

WORKPLACE HEALTH SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL OUTLOOK IN EBONYI STATE NIGERIA

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Significant poverty reduction, equitable economic development and improved public health of the people of Ebonyi State Nigeria depends on identifying and valuing the possible risks and dangers associated with their workplace health and safety over time periods much longer than the lives of their investments.

This paper presents headline findings of a survey of 4600 workers conducted between September 2005 and February 2006, focusing particularly on numbers exposed to different groups of hazard and workers' concerns, training levels and view of trend in risk. 85% of the workers responded due to high prevalence of hazards. These are workers who have suffered work injury or work-related illness. The most widespread and prevalent hazard were dust or fume exposure, skin contact, lifting or carrying heavy loads, representing an estimated 38% of the working population, 21% of the workforce expressed concern that stress could cause them harm. The remaining 41% of the workforce responded indifferently to health and safety matters. Access to health and personal safety devices such as: cover-all, hand -gloves, safety boots or shoes, helmet, ear muffs, nose mask, water supply, and toilet for improved sanitary conditions; and first aid box for emergency health challenges are abysmally poor in most of the workplace.

Respondents believed that various categories of health and safety risk have increased remarkably in the past few years.

Waste from these workplaces are not properly managed and disposed hence, rate of pollution particularly, on surface water bodies are high. Bacterial indicators, from fecal coliform contaminations of surface water near those workplaces are case evidence.

Possible recommendations such as: formulation of workplace health and safety policy that will incorporate and enforce effective HSE management plan; awareness campaign for HSE compliance through seminars and workshops, as well as capacity building by informal and formal training of employees; provision of sustainable water supply to help improve sanitary conditions of workplaces; provide and maintain effective waste management system to help reduce pollution problems within and around workplaces; formulate HSE routine audit plan to check for compliance or non-compliance to HSE Standards; devise statutes by village and town organization, local charities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) act as health safety and environmental vanguards, are proffered as remediation for improvement. There is great need for international donor agencies and governments to participate in solving this emergent unhealthy workplace disaster. Donor organizations could contribute in areas of manpower development, education, and funding of regional-scale study of unhealthy workplaces as well as application of remediation measures.