

IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY IN INDIAN CONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

This research paper illustrates the present scenario of the labours working in the construction firms with respect to health and safety issues. It gives the information about safety principles compared to the construction field ground reality based on daily routines at site. Lucidly, the safety professionals are required at site to take responsibility in getting acknowledge the discrete safety and health rules, regulations, acts and principle simultaneously creating attention among each other and entourage the industry for the advancement of the project and mankind.

Keywords: *Construction, Safety, Injury, Accidents, Workers*

I INTRODUCTION

Construction in developing countries such as India is more labour-intensive than that in the developed areas of the globe. In numerous developing countries such as India, there is a significant difference between large and small contractors. Most large firms do have a safety policy, on paper, but employees generally are not aware of its existence. Nevertheless, a number of major constructors exhibit a concern for safety and have established various safety procedures. They also provide training for workers and maintain safety personnel at the job site.

Construction Industry in India is highly prone to hazards related to site activities and construction projects engage large number of contractual workers. These workers come from varied trades especially from rural areas and agricultural background who do not have proper training in construction safety also are not literate enough to forecast the unknown dangers. During execution at site, these workers are exposed to various risks involved in construction works and other occupational diseases and health hazards which cause injuries and illnesses. As a result, the construction projects get delayed due to loss of working hours and other legal hassles. This ultimately accounts for cost and time overrun. Therefore, it is essential for any construction project to have

certain safety guidelines and procedure to be followed for site activities and to create awareness among the workers, site supervisor and engineers.

II OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The objective of study are the following:-

- a) To determine the various facades of construction safety
- b) To get information about health and safety act and regulations
- c) To know causes of a major injury
- d) Efforts put in practice in India

III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology is designed in such a way that it depends on four factors which are taken into consideration:-

- i. Health and safety issues for construction workers
- ii. Safety principles v/s ground reality
- iii. Construction accidents
- iv. Foundation of major and minor injury
- v. Efforts put in practice in India
- vi. To conclude the implementation of zero injury environment



Figure 3.1. Representation of unique methodology for Safety in Indian Construction

IV HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

Majority of the health issues that labours are facing in construction field are the following:-

- a) Pain or injury from overexertion.
- b) Repetitive manual tasks, or working in uncooperative postures.
- c) Exposure to moulds, fungi or rodent droppings.
- d) Exposure to paints, lead, wood dust, asbestos and/or toxic chemical solutions.
- e) Working in extreme conditions like high temperatures and under UV radiations.
- f) Working with hand tools, powered tools and heavy machinery equipments.
- g) Excessive vibration of hands, arms or body from powered tools or equipments.
- h) Extension of work days, stress or Shift work hours.
- i) During night, working in low lightening or poor visibility

The best way to protect workers against hazards is to control problems at the source. OSHA stated that workers must have PPE (Personal Protective equipment) that fits properly. Poorly fitted PPE may cause additional hazards. Construction safety (the intermediate phase between a finished design and a completed building) is largely the responsibility of the contractors and other site professionals. Hazard can be defined as a physical or chemical characteristic that has the potential to cause harm to people, property and to the environment. To prevent health hazards at work, all possible sources should be identified before commencement of construction work. Hazards at a construction site may come from hazardous substances used on site, and/ also environmental variables may create additional risks as heat and noise. Most construction accidents result from basic root causes such as lack of proper training, deficient enforcement of safety, unsafe equipment, unsafe methods or sequencing, unsafe site conditions, not using the safety equipment that was provided, and a poor attitude towards safety.

V SAFETY PRINCIPLES V/S GROUND REALITY

Safety Principle: Ensuring safety at construction sites is mandatory requirement as it is directly related to welfare of staffs and contractors' workers.

Ground Reality: Many sites don't have the necessary safety equipment such as safety harness vest while working at heights.

Safety Principle: All accidents and occurrences of near-misses can be avoided by proper planning and thorough implementation of safe practices at work place.

Ground Reality: Planning is generally done by the labors or less experience supervisors as per their suitability and ease, without considering the risk involved.

Safety Principle: To increase the safety consciousness of the workforce and the supervisory staffs through continuous training and motivation towards safe practices.

Ground Reality: It is only reputed builders and contractors that have adopted such practices.

Safety Principle: Regular monitoring, inspections and safety audits will form an integral part of the safety programs at the worksite.

Ground Reality: Many sites do not follow such audits and monitoring to avoid the extra cost and effort.

VI HEALTH AND SAFETY RULES AND REGULATIONS

There are two major pieces of legislation governing health and safety law. These are:

- Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Condition of Services) Act 1996
- Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Condition of Services) Central Rules 1998

Allied to these are several statutory instruments governing safety. These are:

- Factories Act 1948

- The Delhi Building and Other Constructions Workers (Regulation of Employment and Condition of Services) Rules 2002
- Indian Electricity Act 1948
- Indian Electricity Regulations 1956
- Motor Vehicle Act 1998

Construction safety in India is still in its early years because safety laws are not strictly enforced. The contractors ignore many basic safety rules and regulations from the start of any work. However, to improve working conditions, the government has enacted specific legislations like the Minimum Wages Act, the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1923 (modified in 1962), and the Contract Labour (Regulation and abolition) Act of 1970, of which only a small amount scope and procedures are put into practice. National Building Code of India, 2005 provides guidelines for regulating construction activities for a building; across the country along with many IS codes of Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), such as, SP70-Handbook on Construction Safety Practices for site engineers, Project Managers, and engineers-in-charge of buildings and civil works. Even then, worker's safety in the Indian construction industry is frequently pushed to the bottom in the priority list of most of the builders, contractors, and engineers while many are unaware of any such norms and regulation

In developing countries like India, Bangladesh, etc., safety rules usually do not exist, even if it exists; regulatory authorities are unable to implement such rules effectively. Therefore, it is up to the construction professional to inculcate and concrete these safety norms in their working and ultimately setting up a desired standard. This can definitely reduce accidents that directly or indirectly reduce project cost and ultimately the delays. In India efforts should be made to raise the level of awareness among the workers and the employers about the importance of health and safety-related issues.

VII FOUNDATION OF MAJOR INJURY

The recognition that any unintended occurrence is an accident is the first requirement of hazard control. It is altogether a different matter whether such accidents results in injury or not. It can be observed that on many occasions the accidents do not cause any injury due to a number of reasons. In construction, for instance, objects falling from height may miss a person by a whisker. Such instances are also known as near misses and they are as important as accidents involving injuries.

According to a study conducted by **Heinrich(1959)**, the ratio of 'no injury' to 'minor injury' to 'major injury' is **300:29:1** (see Figure 7.1). Underlying these minor injuries are numerous unsafe practices and unsafe conditions that, fortunately, may not result in any accident. **Bird and Loftus (1982)** have updated this ratio with further information on property damage accidents. According to this study, the ratio of 'near miss accidents' to 'property damaging accidents' to 'accidents involving minor injuries' to 'accidents involving serious or disabling injuries' is **600:30:10:1** (see figure 7.2). The moral of these ratio studies is that accident prevention must start with prevention of unsafe practices and unsafe conditions as well as of minor injuries.

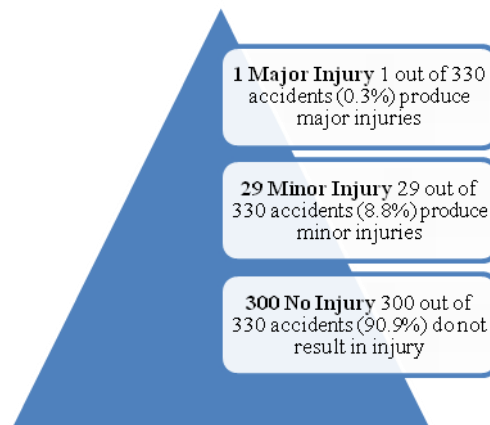


Figure 7.1 Foundation of major injuries (Heinrich 1959)

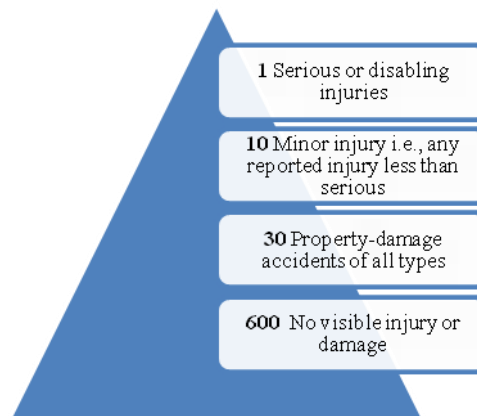


Figure 7.2 Foundation of major accidents/injuries (Bird and Loftus 1982, cited in Mining Safety Handbook)

VIII CONSTRUCTION ACCIDENTS

Accidents in the construction industry are costly in human and financial terms. The economic cost is not the only basis on which a contractor should consider construction safety. The reasons for considering safety are humanitarian concerns, economic reasons, laws and regulations, and organizational image. Cost of safety is paid by the organization either through the uncontrolled cost of accidents or through the controlled cost of safety program. The uncontrolled cost of accidents includes the loss of productivity, administrative time for investigations, disruption of schedules, wages paid to the injured workers, adverse publicity, liability claims, and equipment damage. The controlled cost of safety program consists of salaries of safety, medical, and clinical personnel, expenses for safety meetings, inspections of tools and equipment, orientation sessions, site inspections, personal protective equipment, and health programs. The identification of root causes of accidents is a complex process. Accident mitigation requires a comprehensive understanding of construction process. With increasing population and expansion of urbanization, many projects are therefore, carried in congested

spaces of cities, like Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Chennai, etc., where, not only the safety of the workers inside the site needs to be ensured but also the safety of people passing and residing in the adjacent. Still every month accidents, such as, adjoining residents being killed in mishaps, pieces of reinforcement falling and piercing in someone's body, dusty environments as a result of construction activities resulting health hazards, etc., come up which can bring a legal stay over the project and thus making errands of walks to court which instead could have been prevented if precautionary measures would have been taken.

A. Accident statistics

In the economic point of view, the construction industry plays a vital role as it typically contributes 10 per cent of a developing country's GNP. It is also very hazardous with almost six times as many fatalities and twice as many injuries per hour worked relative to a manufacturing industry. Helander analyze 739 construction fatalities that occurred in the UK. He found that fifty two per cent occurred due to falls from roofs, scaffolds and ladders. Falling objects and material were involved in 19.4 per cent of the deaths, and transportation equipment, (e.g. excavators and dumpers) were involved in 18.5 per cent. Helander also found that 5 per cent of construction accidents occur during excavation work. The categories used for classifying fatal accidents were:

- a) Falls
- b) Falling material and objects
- c) Electrical hazards
- d) Transport and mobile plants
- e) Other

Most of the accidents that involved falls occur during work on roofs, scaffolds and ladders. Moreover, collapses of structures and falling materials also contribute for a large proportion of victims. Many of the safety hazards are particular to the different trades, and usually construction workers underestimate the hazards in their own work which affects the motivation for adopting safe work procedures. The establishment and use of procedures and regulations to enhance safety can avoid a large proportion of these accidents. There are also forceful monetary incentives in construction safety as it is estimated that construction accidents amount to about six per cent of total building costs; this should encourage the industry as well as the regulatory agencies to invest in construction safety.

IX EFFORTS IN INDIA

Efforts are taken by government by setting up, National Safety Council (NSC) which generates, develops and sustains a voluntary movement on Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) at the national level. It carries out various activities such as specialized training courses, conferences, seminars & workshops; conducting consultancy services such as safety audits, hazard evaluation & risk assessment; designing and developing HSE promotional materials & publications; facilitating organizations in celebrating various campaigns e.g. Safety Day, Fire Service Week, World Environment Day i.e. 4th March, in India, is celebrated as National Safety Day/Week every year, during which various campaigns are organized in promotion of Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) movement to different parts of the country. Apart from this, the BIS (Bureau of Indian

Standards) have taken intensive researches and studies to publish many SP and IS codes, for bringing standardization, marking and quality certification of goods and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, acting as guidelines for construction, manufacturing, processing etc.

With increase in market competition, many construction giants are taking up modern trends and technique, such as, ISO certification, under which they are to undertake the safety of their workers, set up safety organization, issue safety policy, safety checklist, safety manuals, etc. These giants have understood the importance of safety after having gone through the adverse side effects of non-safe acts. The cost of accidents can go anywhere from low cost to tremendous high cost, which not only affects the current projects but also the upcoming project of the company. Now companies define standards for every project, for health and safety guideline. Regular health and fitness checkup for every member is carried out. Gammon India holds the record of *Twelve Million* hours of accident-free work at Kalpakkam.

X CONCLUSION

Owing to increase in complexity of operations, the construction industry has become more dangerous than ever before. Construction organizations are faced with the challenge of having to closely monitor their safety management systems to minimize occupational hazards, while simultaneously trying to sustain profits in a competitive marketplace. In the United States, government agencies such as Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) have done their part to promote a ZERO injury environment. However, in India effective safety construction management is not available. Moreover, the key to proper safety execution is not necessarily through strict guidelines and standards, but through an effective total safety management initiative, first supported by an organizations senior management, then integrated via specific safety management implementation tools/ systems, and finally by continuous follow up and monitoring to ensure quality and continuous improvement. It is the attitude of the senior management and proprietary contractors to take the initiative and start giving importance to health & safety of workers and engineers at site. Construction organizations interested in maximizing safety and competitiveness must look to Total Quality Management (TQM) initiatives for inspiration. Quality focus, total commitment, and continual improvement must be the mantra of choice. Only those companies that take on an aggressive safety management approach will sustain profit margins and achieve world-class competitiveness.

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