

COURSE n° 4: Workplace Hazards

Definition:

Workplace hazards are potential sources of harm or damage to someone or something in any work environment. They can be material or any activity that has the likelihood to cause injuries under specific conditions.

HAZARDS CLASSIFICATION:

Hazards can be classified into (6) different categories. Here are the most common types of workplace hazards:

a) Safety hazards:

These are the most common type of hazards that are always present in a construction site. They include unsafe working conditions that can cause injury, illness, or death. Examples of safety hazards in the workplace include spills on floors or tripping hazards such as blocked aisles or cords running across the floor; working from heights including ladders, scaffolds, roofs, or any raised work area; unguarded machinery and moving machinery parts; guards removed or moving parts that a worker can accidentally touch; electrical hazards like frayed cords, missing ground pins, improper wiring; confined spaces; and equipment and machinery-related hazards (lockout tagout, boiler safety, forklifts, hand, and power tools, etc.).

b) Biological hazards:

These hazards are associated with working with animals, people, or infectious plant materials. Most at-risk workers include those who work in schools, daycare facilities, colleges and universities, hospitals, laboratories, emergency response, nursing homes, and outdoor occupations. Examples of biological hazards workers may be exposed to include blood and other body fluids; fungi/mold; bacteria and viruses; insect bites; and animal and bird droppings.

c) Chemical hazards:

These hazards are present when a worker is exposed to any chemical preparation in the workplace in any form (solid, liquid, or gas). Chemicals can be safer to others, but to some sensitive workers, even the most common solutions can cause illness, skin irritation, or breathing problems. Examples of chemical hazards in the workplace include liquids like cleaning products, paints, acids, solvents – especially if chemicals are in an unlabeled container; vapors and fumes that come from welding or exposure to solvents;

gases like acetylene, propane, carbon monoxide, and helium; flammable materials like gasoline, solvents, and explosive chemicals; and pesticides.

d) Ergonomic hazards:

These hazards are related to the design of workstations, tools, and equipment. They can lead to musculoskeletal disorders such as carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, and other physical conditions. Examples of ergonomic hazards in the workplace include repetitive movement, awkward postures, forceful exertions, and vibration.

e) Physical hazards:

These hazards are related to the physical environment of the workplace. They can cause harm to the body without necessarily touching it. Examples of physical hazards in the workplace include noise, radiation, extreme temperatures, and vibration³.

f) Psychological hazards:

These hazards are related to the mental and emotional well-being of workers. They can cause stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Examples of psychological hazards in the workplace include bullying, harassment, violence, and work-related stress.