

Governing Occupational Health and Safety Among Forest Workers in Malaysia

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Abstract:

Occupational accidents and health impairments are a source of great human suffering which affect the expectations that every man and woman has regarding personal physical and psychological health and integrity. Many countries have only rudimentary social security systems and are unable to buffer the economic difficulties faced by a family losing its member to help with the occupational rehabilitation of accident victims. Forestry work is characterized by high rates of accidents and occupational diseases and by difficult working conditions. Issues related to occupational safety and health and working conditions have been of special concern to the International Labour Organization. Forestry work is generally characterized by a combination of natural and material risks to the health and safety of forest workers. The natural risks are associated with steep and broken terrain, climate, dense crops and adverse working conditions. The negative effects of these natural features are often made worse by the inadequacy or absence of work site welfare facilities, food and drink, appropriate clothing, etc. Forestry accidents take a heavy toll but a far more serious and insidious health problem is created by the constant exposure of forestry workers to excessive physical stress; heat or cold; noise; vibration; and, ironically in the case of modern machinery, boredom. Occupational diseases are the result of repeated or continuous exposure to unfavourable environmental conditions and become apparent after a certain lapse of time. In Malaysia, employment in forestry amounts to about 10,000 workers. Most of them engaged by contractors. The State Forest Department leases logging rights in forest reserves which are to be managed sustainably. Within the structure of the government, responsibility for occupational safety and health and labour-related matters have been distributed to their agencies which implementing various legislation. The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1994 applies to all occupations, including forestry, and places the responsibility for safety and health on those who create risks: employers, manufacturers. The objective of this study is to review the role and effectiveness of government policies on improving occupational health and safety among forest workers in Malaysia.

Key words: Safety, health, forest workers, occupation, effective.