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by [Vaaranen A](#), [Kolivuori T](#), [Rossi K](#), [Tolonen M](#), [Hassi J](#)

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Personnel facilities in small workplaces with special reference to occupational health services

by ANIKA VAARANEN, R.N.,¹ TERTTU KOLIVUORI, R.N.,² KITTA ROSSI, R.N.,³ MATTI TOLONEN, M.D.,¹ and JUHANI HASSI, M.D.²

VAARANEN, A., KOLIVUORI, T., ROSSI, K., TOLONEN, M. and HASSI, J. Personnel facilities in small workplaces with special reference to occupational health services. *Scand. j. work environ. & health* 5 (1979): suppl. 2, 16—17. The personnel facilities of small workplaces generally complied with the requirements. Yet, defects were detected in 20 % of the 163 firms surveyed. Most of the faults were insignificant from the point of view of health. The failures were due to the fact that the facilities had not originally been planned for their present purpose. The need for the inspection of sanitary installations such as toilets and washrooms and facilities for storing and drying clothes was noted in dirty jobs and in places of work with toxicologic hazards. The management of small firms rarely needs medical advice on sanitary, catering and welfare amenities.

Key words: occupational health nursing, personnel facilities, small enterprises.

By the term "personnel facilities" is meant the following amenities required by law: sanitary installations such as toilets, washing facilities including towels, and, if special circumstances demand, provision for showers or baths, warm water, and sauna; facilities for changing and storing clothes and, if necessary, a place for drying clothes; amenities for eating which include adequate furniture and equipment for warming food; and proper toilet facilities.

¹ Uusimaa Regional Institute of Occupational Health, Helsinki, Finland.

² Oulu Regional Institute of Occupational Health, Oulu, Finland.

³ Institute of Occupational Health, Helsinki, Finland.

Reprint requests to: Dr. Matti Tolonen, Uusimaa Regional Institute of Occupational Health, Arinatie 3 A, SF-00370 Helsinki, Finland.

THE WALK-THROUGH SURVEY

The occupational health nurses evaluated the personnel facilities of all the 163 workplaces surveyed in this study (1). As a basis for comparison the Labor Safety Act and the guidelines for its application approved by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs were used.

The personnel facilities were evaluated and scored with respect to the 11 items listed in table 1. Table 2 presents the interpretation of the total score.

RESULTS

Most of the personnel facilities (74 %) fulfilled the requirements (table 3). Only one

firm had very inadequate personnel facilities. The most common defects were poor lavatory facilities and cramped space. In two places of work personal hygiene suffered from uncleanness.

The defects were found primarily in industrial places of work. Showers were not available in some places where they could

be considered necessary because of dirty work. Dressing rooms, personal lockers, and disposable towels were also not always available when considered necessary.

The survey of the personnel facilities took an average of 17 min per workplace.

Table 1. Items evaluated in the personnel facilities survey.

Item	Score
Dressing room	0—5
Lockers	0—5
Drying space	0—5
Sauna	0—5
Showers	0—4
Lavatories	0—5
Toilets	0—5
Soaps and detergents	0—5
Towels	0—5
Eating facilities	0—5

Table 2. Interpretation of the total score given to a workplace for the condition of its personnel facilities.

Total score	Personnel facilities
0—12	As required
13—23	Minor defects
24—38	Substantial defects
39—52	Unsuitable or lacking

Table 3. Distribution of the rating given for the condition of personnel facilities.

Score	Firms		
	N	%	% ^a
0—12	119	73	75
13—23	34	21	19
24—38	9	5	5
39—52	1	1	1
Total	163	100	100

^a Percentage calculated from the observations made for the different branches of economic activity and taking into consideration the proportion of workplaces surveyed.

DISCUSSION

Three-fourths of the surveyed facilities complied with the requirements. Only one firm (a shop) had poor sanitary installations. In other firms the defects and problems noted were due to the fact that the rooms now in use as personnel facilities were not originally so intended. For instance, two industrial plants were located in a former cow barn, and three firms in former schools. In addition, the temporary nature of the work environment in some small firms had adversely affected the planning of these facilities.

The lack of proper space was a common cause of inadequate lavatory facilities. This situation is difficult to overcome and occupational health services can hardly help it. However, adequate soaps, detergents and towels, as well as the cleaning of washing facilities, can be required in all places of work.

The supervision of personnel facilities is the responsibility of the labor inspectorate. In the light of this study action by occupational health personnel would not be necessary unless the visit to a place of work revealed unusual situations, e.g., dirty and dangerous jobs requiring special personal hygiene facilities.

REFERENCE

1. TOLONEN, M. Municipal occupational health services for small workplaces: Background and general methodology of the study. *Scand. j. work environ. & health* 5 (1979): suppl. 2, 1—11.