



Case study-Paint safety

Initial situation:

Factory A, a Vietnamese state-owned enterprise employs 420 staff and produces electrical motors. During the Factory Improvement Programme, a number of paint-related occupational health and safety hazards were present, such as:

- Paint, petrol, oil, plastic wire, carton box, carton labels and a broad variety of inflammable materials that were stored next to each other with no warning signs or instructions being posted.
- Workers were only wearing thin cotton masks during the painting work.
- Personal protective equipment was not properly cleaned and maintained.
- Breaks were spent close to the painting station and drinking water was exposed to paint and fumes.

Recommendations made by the FIP team:

- Training should be conducted for workers on health and safety issues.
- A ventilation system should be installed in the spray painting workshop.
- Workers in the spraying area should be provided with appropriate personal protection equipment.
- Drinking water should not be stored away from the painting and punching department.
- Warning signs such as “No smoking”, “Inflammable”, “No entry” etc. should be posted, especially in areas where chemicals and petrol are used and stored.
- Chemicals should be stored separately from other items.
- Resting time for workers exposed to chemicals should be increased to minimize the exposure time.

Actions taken to meet the recommendations:

Detailed health and safety checklists provided by the expert were made available to the health and safety committee and workers and manager who make up the Factory Improvement Team (FIT). The health and safety committee and the FIT customized the checklists and introduced the checklist procedures on every work floor. The recommendations made by the expert were discussed among the health and safety committee, the FIT and the company management. Discussions focused on the company’s responsibilities in relation to health and safety and the costs associated with implementing the improvements.

Results and impact:

Most importantly, management agreed to initiate most of the experts’ recommendations and make the required financial resources available. The health and safety improvements related to use of paint and toxics included:

- Providing OSH training to workers with specific attention on safe use of chemicals and toxics.
- Providing 20 active-coal masks to workers in the painting workshop and to workers handling toxic materials. Workers were requested to wear masks at all times when working with paint and other toxics.
- Drinking water was stored in locations where it could not be directly exposed to chemicals.
- All chemicals were relocated to a new and separate storage room and appropriate signs were posted.
- A new ventilation system was installed at all work floors.
- A new time policy was implemented to prevent any worker from being exposed to paint and other toxics for more than two continuous hours and daily working hours for this group of workers were reduced from eight to seven hours.

The factory was able to reduce the working hours for workers exposed to toxics without reducing productivity or workers’ salaries. Quality Management Manager, Mr. Do Vinh Hoa, said: “We have conducted research on productivity of our painters after they started working seven hours instead of eight hours per day. The salaries of painters remain nearly the same, but their exposure time to chemicals has been reduced.”