

Helping Small Enterprises Improve OSH and Productivity

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Introduction

Thailand is one of the fastest growing economies with a rapidly expanding manufacturing sector supplying textile, garments, electrical and electronic goods, gems and jewels and dozens of other products for local and world markets.

In Thailand, more than 93 percent of enterprises which employed less than 49 employees while more than 96 percent of enterprises which employed less than 99 employees, as shown in table 1.

Year	Number of Enterprises				
	Total	1 – 49 employees		1 – 99 employees	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent
2004	411,068	387,531	94.27	397,965	96.81
2005	377,753	353,316	93.53	364,108	96.38
2006	385,515	360,470	93.50	371,739	96.42

Table 1: Number of establishments and employees, 2006

From occupational injuries statistics that we got from the Office of the Workmen's Compensation, we found that more than 40 percent of occupational injuries occurred in enterprises which employed less than 99 employees, as shown in table 2.

Size of Establishment (Number of employees)	Number of Occupational Injuries					
	2004		2005		2006	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1 – 99 employees	90,798	42.13	92,610	43.23	88,150	43.16
100 – 199 employees	35,150	16.31	33,317	15.55	30,157	14.76
200 – 499 employees	42,283	19.62	41,944	19.58	41,482	20.31
500 – 999 employees	22,917	10.63	21,735	10.14	20,489	10.03
From 1,000 employees	24,386	11.31	24,629	11.50	23,979	11.74
Total	215,534	100.00	214,235	100.00	204,257	100.00

Table 2: Number of Occupational Injuries classified by size of establishment, 2004 – 2006

In 2005 – 2006, the National Institute for the Improvement of Working Conditions and Environment (NICE), Department of Labour Protection and Welfare conducted a study on OSH situation in SMEs. We found that SMEs are facing many occupational safety and health hazards such as mechanical and electrical (machine guarding, electrical equipment, etc.), physical environment (heat, illumination, noise, etc.) and chemical hazards (storage of chemical containers, ventilation system, personal protective equipment, etc.) including ergonomics (manual material handling, repetitive work, etc.). Their working conditions need to be improved.

Material and Method

The Department of Labour Protection and Welfare, Ministry of Labour recognizes that SMEs play the very important role on economic development of the country. We have conducted various activities to help

SMEs to improve safety and health in their work places. Started from 2006, NICE launched a project to develop OSH in SMEs. The project consisted of the following activities;

1. **Selection of SMEs:** After we got the list of enterprises with their addresses and number of occupational injuries from Office of the Workmen's Compensation, we selected the enterprises that were SMEs and had high number of occupational injuries. Then we sent the invitation letter to those enterprises to join the Project.

2. **Organize meeting with SMEs:** We organized a half day meeting by inviting SMEs that would like to join the Project and told them that their enterprises had high number of occupational injuries and it's their responsibilities to reduce the occupational injuries. If they join the Project, we can help them to improve OSH and reduce the number of occupational injuries.

3. **Organize workshop in SMEs:** We organized a half day workshop in each SMEs that joined the Project. The participants in this workshop will be OSH committee (in case SMEs had OSH committee), safety officer and supervisor. The activities in the workshop were:

a. We showed the occupational injuries in that SME and example photos of OSH improvement from other SMEs. They discussed about how to improve their working conditions to eliminate the hazard so that occupational injuries would not happen again in future.

b. Participants in the workshop conducted WISE Checklist (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises) form ILO's manual "Higher Productivity and A Better Place to Work". After survey the workplace, they discussed about points to be improve in their workplace and also their future action plan for OSH improvement.

4. **Future action plan for OSH improvement:** We asked the SMEs to submit their future action plan for OSH improvement to us after it had been approved by their employer.

5. **Follow-up visit:** We visited the SMEs to check that they can improve OSH in their workplace according to their future action plan for OSH improvement that they submitted to us or not. If they had any problems, we tried to help them. We took pictures of before and after OSH improvement. If their improvements were about working environment (heat, illumination, noise, etc.), we measured the environmental monitoring of before and after OSH improvement. We also conducted OSH in-house training for some SMEs that requested.

Results and Discussion

We found that SMEs that join the Project can make various OSH improvements in their workplace. If their OSH improvements were about to eliminate hazards from occupational injuries, the number of occupational injuries in that SMEs would reduce. Some improvements made employees work more comfortable, the number of work quality and quantity would increase. Most of their OSH improvements were simple, practical and low cost. In 2006, there were 100 SMEs that join the Project. In 2007, there were 276 SMEs that joined the Project and among those SMEs there were 222 SMEs or 80.43 percent that made OSH improvement in their workplaces. Our target in 2008, we will try to convince at least 250 SMEs to join the Project.

We also published 5,000 copies of WISE checklist and 1,000 copies of Guidelines to improve OSH in SMEs. In the Guidelines, there is not only ways how to make OSH improvement, but also many pictures of OSH improvement. We will distribute them to SMEs that would like to join the Project.

References

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