



Shaping the future H&S in the construction industry

Key challenges and opportunities

Friday 29 October 2021 (10:00-12:30) – online seminar

One of the major challenges of the construction industry is to ensure the safety and health of workers performing various tasks and activities, often associated with a dynamic high-risk working environment. In many cases, accidents in the construction industry are potentially very serious, as related to daily activities such as working at height, working in confined spaces, being exposed to airborne and physical hazards and many more. It concerns every worker on a construction site whether directly employed by the main contractor or sub-contractors. An additional challenge in this special industry derives from the dynamic of different cultures, linguistic backgrounds, and work experience. Exchange of information and best practice becomes ever more important as part of the continuous process of improvement in managing safety and health on a construction site. Common efforts in improving safety and health of the worker must not only apply to those employed directly by the big companies but also by SMEs.

Overview of construction market in Europe

Roman Horvath, Policy officer - European Construction Sector Observatory

The speaker representing the European Commission provided an overview of the construction sector in Europe, from its outlook to its challenges, with a specific focus on health and safety at work. The presentation also provided an overview of the role and the analyses of the European construction sector observatory (ECSO), an EU initiative aiming at carrying out comparative assessments on the construction sector in all 27 EU countries and the UK.

The social control in the workplace: the Italian experience

Dott. A. Terracina – Contarp - INAIL Italian Worker Compensation Authorities

The Italian collective agreement for different production sectors establishes joint committees between Employers and Unions to deal with different common issues such as OH&S matters. The OH&S Italian most important law, D.lgs 81/08, gave the opportunities to joint committees to verify and “certify” the adoption of “OH&S organizational model” which can be based on OHSAS:18001 (and UNI ISO 45001:18) or on Italian UNI -INAIL OH&S MS guidelines. The construction sector joint committee was the first one, strongly supported by INAIL, to promote a UNI standard containing the rules for such an unusual “certification” with the aim to strengthen the collaboration among companies and their social representatives in order to promote safe and healthy workplaces.

A commitment to safety - best practice in construction

Adam Sękowski - QHSE Director, Headquarter, Quality, Safety, Environment & Internal Control Department, Eiffage

The safety of employees is undoubtedly a strategic priority for construction companies, but despite the current legislation, the individual approach of the employer is the main driver for an effective implementation. The exchange of experience between industry experts is key for constructive change and a practice that should be strongly promoted. One example is the communication for safety in construction in Poland, that brings together the leaders of this industry. Jointly developed recommendations and contacts with the Labour Inspectorate are a way of improving working conditions. Good practices gathered in the form of a code of safe working at height developed by national experts, including practical guidance for various activities, are the starting point for completing the technical requirements of the legislation.

Today's health and safety challenges for the construction industry: the use of respiratory protection in construction work

Reinhold Rühl – ETUC-EFBWW

The speaker presented practical implementation of effective respiratory protection incl. the key challenges and regulatory requirements. The proper selection and then adjustment & face seal of respiratory protection equipment is a much broader issue than silica. The respiratory risks in construction relate to wood dusts, asbestos, chemical agents, dusts and gases of bituminous origin and many others. The presentation covered a short introduction on diseases, protective measures and wearing respiratory protection on construction sites.

Holistic Occupational Health and Hygiene Management

Eric Ball – Park Health and Safety Partnership LLP

Using exposure to respirable crystalline silica as an example, this presentation told the story of how Park Health and Safety operates a holistic occupational health management strategy on major construction projects in the UK.

Conclusions at the end of the webinar

We had an interesting exchange of experiences from different European countries and from different perspectives. **Thank you to all speakers and participants for a very interesting webinar.**

Some key thoughts :

- Human capital is critical – not only skills of the personnel, but also their health & safety. Even with a very well organised and technically highly developed sector/company, without a safe and healthy workforce the sector/company will fail.
- Governmental and standardisation support for health and safety at work is important. But also working together and learning from each other to improve H&S in a sector.
- Risk assessment applied by the inspection, based on applied standards in companies helps to focus on the potentially highest risk situations, which in turn leads to quicker improvements.
- Companies working together on H&S, as in the Polish example, can be inspiring for other countries and sectors.
- Involvement of all partners, from the design onwards, works. Not only eco-design but also safe-design (e.g. also considering creating safe working conditions for the persons doing the maintenance).

- There is an important difference between theory (legislation – standards) and practice on the workforce. Therefore, an appeal to legislators and standardisers to take reality into account : “theory” must be easily implemented.
- A holistic approach is certainly a very good practical way forward. And remember : H&S at work also has an influence on health and safety of the general population.

Call for actions :

- There is a lot to learn from each other – so as organisers of the webinar, there is certainly room for follow-up webinar/event to facilitate this exchange.
- Training and Fit-testing (not only for respiratory protection, – also e.g. fall protection, hearing protection, ... but also skin care) : still a lot of work to do in terms of awareness and training. Something to work on together as not effective by only one partner of the complete chain. Suppliers of PPE have a role to play, together with all other stakeholders/partners.
- How to measure the effect of use / correct use of PPE ? Data on this would be very useful. How can we work on this ? Suggestions are welcome.

Additional information mentioned during the webinar :

- European Construction Sector Observatory - Policy fact sheet - Poland - Construction Safety Agreement <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/43628>
- Report published by DGUV (in German only) : Quarzexpositionen am Arbeitsplatz (exposure to quartz in the workplace) : <https://www.dguv.de/ifa/publikationen/reports-download/reports-2020/vorabveroeffentlichung-quarzexpositionen/index.jsp>