

Address Delivered by

Dr. the Hon. Esther Byer Suckoo, M.P.,

Minister of Labour and Social Security

at the Opening Ceremony of

Occupational Safety and Health Week 2011

July 4, 2011 at 9.00 a.m.

Accra Beach Hotel

Senator Sir Roy Trotman

Permanent Secretaries

Members of the head table

Members of the National Advisory Committee on Occupational
Safety and Health

Distinguished guests

Participants

Members of the Media

Ladies and gentlemen

As Minister with responsibility for Labour and Social Security,
I consider it a special privilege to address you today at the
commencement of this Occupational Safety and Health Week
2011. On this occasion the series of seminars is being hosted
under the theme “**Safety Management System – A Tool for
Modern Business**”. Coincidentally, the focus of the celebrations

for **World Day for Safety and Health at Work** 28th April 2011, was also on safety management systems. Since 2003, the ILO observes World Day for Safety and Health at Work on April 28. Globally, the activities held in recognition of this day seek to promote the prevention of accidents and diseases at work, and honour the memory of victims of occupational accidents and diseases. While we honour injured and fallen workers, we however appreciate that these incidents can be reduced.

In recent times, given the state of the economy worldwide, businesses have been forced to innovate and integrate new approaches in an effort to be sustainable. As a consequence, this week of seminars should be seen as a catalyst that would engender a new approach to safety and health, locally. The social partners must seek to adopt and adapt occupational safety and health systems and practices to benefit workers, the business community, and by extension the nation. In this regard organisations need to view the implementation of a Safety

Management System as a viable tool for improving the management of successful business.

What is an Occupational Health and Safety Management System

But, what really is an Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS)? An Occupational Health and Safety Management System is the introduction of plans, actions and procedures to systematically manage health and safety in the workplace. A system set out to achieve the goal of making sure that every employee returns home healthy and safe, while business resources are efficiently utilized to maximize profitability. With more businesses implementing safety management systems we can look forward to a redounding effect at the national level.

Benefits

The very term “OSH management system”, connotes integration, homogeneity, co-operation and continuous review and improvement. Through management system components such as the safety and health committees and the promotion of the concept of joint responsibility; through toolbox talks to facilitate suitable and sufficient risk assessment and job execution; and through visible management involvement to demonstrate buy-in and commitment to safety; a safety management system provides the framework for improved business, providing greater opportunity for worker participation and the structure for effective hazard recognition and the institution of measures to mitigate hazards.

In managing safety and health in a modern business the intangible elements should not be overlooked. The social and mental wellbeing of your employees must be considered as a part of day to day management. Employee Assistance Programmes

(EAPs), and wellness programmes have now become critical components of successful safety management systems by ensuring that the employer consider the worker in totality. We can all think of occasions where we have seen this in practice in both the private and public sectors. Recently, my ministry launched a fitness program for employees at the Warrens Office Complex. We all recognise that our human resources are perhaps the most critical asset to the success of any organization including the attainment of a market advantage.

The competitive nature of business makes it absolutely imperative that continuous review and improvement is a feature of the system. Through this continuous review and improvement you can identify your assets, among them being efficient plant and skilled employees. Undoubtedly, occupational safety and health management systems help you to retain all of these.

We in the public sector are currently engaging in a review process. I am sure many of you will be aware that we recently

embarked on a survey of governmental workplaces. The commissioning of the Public Sector Survey which was started on May 16, 2011 and due to be completed over the coming weeks, saw an audit being conducted of OSH conditions in government owned and occupied premises. Officers from the Environmental Health Department of the Ministry of Health joined with officers from the Occupational Safety and Health Section of the Labour Department in assessing over 170 workplaces to date. Similarly, we have engaged the private sector as was seen through the 2010 inspection blitz in the hospitality sector. During this week we will highlight some of the positive examples we encountered during that exercise.

Repeatedly we are told that evaluation and re-evaluation of systems contributes to decreases in loss time accidents and decreases in plant and equipment failure, while seeming to improve productivity, product quality and worker morale.

These factors are desirable to any business irrespective of whether the organisation is small, medium or large.

Small Business

Size is not to be viewed as a determinant of the need for an OSH management system nor the quality of the system. The importance of securing the safety of employees, the profitability of a business and the minimization of occurrences of ill health remain essential in any circumstance, whatever the size of the organization. Underpinning our various approaches to occupational safety and health should be homogeneity of thought and action on how to design the system that best fits the need of an organization. It is however, recognized that smaller enterprises will require assistance in developing and implementing appropriate systems, so too will some of the larger enterprises. With this in mind the Ministry of Labour considers it a duty to provide the platform upon which these organizations can build.

Mexican Cooperation

As part of this thrust to promote the use of occupational safety and health management systems in Barbados, the Ministry of Labour has seized the opportunity presented by the RIAL programme of technical cooperation. The Inter-American Network for Labour Administration or RIAL as it is known, is the cooperation mechanism of the Organisation of American States. Through this programme of country to country cooperation, smaller states can draw on the experiences of their neighbours. Mr. Luis Miranda Cid, Deputy Director Management Systems for Safety and Health at Work, Mexico will on Tuesday, June 12, 2011 facilitate consultation on the use of a national **safety and health self management system**. The objective of the consultation is to share the Mexican experience in the implementation of their self management system, with a view to adapting the Mexican model to aid in the development of a model for Barbados. As was stated in the justification for this project it is

hoped that this association would aid in enhancing the local situation and by extension, ensure adequate protection for workers.

It is through the persistence of the Labour Department, in collaboration with our Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Mr. Luis Miranda Cid will be present next Tuesday. This consultation is of even greater significance because it presents the ground-breaking opportunity where the information will be communicated across the Spanish/English language barrier. Approximately one hundred persons have registered to participate in this consultation. Clearly there is a high level of interest in this initiative amongst the social partners.

Tripartite Partnership

In acknowledgement of the role of tripartism in fostering advancement in safety and health systems locally, our social partners have come onboard. In this connection we must

acknowledge the contributions of the Barbados National Terminals Company Limited (BNTCL), Barbados National Oil Company (BNOC), C.O.Williams Construction Ltd, and Steve's Building Works a representative of the Barbados Contractors Association (BCA). These entities have graciously collaborated with us to fund the visit of Mr. William Dixon, one of our resource persons for this week. Mr. Dixon will be addressing the issue of working at heights, which was identified as an area of concern subsequent to the 2007 construction blitz. Mr. Dixon worked in Barbados for a short time and so he understands the local situation and has journeyed here again from the UK to address this pertinent issue.

That an officer of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) of the UK, a world renowned agency, will share his expertise in this forum, represents another first for OSH Week.

Safety Reward Programme

This year's focus on safety management systems helps to prepare us for one of our long term goals. The goal of providing recognition for companies which display exemplary safety and health practices. Although companies are showcased on each occasion of OSH week, it is done on a small scale. The proposed programme would see us on the road to developing a more meaningful programme of recognition.

Conclusion

This week of activities provides an opportunity for the safety and health movement to meet the challenges presented to it. The movement has to be able to build a solid foundation at the organisational and national levels. The use of safety management systems presents an excellent opportunity to do this. With the assistance of our counterparts both local and international, we hope to see modern approaches to safety and

health management in the way business is done within small, medium and large enterprises.

The Ministry of Labour will continue to be in the forefront of that movement and with OSH week being a flagship event, continue to provide educational programmes toward developing trained, dedicated, safe and healthy workers who will be the backbone of a strong Barbadian economy.

I endorse the sentiments of Dr. Juan Somavia, Director General ILO who during his message for World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2011 expressed the view that *“Successfully building a strong preventative safety and health culture will depend on strong commitment, collaboration and concerted action by governments, employers and workers and all stakeholders – it cannot be the sole preserve of experts”*.

Effective OSH management must be a collective effort. I encourage you therefore, to use the opportunity of this OSH week 2011 to begin the process of putting measures in place to improve your respective workplaces. I wish you a successful and rewarding week.