Abstract

A system of occupational safety and health (OSH) in Poland was first created after the First World War. Since its onset, it has been subjected to various changes related to the state’s political and economic systems. Currently, two decisive processes have impact on OSH: (a) socioeconomic transformation and (b) Poland’s planned accession to the European Union (EU). The former results in significant changes in statistics of occupational accidents and diseases and in social problems resulting from high unemployment. The latter manifests itself in efforts to harmonize the law and standards with those of the EU requirements. Within this framework, the National Strategic Program “Occupational Safety and Health Protection in the Working Environment” has been carried out since 1995. The goal of this program is to create an effective system of safety and health protection in the context of Poland’s association with the EU. © 2001 National Safety Council and Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Occupational safety; Working conditions; Safety management; Safety research; Poland

1. Introduction

The socioeconomical transformation initiated by the introduction of democracy and the principles of market economy has been taking place in Poland for 10 years and translates into ongoing profound social and economic changes. These changes have tremendous impact on the labor market, including the working conditions.

Another element that has impact on systemic changes in occupational safety is Poland’s association with the European Union (EU) and the resulting
necessity to transpose regulations and standards in the field of occupational safety and labor protection in Poland. This paper presents an outline of the history of labor protection in Poland, the current situation, and prospects for the future.

2. Historical outline

It is easier to explain the current state by referring to the past. From 1772 to 1914, Poland — divided among three invaders: Russia, Prussia, and Austria–Hungary — was not independent. This separation prevented Poland from establishing its own system of labor protection. At that time in Europe, institutions other than state executive authorities were being established based on industrial associations (France, Belgium, and Italy), insurance (Germany and Switzerland), and professional-technical (in all countries of Western Europe). Russia and Austria–Hungary did not have public-legal or social organizations other than strictly state authorities in the area of labor protection, whereas German experience was not transferred to eastern districts. The establishment of a system of labor protection became possible only after Poland regained independence in 1918, just after the end of the First World War. New statehood was created with great enthusiasm and a flourish. It is worth emphasizing that labor inspection was established as soon as 1919, when Poland became one of the founders of the International Labor Organization (ILO). In 1931, the Institute for Social Affairs, a foundation of numerous social insurers, was established. It took up scientific, publishing, and dissemination activities in all areas of social insurance, and it acknowledged the matters of occupational safety and health (OSH) as particularly urgent social issues. In 1933, the first Convention of Safety Engineers took place, and in 1938, there was an Occupational Safety Congress. In 1937, with the help of the Social Insurance Institution, the Model Workshop for Protective Devices and Occupational Safety Advisory Services was established at the Museum of Technology and Industry. Great importance was attached to the problems of the organization of occupational safety; in 1933, the Ministry of Social Welfare issued an ordinance “on premium rates of insurance against accidents in employment and occupational diseases.” The Second World War interrupted efforts to set up a system of occupational safety and labor protection.

As a result of the Second World War, Poland was totally destroyed. Losses in fixed assets exceeded 38% of their total value, and total losses in the form of material destruction exceeded US$16 billion (in 1939 prices). It is estimated that on the pre-1939 land (excluding those territories that following the Second World War became part of the former Soviet Union), 14,000 factories, 1 million rural households, and 2 million urban households (40% of buildings) were destroyed. Approximately 6 million people were killed, including many young people and members of the intelligentsia. A period of reconstructing the country with simultaneous restructuring of the economy immediately followed the war.
There was intensive development of the heavy industry, especially mining (hard coal, brown coal, sulfur, and copper) and metallurgy. The chemical industry was developing (especially in the 1960s). As a result of the political system change, private ownership practically ceased to exist; private manufacturing was limited to craftsmanship. Industrial plants were nationalized. Collective farms existed for a relatively short time until 1956; later, agriculture was based on small private ownership, which was a marvel in the former communist countries. The right to safe and healthy working conditions was guaranteed by the Constitution. In 1945, the National Labor Inspectorate resumed its activity, plant circles of occupational safety and OSH departments were gradually established, and occupational safety inspectors from the Social Insurance Institution resumed their activity. In labor law, the principle of maintaining in force the legal acts of the period between the First and the Second World Wars was accepted. There was a general assumption of nondiminution of the rights acquired by some privileged occupational groups. The system of labor protection was based on three main departments: executive, supervisory (inspection), and scientific research. Supervision was carried out by trade unions. Later, it was the role of the trade unions that was particularly criticized; in communism, they insufficiently, if at all, represented workers’ interests.

In the Polish People’s Republic (i.e., during communism), expenditure on labor protection was high. However, these means were not always efficiently used. As a result, working conditions were sometimes very difficult, which was compounded by the pollution of the environment. It is worth emphasizing that ILO Conventions Nos. 87 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize) and 98 (Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining) were entered in the famous 1980 agreement in Gdańsk, Poland, signed between the government of the Polish People’s Republic and the new trade union Solidarity (Feitshans, 1998). After 1990, the building of a democratic state began in Poland and socioeconomical transformation started.

3. Current economic and political situation of Poland

Economic and political reconstruction has been going on in Poland for 10 years, resulting in great economic and social changes. Poland is in the process of restructuring the economy, especially in the heavy industry (mining, metallurgy, and arms), and state enterprises are being privatized. Privatization covers such sectors as banking, telecommunication, social insurance, and railway. Many big enterprises are closed down and have been replaced with small and medium-sized enterprises (SME; currently, there are about 2.5 million). Unemployment has become a problem as well. In the former political system, either there was no unemployment or it was hidden because too many workstations were created (Koradecka, 2000). The problem of occupational safety, earlier exclusively the state’s concern, has now become the responsibility of the owners of enterprises.
The economic changes are compounded by problems related to Poland’s accession to the EU. In the preparatory period, this means a general change of legislation in practically all spheres of the economy and society. All these problems are directly reflected in the shaping of and compliance with the conditions of labor protection.

It is interesting to follow the evolution of the European attitude toward the protection of workers over the last 50 years.

The European Social Charter of 1961 obliged the state to issue appropriate OSH regulations, to provide means to control compliance with them, and, if necessary, to consult employer and employee bodies regarding means of improving OSH.

The Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter of 1988 included significantly far more reaching obligations of the state to accept and support measures that would involve employees and their representatives not only in consultations but also in shaping OSH in their enterprises.

The European Social Charter of 1996 repeated the already mentioned measures and drew attention to the necessity to establish a cohesive and systematically updated national policy in shaping OSH and the working environment, with emphasis on preventing any threat to those values.

Thus, there has been an evolution in the notion of shaping working conditions from state supervision through employee participation to parallel activity of the state and the employer with the employer’s enterprise services.

Against this background, it is worth discussing what Poland is like today. Poland has more than 38 million citizens, of which 23 million are in the working age (with 17 million professionally active). As has already been mentioned, the significant unemployment rate of over 14% is an immense problem. In some areas touched with the so-called structural unemployment, it reaches 30%. Lack of employment for people who do not complete their education is acute. Despite these problems, the economy is perceived as fast growing and EU experts have high regard for Poland as a country associated with the EU. Table 1 shows the basic economic indices.

Besides structural changes in the economy, transformation manifests itself in big reforms undertaken in the basic areas of social life. Four big social reforms that have taken or are taking place include reforms of (a) public administration, (b) social insurance, (c) health service, and (d) education. These reforms also have had their impact on the problems of labor protection.

It is worth emphasizing that the process of socioeconomic transformation requires the state to make dramatic decisions and causes long-term social costs.

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**Table 1**
Some basic economic indices (Central Statistical Office (CSO) of Poland, 2000)

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<tr>
<td>Gross domestic product (previous year = 100)</td>
<td>106.0</td>
<td>106.8</td>
<td>104.8</td>
<td>104.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gross domestic product per capita (previous year = 100)</td>
<td>105.9</td>
<td>106.7</td>
<td>104.8</td>
<td>104.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation rate (%)</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
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Expenditure on healthcare is very low; Poland ranks 26th among the 29 countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). According to public opinion, healthcare is insufficient and is not easily available. The decrease in expenditure on science is also drastic (in 2000, it constituted 0.47% of the gross domestic product). However, despite these difficulties, Polish science has a relatively high position in the world. Its 18th position on the list of scientific publications developed by the Institute for Scientific Information in Philadelphia, PA attests to that. This is the highest position from among all former communist countries of Central Europe. One may hope that in the future the tradition of great Polish names in the world science will be continued; Poland, after all, was the homeland of Mikołaj Kopernik (Nicolaus Copernicus) and Maria Skłodowska-Curie (Marie Curie).

This short assessment of some aspects of the social and economic situations in Poland may be helpful in understanding the problems related to labor protection and the directions taken in this field, the scale of achievements, and the scale of intentions.

4. Labor protection today

As previously discussed, the two processes that have primarily influenced the current scope of the problems of labor protection in Poland are socioeconomic transformation and planned accession to the EU.

Participation of SMEs in the labor market is a positive outcome of transformation; currently, they constitute approximately 99% of the total number of enterprises in Poland, providing employment for more than 7 million employees. High unemployment rate is a negative outcome as are increased work-related stress (or its lack) and associated health disorders.

Approximately 70 directives related to labor protection are in force in the EU and Poland is intensively implementing them now. In this context, various aspects of the system of labor protection follow.

4.1. Legal regulations and institutional responsibility

Currently, binding OSH regulations can be found in the Labour Code (most recently updated in 1996) and in secondary legislation issued on its basis; there are increased labor protection concerns for women, juveniles, and people with disabilities. It should be emphasized that labor protection is understood in different ways in the science of labor law and in social policy. In the science of labor law, labor protection is separated because of the subject and independent law institution. It constitutes a set of legal norms intended to prevent occupational hazards and harm, which oblige all indispensable measures to be taken, particularly those related to safety engineering and occupational health, ergonomics, physiology, and occupational medicine. They are addressed to all whose activity can have influence on OSH, that is, employers, employees, and other
people ensuring safe working conditions. On the other hand, social policy understands labor protection as being all of the legal regulations related to employment. In Poland, they comply with the following documents:

- international regulations expressed in conventions and recommendations of ILO and the World Health Organization (WHO);
- regulations of the European communities (currently the EU): ordinances, directives, and decisions; and
- international standards [International Organization for Standardization (ISO), including standards from the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) and European ones (European Committee for Standardisation (CEN))].

In Poland, the highest institutional authority is the Sejm (the lower chamber of the Parliament), to which the Council of Labour Protection and the National Labour Inspectorate are subordinate. The Social Insurance Institution is subordinate to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Chief Sanitary Inspectorate to the Ministry of Health. The two biggest scientific research institutes in the field of OSH, the Central Institute for Labour Protection (Warsaw, Poland) and the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine (Łódź,
Poland), respectively, are subordinate to those two ministries. Fig. 1 presents this schematically.

To control compliance with widely understood OSH requirements in enterprises, the following institutions within various scopes have competencies: the Supreme Auditing Chamber, National Labour Inspectorate, Sanitary Inspection, Inspection for Environment Protection, Office of Technical Inspection, State Mining Authority, General Office of Building Control, National Atomic Energy Agency, and State Fire Service.

4.2. The level of occupational hazards

In the last 20 years, of which the latter 10 are the transformation period, there have not been any significant changes in the number of employees working in harmful conditions (Fig. 2). However, three interesting phenomena have been observed: (a) a decrease in the number of accidents at work (Fig. 3); (b) a decrease in fatal accidents at work (Fig. 4); and (c) an increase in the number of occupational diseases (Fig. 5; Koradecka & Kowalski, 2000). Changes in accident statistics were initially caused by reduced output, then by big enterprises closing down (mainly in heavy and chemical industries) and the reduced...
employment that followed. On the other hand, the increased number of registered cases of occupational diseases was paradoxically caused by the same process and had to a large extent social reasons: the object was to provide means of support for dismissed, long-term employees who were too young to benefit from the pension system and at the same time too old to find new employment. This increase also resulted from the attitudes of those employees who wanted to be compensated for losing work and possibly earn money by claiming benefits for unquestionable loss of health.

4.3. Research in the field of labor protection: National Strategic Programme

Significant importance is attached to research in the field of labor protection and ergonomics. The National Strategic Programme “Occupational Safety and Health Protection in the Working Environment” (1995–2001) attests to this attitude. The program’s main purpose is “the establishment within the framework of the state’s socioeconomic policy of an effective system of safety and health protection in the working environment in the context of the association of
Poland with European communities.” The following tasks were accepted for specific aims:

- achieving significant improvement of working conditions;
- limitation of the number of accidents and occupational diseases and other consequences connected with work; and
- achieving development of methods of recognizing and preventing work-related hazards to life and health that are comparable with that of the EU countries.

The Central Institute for Labour Protection was entrusted with coordination of this program. Within its framework, the following five groups of research tasks are carried out:

- improvement of legal, organizational, and economic solutions of the system of protecting workers, taking into account the requirements of international law;
- development and implementation of a state-of-the-art system of recognition and assessment of occupational hazards;
- updating the system of technical prevention of occupational hazards and optimization of working conditions;
- development and implementation of state-of-the-art medical prevention and health promotion at the workplace; and
- introduction of a state-of-the-art system of information and education in the field of OSH.

The results of research and implementation work carried out within the framework of the first stage of this national program were the basis of the position of the Polish government, as presented to the European Commission in 1998 during the screening of the transposition of Polish law in OSH according to the requirements of the European communities. In the positive assessment of Poland’s achievements, the European Commission emphasized two systemic solutions. Implementation of EU guidelines is connected with the necessity to establish a system of recognizing hazards at the workstation. During the last 10 years, documentation for more than 200 harmful agents in the working environment [maximum admissible concentrations (MAC) and maximum admissible intensities (MAI); Fig. 6] have been developed and approved in Poland and more than 100 standards of the methods of their measurement and assessment in the working environment have been developed. It is worth emphasizing that Poland is one of four countries (along with the United States, Germany and Sweden), that has full documentation of the admissible value levels of occupational exposure to harmful agents in the working environment.

Another systemic solution implemented in Poland is the organization of a uniform system of testing and certification of products for compliance with OSH requirements (Fig. 7). On the basis of the law on testing and certification,
the Polish Centre for Testing and Certification was established. It develops a list of products subject to obligatory certification for the safety mark B. It was decided that from the point of view of OSH, it is first and foremost necessary to test and certify products most significant for that area, that is, personal and collective protective equipment as well as machinery that causes the largest number of fatal and serious accidents. In the Central Institute for Labour Protection, a quality system has been implemented. It covers approximately 250 testing procedures within this scope. They have been implemented in the group of 17 testing laboratories. In this way, the Institute was granted a certificate confirming the competence of its testing laboratories.

Between 1990 and 1999, the Institute developed the following for testing and certification of compliance with safety conditions:

- 105 standards consistent with international and European standards (Fig. 8) and
- 192 standards for testing the compliance of the aforementioned products with the requirements of occupational safety and ergonomics.

The result of the second stage of the national program will consist of documentation confirming the transposition of the law and national practice in accordance with the requirements of other EU directives.

To date, within the framework of this program, approximately 300 research tasks and projects have been realized with participation of approximately 50 agencies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, universities, and institutes. The more important results of the program follow.

1. In the field of legal and organizational solutions as well as upgrading the system of recognition and assessment of occupational hazards:

- legal acts for harmonization of the Polish law in the field of OSH;
- updating the Polish list of occupational diseases;
approximately 200 sets of documentation on admissible levels of occupational exposure to chemical substances that have systemic, irritating, and allergenic effects and for physical agents (noise, vibration, and radiation); and

approximately 120 drafts of standards and approximately 100 recommended methods concerning methods of measuring harmful chemical and physical agents in the working environment.

Establishment of MAC values and Polish standards makes it possible to standardize methods of assessing the working environment used by all laboratories involved in measuring and assessing exposure to harmful agents (in accordance with the Labour Code). This constitutes a basis for controlling occupational exposure, standardizing occupational risk assessment, and taking appropriate preventive measures.

2. In the field of development and improvement of technical prevention of occupational hazards:

- Approximately 350 Chemical Safety Data Sheets of dangerous substances (on CD-ROM) have been developed in accordance with new European and international regulations, which constitute the basic source of information on their properties and related them to requirements of safety, health, and environment protection, pursuant to the provisions of the United Nations, ILO conventions, and European Economic Community directives. They are used by plants that produce or use dangerous materials, as well as units involved in rescuing property and people at risk because of those substances.

- Approximately 40 drafts of Polish standards on OSH requirements regarding machinery, devices, and personal and collective protective equipment for workers have been developed.
The technical and research potential of testing laboratories and units certifying for compliance with the requirements of occupational safety and ergonomics has increased. Consequently, the scope of the national system of testing and certification of products through the development of methods of testing and criteria of assessment of machinery, devices, and personal and collective protective equipment has been extended. Among others, 100 test stands, 130 procedures, and 80 test methods have been developed and introduced into the national system of testing and certification.

Hazards to persons at workstations have been eliminated or limited through new organizational solutions, particularly in OSH management. To accomplish this, appropriate tools have been prepared for occupational risk assessment: for example, a computer system for hazard registration and occupational risk assessment (STER); a computer system for a systemic analysis of the reasons and consequences of accidents with the MORT method; a system of accessing various databases (SINDBAD); a computer database for selection of personal protective equipment taking into account data on harmful and dangerous agents; and a computer database on materials, products, and clothing appropriate in protection against noise and vibrations.

Approximately 130 criteria, requirements, and recommendations concerning technical and medical prevention of occupational hazards and shaping safe working conditions have been developed.

Other than the aforementioned systemic solutions, a number of new technical solutions have been developed and implemented. They have made improved working conditions possible; for example,

- an industrial robot control system, which utilizes artificial neural networks;
- an auditory danger signal that protects employees at dangerous workstations in industries with a high level of noise;
new solutions for hearing protectors with active noise attenuation and protectors with regulated noise suppression (Fig. 9);
- antivibration gloves;
- an antidust prefilter, which utilizes the triboelectric effect for respiratory protective equipment;
- barrier material ensuring comfort under coated protective clothing; and
- ecologically safe technology of producing phenyl-formaldehyde resin.

Hearing protectors with active noise attenuation and antivibration gloves have won a gold medal at the Eureka Fair in Brussels, Belgium.

3. In the field of medical prevention and health promotion at the workplace, the following have been developed (among others):

- programs of health promotion;
- procedures for physiological, biomechanical, and psychological examinations for deciding if people with disabilities are capable of occupational work and a self-assessment questionnaire for people with disabilities for occupational advisory services;
- criteria and principles of assessing sanitary conditions in healthcare;
- a model of psychosocial stress management at the workplace and antistress training (Fig. 10);
- procedures for modifying stress for pathological type A people; and
- principles of working conditions in enterprises being checked by the employers themselves (a checklist).
4. The broad and consistent education of the society, employees, and employers as well as young people in OSH should be mentioned. Some ways to do this are by developing:

- an Internet version of educational materials in occupational safety and ergonomics for universities;
- educational packages for postgraduate studies and specialized courses; and
- multimedia training materials in OSH on CD-ROM for schools and companies running training courses in OSH.

Within the framework of the quality system, a Centre for Certification of Personnel’s Competence in OSH (OSH services, industrial hygienists, auditors of management systems, and lecturers) has also been set up.

Extensive popularization of OSH issues should also be mentioned. It is done by, for example,

- organizing six editions of a national Occupational Safety Poster Competition. They were devoted to Stress, Computer, Occupational Risk, Chemicals, Ergonomics, and Accidents in Agriculture. These competitions have resulted in approximately 1,000 posters and scores of exhibitions in Poland and abroad (Figs. 11–13);
- producing films on hazards and safe behaviors at work;
- publishing research results in scientific literature and literature for the lay reader (approximately 850 publications, including monographs and guides). It is worth mentioning the two-volume monograph *Occupational safety and ergonomics* (Koradecka, 1999), which comprehensively presents

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**NEGATIVE STRESS RESULTS**

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**HUMAN**
- mental and physical health symptoms

**ENTERPRISE**
- absenteeism
- turnover of employees
- lower work quality
- lower work efficiency
- death from overwork (karoshi)

**Fig. 10. Negative stress results.**
the state of knowledge in the field of the protection workers, and the OSH management series of publications; and

- presenting research results at conferences and symposia in Poland and abroad (approximately 750 papers).

It should be emphasized that publications and specialized training create an awareness of occupational hazards in various social and occupational groups as
well as popularize methods and solutions for eliminating or reducing the causes and consequences of those hazards.

In addition, in an effort to extend cooperation in shaping safe and ergonomic working conditions and to use the results of the program directly in enterprises, the Safe Work Leaders’ Forum was created. It brings together enterprises from around Poland that are best in creating safe working
conditions by implementing state-of-the-art scientific and technical solutions that improve working conditions.

It would have been impossible to achieve those results without systematic complex interdisciplinary measures at an appropriately big scale. It is expected that in the future conditions will be created for complex research and implementation studies within the framework of a multilayer program supported by the government. Such a program will allow researchers to effectively create instruments for improving working conditions and for adapting them to European and international standards.

Fig. 13. Mentioned in “Remember about occupational risk” from the “risk” edition of the occupational safety poster competition (Author: Aleksandra Łowicka Cuper).
The present and the future of research in the field of occupational safety and ergonomics, as well as competent actions to protect employees, requires educated specialists in this field. In Poland, such specialists are educated in eight technical and six other universities. Publications in the field of labor protection are gathered in the National Library and university libraries, as well as other specialized libraries. Some of those libraries make their catalogues available on the Internet. Approximately 20 scientific and specialized journals in the field of occupational safety and ergonomics are published in Poland. This number includes two international titles: the *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics* (JOSE) and the *International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health*.

Currently, in Poland, approximately 500 researchers deal with ergonomics in 21 scientific institutes and universities. It is estimated that the number of researchers involved in the problems of occupational safety is three times higher (Koradecka, 1997).

Research is conducted in cooperation with foreign partners, including, in particular, the following international institutions:

- International Labour Office,
- WHO,
- International Safety Council,
- World Safety Organization, and
- International Organization for the Provision of Work for Handicapped Persons,

and with foreign scientific and professional societies, such as:

- International Ergonomics Association and
- American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists

as well as with scientific research institutes in the field of OSH around the world.

4.4. An assessment of the current situation

According to the assessment of foreign experts, in opinions expressed in the Sejm, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the National Labour Inspectorate, and in the media, which represent the public opinion, there are symptoms of improved working conditions. However, the causes and effects of the still unsatisfactory, in view of international standards, OSH are mentioned as well. On the other hand, Poland is the only country of Central and Eastern Europe in which scientific principles and modern practical instruments have been created to change this situation. This has been possible due to the cooperation between the state and social partners.
Among others, the following have been developed:

- a state-of-the-art system of establishing MAC and MAI; the Polish list of those values has been extended from 200 to 414 items. Each substance on the list has full documentation of data on the mechanisms of its harmful influence and on preventive recommendations;
- a state-of-the-art system of testing and certification of personal protective equipment and dangerous machinery, complying with the standards of the ISO 9000 and EN 45000 series. Interlaboratory studies are conducted with foreign centers, which confirm Polish laboratories’ credibility;
- state-of-the-art Polish standards, implementing regulations of international and European standards in the field of technical requirements of occupational safety and labor protection (approximately 200 standards) and requirements connected with occupational safety management in a way integrated with the quality of production and environmental protection;
- state-of-the-art computer programs working with relevant, continually updated databases, which interactively support occupational risk assessment procedures;
- a state-of-the-art system of education in the field of occupational safety and labor protection at the level of secondary schools, universities, and postgraduate studies. Teaching materials have been developed (including multimedia ones), addressed both to lectures and students. Between 1997 and 2000, 220 people completed postgraduate studies in the Central Institute for Labour Protection, and annually, from 1,200 to 1,800 people complete required training.

5. Tasks for the future

Scientific-technical development is continuous, technologies and social and economic conditions change, and working conditions change along with them in this basic form of human activity. Teleworking and virtual institutions are new phenomena. Together with civilizational progress, the need and opportunity to preserve health and life in the working environment increase. The workplace begins to be perceived as not health or life threatening but even as a place for improving health understood by WHO as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” More and more attention is paid not only to chemical or physical hazards but mental as well; stress increasingly arouses interest (Widerszal-Bazyl & Ciesiak, 2000). Due to the process of aging of the society, more and more attention is also paid to the problems of elderly people (Bugajska, Krzyškow, & Koradecka, 2000). The capabilities of people with disabilities as employees are perceived more comprehensively (Kurkus-Rozowska, Najmie, Tokarski, & Konarska, 2000). Research on the economic aspects of OSH problems, which in Poland have brought new results (Pawłowska & Rzepecki, 2000; Fig. 14), as well as research
on management techniques in occupational safety, for which there is a great social demand (Podgórska, 1999, 2000), has to be continued. Traditional hazards are measured and described in a new way (Kamińska et al., in press).

The aforementioned remarks on the evolution of the labor market and on the evolution of the mechanisms of protecting employees should be taken into account in the further development of the system of occupational safety and labor protection in Poland. These notions are deeply rooted in our culture; it was a Pole, after all, Wojciech Jastrzębowski, who first introduced the notion of ergonomics in 1857: “By the term Ergonomics, derived from Greek words ergon meaning work and nomos meaning principle or law, we mean the Science of Work, which is the use of Man’s forces and faculties with which he has been endowed by his Maker” (Jastrzębowski, 2000, p. 15). Almost 100 years later, this notion appeared independently in the name Ergonomics Research Society, which was established in the UK. So, we were the first, and in this understanding of ergonomics as the basis of the sciences of work, we would like remain among the leaders.

6. Conclusions

The opportunity offered by political transformation and the prospect of entering the EU can and should significantly help in improving occupational safety in Poland. The following are the tasks that will help achieve that purpose.

- Consistent improvements of instruments supporting social partners in shaping working environments (in cooperation with partners in developed
Financing this work is the state’s responsibility, as it follows from regulations of ILO conventions and EU directives as well as the practice of developed countries. The Polish state, in the current difficult period of socioeconomic transformation, meets this obligation.

- Supporting employers in carrying out their obligations to inform employees on occupational risk by developing relevant materials and instruments.
- Striving to establish economic mechanisms of making employers interested in investing in good working conditions.
- Striving to establish mechanisms that will relieve SME employers of some OSH costs without jeopardizing the employees’ OSH.
- Creating conditions for continuing research in occupational safety and ergonomics to ensure progress in this field.

References


Danuta Koradecka, PhD, DMedSc is Director of the Central Institute for Labour Protection, Warsaw, Poland and has authored over 200 publications internationally.

Helena Dryzek, PhD is Head of Department of the Central Institute for Labour Protection and has authored 35 publications on information processing and retrieval, automatic text processing, and information policy.