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Occupational Health and Safety in China calls for CSR

A Case study of China CDC and GE Foundation Project

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Abstract

Purpose: To improve occupational safety and health and implement corporate social responsibility in China.

Methodology: Since September of 2005, GE Foundation has worked together with NIOHP, China CDC to develop the training project to control Occupational Hazards in Chinese Industrial Enterprises. Government, CDC, NGOs, multinational corporations, state-owned enterprises and small-medium-sized companies co-participated in the training.

Findings: The training for legal persons and managers improved their occupational safety and health consciousness effectively, and promoted them to fulfill corporate social responsibility in Chinese industrial enterprises.

Value: The project also gives us a new exploring for further cooperation and training model in the field of OHS to improve the work-condition to protect the workers' health and help them work in decent, safe and healthy way.

Keywords: occupational health and safety, corporate social responsibility, training

Introduction

The corporation is the principal organization needing to practice occupational health and safety. It's a precondition to protect the workers' health and help them to work in decent, safe and healthy way that the proprietors of corporations fulfill the main objectives of social responsibility. It's an irreversible trend to confirm the profits of corporations, employees, and environment organically, to fulfill people-oriented, nature-economy-community harmony and sustainable development.

Occupational health and safety(OHS) challenges being faced in China

OHS has become a big public health concern in China

From reform and opening-up the economy , the government, community, and corporations focused on short-term economic interest, and created economic growth at all costs. The serious problems, such as environment pollution and OHS problem, came with such blind and rapid economic growing. This problem restricted the socio-economic development and social harmony so that occupational diseases and morbidity increases, migrant workers' OHS rights and interest defaults, poisoning affairs and mining affairs continually occurred. A large number of workers are being threatened by severe OHS problems; with a total population of 1.3 billion, approx 700 million are in the active workforce, and most of them are blue-collar workers. In addition, a large proportion, in particular of migrant workers, has been exposed to potential occupational hazards. A number of 150-200 million rural population is floating into cities and non-farming sectors, which accounts for more than 1/3 of the total rural labor force. Most of them were in low education level, low caste, engage in arduous, dangerous, burdensome manual work, devoid of self-protect consciousness, didn't know how to protect self legal right and interest and health, knew little about occupational poison and diseases. To earn more money, they would sacrifice their health, even lives, and faced to work hazards, poisons, pneumoconiosis, work stress, noise, and so on.

Economic burden of occupational illness and accident

Occupational illnesses and injuries are costing China 100 billion RMB annually (US\$12.5 billion) in direct losses, a senior health official has warned. The indirect costs could double the figure to 200 billion RMB (US\$25 billion). These account for 6% of the national GDP (300/5000 billion), which is 33% higher than that of global economic burden due to occupational illnesses & accidents (4%).

CSR was imperceptible

The principles are the same between Chinese laws of product safety, prevention and cure of occupational diseases, social security and the rules of CSR. The key is the surveillance part of the local government because the corporations neglected the labor's right and interest, pursued economic developing only, therefore CSR was imperceptible, surveillance was absent, corporations were short of self-discipline mechanism, and the relative items of the law and rules could not be fulfilled.

Policy, Law & Regulations: International Standards and National Priorities

Both the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have advocated OHS rights of workers through conventions and declarations for decades. For example: ILO: Occupational Safety and Health Conventions; WHO: Beijing Declaration "Occupational Health for All".

Key Issues in Safety & Health Law and Regulations

Being faced with these challenges, a number of key legislations in OHS have been put into the agenda, examples include: The Occupational Disease Prevention and Control Act, P.R. China, (ODPC-ACT). It was adopted by the National People Congress in 2001, and put into effect since May 1, 2002, which has become the most comprehensive and compulsive law on occupational health since then.

Key Issues in Health and Safety Law

The Labor Contract Law of the P. R. China, which was adopted in 2007, and came into force on Jan 1, 2008. This Law shall be applied to the establishment of employment relationship between employees and enterprises, individual economic organizations, private non-enterprise entities, organizations.

Other laws relevant to Migrant Worker Protections

Migrant Worker Protection Rules. The circular on enhancing management of contracts for workers from rural areas in construction and other industries, co-promulgated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, Ministry of Construction and ACFTU, in 2005. To deal with the changing work situation, there have been new rules on occupational accident insurance since 1 Jan 2004:

- All firms are now required to have occupational accident insurance and to pay the relevant contributions,
- Workers, including itinerant workers, are entitled to benefits from such insurance.

The Chinese trade unions have positively advanced and participated in formulation of laws and regulations concerning workers' safety and health rights and interests and with regard to supervision over safety production by trade unions, such as: The Labor Law, Trade Union Law, Safety Production Law, Labor Contract Law, Industrial Injury Insurance Regulation, etc.

There are National Programming of Occupational Disease Prevention and Control (2009-2015) and Healthy China 2020 Strategic Planning. The central government attaches great importance to occupational disease prevention and control now. Various kinds of enterprises can not escape the responsibility of occupational disease prevention and control. To protect workers' health and safety is a key duty of enterprises and it is the embodiment of corporate social responsibility.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in China

The concept of CSR is gaining wide-spread attention in China and is triggering various activities.

Despite remaining sensitivities on topics such as freedom of association, the concept is receiving Chinese government support. The China Enterprise Reform and Development Administration and Shenzhen municipal government have recently announced initiatives to develop "CSR" standards. Labor health and safety, as well as environmental protection, are key components of the CSR initiatives being discussed within China. More Chinese government departments, business associations and trade union groups conducted their own research on CSR. China takes an active and participatory approach towards how to use CSR as a competitive advantage to keep the enterprises moving during the critical period of financial crisis.

1. To build up the corporations citizen consciousness, create the CSR culture, arouse the corporations focusing on their contribution to the community, take part in commonweal and charity project in their power, help and aid the disadvantaged group and difficult group, sustain the education, science, culture, health, physical education or training, environment protection, society public facilities construction, promote the society advancement and public welfare career. When they contributed to the society, the corporations could stand in a steadier and healthier social economic environment.

2. Strengthen the consciousness of OHS in CSR

The corporations should focus on OHS and employees' basic right and interest, environment protection, public safety (including the safety of their production), to promote their ability of brand competition and profit; promise and give a practical way to fulfill OHS of CSR; conform that Profit-People-Planet is the pivot of CSR structure, and could not be replaced, the profit comes from the healthy worker and good environment. In these global economic days, the corporations which pursue economic interest only, and ignore OHS, would be restricted in international trade.

Case study: the training project of occupational hazards prevention and control in industry corporations

Background

Chinese Center for Disease Control (CCDC) and GE co-sponsored OHS training program offer courses on:

- How a multinational corporation can transcend the boundaries of its own operations and supply chain to initiate CSR, promote human rights for OHS across a wider range of areas.
- To improve OHS practice across all local industries, multinational corporations take partnership with Chinese organizations to tackle the knowledge and technology gaps on OHS.

GE Foundation and GE business units in China seek to address this challenge through an ongoing collaboration with CCDC.

There are several business opportunities and advantages linked to GE's sponsorship and involvement in this program. The program has given GE the opportunity to develop and deepen relationships with the Chinese government-through which agency representatives have increased their familiarity with GE's business lines and practices.

GE has also helped to improve OHS standards in China and drive improved performance, which in turn reflects positively on GE's brand and reputation. Not only for training participants learn firsthand about GE's safety practices, but also the companies' representatives are more likely to understand GE better and trust the company.

Positive brand image and increased brand familiarity are also more passively driven by the fact that GE's logo is included in every training course, forum and conference.

Program Purpose:

CCDC and GE Fund co-sponsored training program on occupational health has been launched and implemented since Sep. 2005, which is aimed at:

- Aligned with EHS professionals and employees, according to the Occupational Disease Prevention and Control Act, PR China.
- To prompt employers putting OHS into the agenda of corporate social responsibility initiatives and always being responsible for Prevention and Control of Occupational Hazards.

To upgrade knowledge and appropriate technology for EHS professionals at enterprises conducive to further improve OHS provision at workplaces

To empower employees with proper attitude and basic knowledge to facilitate their participating in the activities towards prevention and control of occupational hazards and self-protection at workplaces.

Scope of the Training Program:

The training program is organized around the three core objectives of: strengthening leaders and employers' CSR concept aligned with improving occupational health and safety at workplaces; cultivating highly trained EHS professionals towards upgrading operational capabilities on occupational health and safety management and services; and empowering employees with basic knowledge and skill to protect themselves from occupational hazards and participating in OHS activities.

To achieve these scopes, a range of common and specialized training courses were offered under the auspices of China CDC, local governmental health agencies and the enterprises. For example:

Leadership and management training

Ten courses of "General principles and knowledge of occupational health and safety management" were given to company managers at capital city Beijing, and other provinces, municipalities and/or Autonomous Region, with nearly 1,500 managers from various industries were extensively trained. Table 1 below lists the key activities that this program has undertaken since 2006 to 2008.

Table 1: Major Activities of the Training Project for Preventing and Controlling Occupational Hazards in Chinese Industrial Enterprises

	2006	2007	2008
Training Courses	3 training courses in: Qingdao, Guangdong, Jiangsu	4 training courses in: Hunan, Hubei, Beijing, QianDao	3 training courses in: Zhejiang, Inner Mongolia, Jilin
Training Manuals	-Began creating "Occupational Health Management in Enterprises" book -4 health education & promotion Brochures: 1) Occupational Health for Women 2) Occupational Hazards in the Coal Industry 3) Safety in Organic Solvent Production 4) Textile Industry Safety	-Completed and published "Occupational Health Management in Enterprises" book -Published Manual on "Textile Safety for Women"	Published Manual on "Occupational Hazards in hot work" and "Occupational Hazards in welders"

And some similar training is scheduled to be offered in Gansu province, Guangxi autonomous region and Shenzhen municipality, in 2009.

EHS professionals training

Under the auspices of CCDC, a passel of senior professional talents on occupational health from enterprises and various CDC were trained in Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2009.

Forum on CSR and workshop

A Forum on "Occupational Health and CSR" initiated by CCDC and GE Foundation joint-training program was held in Zhejiang in 2007. A National Workshop on "Occupational Health Services and Management" was held in Beijing in 2008.

In the auspices of Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labor and Social Security, Ministry of Railways, State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, State Administration for Work Safety and All China Federation of Trade Union, a forum on "Occupational Health and Corporate Social Responsibility" and a workshop on Occupational Health Services and Management were initiated by the China CDC and GE Foundation joint-training program. Around 600 participants from central and local governments, enterprises, academic institutions, NGOs and universities attended the Forum (and workshop) and made presentations at the forum (and workshop).

Training for promoting migrant women workers' OHS

Migrant female workers are recognized as a particularly vulnerable working population due to their disadvantaged social status, lack of social security and a tendency of frequently floating between jobs that have always brought them greater risk of being exposed to a wider range of occupational hazards at work. It affects not only female workers themselves but also their children, which has turned into a severe public health and social problem. It is very important to improve migrant female workers' working-condition and environment, to protect their fair rights of OHS. Therefore, epidemiological investigation of migrant women workers' OHS has been taken, and OHS training which migrant women workers need according to the investigation will be done in the future.

Training materials

As you can see in Table 1, a series of training manuals were contributed by leading OHS

experts in China and served as key guidebooks to OHS practices being implemented in Chinese enterprises. And they were basically updated on annual basis. In addition, workplace health promotion brochures aligned with corporate social responsibility concept and initiatives were frequently disseminated. The web-site on prevention and control of occupational diseases was built up and being shared with via logging in: www.cohpc.com.

By these ways, the benefits of the training extend beyond companies to regulators –and the program will help to raise awareness and drive improvement that ultimately influences health and safety outcomes in Chinese, plants and mines. The attention to multi-stakeholder involvement from government, academia, companies or other stakeholder groups has proven to be a key element of this project's success.

Findings

During the ten training courses from 2006 to 2008, both anecdotal evidence and results from post-training surveys suggest that training participants have been extremely pleased with the immediate quality of information and teaching style of the trainings. One government official who attended a training enthusiastically shared this compliment with the program trainers: *"I kept my concentration on the training for a whole day! I have never attended such a good training before, and I'd like to implement what I learned today in my real work."* Another Chinese company participant was impressed by the training which made him realized that corporation has the responsibility of OHS, and he said EHS awareness trainings and programs were very important for them.

This project embodied the CSR's request, highlighted that the employer is the principle part of OHS, the department of the government, NGOs and the corporations united to carry out a good platform for OHS work. This project urged the supply chain in China of the multinational corporations and all global SMEs to do good in OHS, hastened the Beijing declaration "Global strategy on occupational health for all: The way to health at work" to fulfil in China, led Chinese economy to international economic integration.

These were the protection to give the project a smooth operation that with the pushing and support from GE foundation and GE enterprise, the support by Ministry of Health, Sanitary Surveillance Agency, the leader of CCDC, administrative departments at all levels of government, the corporation with kinds of institutes of occupational diseases prevention, and the participation of kinds of enterprises.

This was a good corporation model (platform). Because GE enterprise and other multinational enterprises participated actively, and NIOHPC cooperated with the related departments of the government, the occupational health work was generally promoted in China. It was good to setup an interactive platform for government, corporations and institutes of occupational diseases prevention.

Large state-owned enterprises played an exemplary role. Sinopec, China National Petroleum Corporation, Baosteel and other large state-owned enterprises introduced their experience and actions actively which played an active exemplary role in creating occupational health environment, and spurred kinds of corporations, especially SMEs and private enterprises fostered corporate civic awareness, created advanced corporate culture, took the social burden of protecting the labor's safety and health, walked on the sustainable developing road.

Advanced experience of multinational enterprises played the model role. GE enterprise, Novozymes company and other companies setup a wonderful administration system of environment-health-safety which was good reference to kinds of corporations, with training and propagating the advanced experience of multinational enterprises, administrating and restricting the supply chain, influencing kinds of corporations playing the CSR themselves, protecting the employees' OHS.

Labor union and private economy enrolled in the training of OHS actively. There were fairly serious occupational hazards in SMEs which was the key and difficulty of the occupational health work. Hengdian group as the representative of private enterprises, who supported and participated the training project actively, and set environment-safety-health and the survival and development of enterprises at the same position. This was one of the significance of GE project.

Conclusions

We had carried out all kinds of occupational health training before, which were occupational health professional and technical personnel training. But this project's training is given to leadership and management, so that they can fully understand the importance of OHS. Despite attention has given rise to CSR in China, it needs to continue to strengthen it through various ways, in order to enable corporation to truly play an important role of occupational health and safety.

1. The international community and international trade put forward to a higher demand that enterprises must attach importance to occupational health and safety.
2. Great efforts have been devoted to improve OHS in China. The central government is advocating "people-oriented, harmonious society".
3. The government is paying more attention to further improve occupational health and safety, and to ease the challenging situation.

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