies should develop and implement a system for reporting and management of occupational incidents and accidents and near misses. Companies’ responses to reports should include thorough investigation and the development of mitigation measures to prevent recurrence.
- Companies should provide emergency prevention, preparedness, and response arrangements.
- Companies should enable workers to provide feedback and report incidents without fear of retaliation.
- Companies should ensure that workers do not work beyond legal limits or recognized standards for regular or overtime hours.
- Companies should ensure that all workers are empowered to stop work activities that they believe to be unsafe.
- Companies should provide transport from the work site to accommodation and welfare amenities. This transport should respect local legislation and collective agreements in place and follow international standards in road safety.
- Companies should ensure that subcontractors have appropriate HSSE management systems for their permanent and temporary workers.
Tools and Resources

» International Labour Convention No.155 on Occupational Safety and Health
» ILO: Safety and Health in Construction Code of Practice – practical guidance for safety and health in the construction sector ILO Good Practices and Challenges in Promoting Decent Work in Construction and Infrastructure Projects
» ILO Helpdesk on Occupational Safety and Health;
» ILO Website on Health and Safety
» World Bank, Environmental, Health and Safety Guidelines
» OSHA – 29 CFR PART1926 and 29 CFR PART1910
» IPECA Managing Fatigue in the workplace
» IOGP Report 597: Fabrication site construction safety recommended the practice (section 3)
» ISO 45001:2018 Occupational Health and Safety
» ISO 14001:2015 Environmental Management

About Building Responsibly

Building Responsibly is a group of leading engineering and construction companies working together to raise the bar in promoting the rights and welfare of workers across the industry. We have come together to foster and ensure a better working environment for workers in the engineering and construction sector. Doing so will allow us to more effectively respond to client, stakeholder, and regulatory expectations and manage a healthier, more productive workforce.

For more information and resources to support implementation of these Principles, visit www.building-responsibly.org.

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