

Workplace cancer prevention

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HUVINEN MT. Workplace cancer prevention. *Scand J Work Environ Health* 1992;18 Suppl 1:115. Safety and health matters should be an integral part of the decision making of management. Cancer prevention at the workplace requires cooperation between management, occupational health personnel, and workers. At the planning stage of a new production facility the safety and health personnel should actively participate and bring their experience and special knowledge to the planning process. The basis for cancer prevention is exact information about exposure and real risk levels. Modern technology can essentially minimize both exposure and health hazards.

Key terms: biological monitoring, cooperation, exposure, exposure monitoring program, health hazard.

Safety and health matters are essential parts of everyday workplace activities — not only the responsibility of safety engineers and occupational health physicians. Cancer prevention at the plant floor level is not successful without active cooperation between the management, the occupational health personnel, and the workers. All those concerned have their own special responsibilities.

The plant management's main task is to take good care of the business in order to get resources for investments in modern technology and keep the production equipment in the best possible condition. The management has to provide the proper training and supervision of the personnel and supply adequate protective equipment to all who need it. Of course the management must provide enough resources for occupational health functions and encourage physicians and nurses to cooperate with expert institutions.

The occupational health personnel has a central role in workplace cancer prevention. First of all, the physicians and nurses have to be very familiar with the processes, methods, and materials. Occupational health physicians are responsible for actively following the literature and acting as a data source at the workplace. They should pass relevant information to both the management and the workers. This information must not overestimate or underestimate health

hazards. Wrong information can cause unnecessary anxiety or carelessness. The information given should also include practical proposals for improving work conditions. Life-style factors like smoking and diet should not be forgotten.

The plant physician is the proper person to coordinate the exposure monitoring program, which must be systematic because random samples do not give reliable information. The physician cannot achieve the goal of occupational health alone — he or she must cooperate with expert institutes and universities to carry out epidemiologic and other studies. It is also important to have contacts with colleagues at the level of international producers' organizations.

When a new production facility is being planned, it is important that the occupational health and safety personnel take an active part in the planning process.

The occupational health personnel should understand the importance of the total health care of workers — curative activities of occupational health give valuable information. In some cases biological monitoring is useful in exposure and health follow-up.

Last but not least, the individual workers also have their responsibilities. They should follow the rules and also actively try to find solutions and proposals for daily problems in production. The risk of smoking combined with occupational exposure should also be understood.

Industrial activities are an essential part of modern life. Modern and advanced technology can minimize exposure and health hazards. Workplace cancer prevention is a pure matter of cooperation.

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