

# Editorial

## Occupational Safety and Health Education in Schools

Schools in Japan, elementary through high schools, teach generally about natural disasters, traffic accidents, crimes occurring to youngsters, drug and thinner addictions, smoking, air-heat-light-noise environment, drinking water, and communicable diseases. More specific education is carried out in technology/home economics and health/physical education at junior high schools, and in health/physical education and engineering course at high schools according to the government guidelines for teaching: safe use of machine and materials; prevention of electric shock; protection from dust and chemicals; management of working environment, posture, and time; design and production concerning user's safety; provision on tiredness, stress, and mental health. But to my knowledge, occupational safety and health (OSH) education has not been properly conducted at schools here.

How about at universities? Some departments of engineering provide students with OSH education before starting laboratory experiments or practical training. The educational effects, however, may be limited, given the fact that the working conditions and environment in most universities are not met with the standard of Japanese Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA).

In 2004 national universities were reformed by the government to become independent corporate entities and had to comply with OSHA, having the function of inspection and punishment by labor inspection offices. This change was seen as drastic, since prior to 2004, OSH of the national universities was controlled by the other legislation without the above-mentioned function. Therefore, some confusion occurred among university people. Nevertheless, it should be noted that educational facilities of the universities were gradually improved to meet OSHA and that both university staff and students began paying special attention toward OSH education and practice. Importantly, the progress in OSH has been expanded also to private universities.

To support OSH at universities, the intercommunication and collaboration (ICC) has been strengthened among the Academic Consociation of Environmental Safety and Waste Management, Japan University Health Association, and other related institutions. In addition, the relevant

committee has been set up in Japan Society for Occupational Health. The principal difference in OSH between universities and general companies is the presence of students; they, of course, are not employers, but their safety and health should be protected from the hazards occurring from educational environment. A Nonprofit Organization, e.g., Research for Environment, Health and Safety Education, was established to promote safety and health education.

Although the OSH activities in universities are still lagging behind those of companies, these activities are rapidly expanding and new development is emerging. The revision of the School Health Act to the School Safety and Health Act has yielded expansion of OSH education from the staff education to school education. The Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare states in the eleventh Industrial Accident Prevention Plan (FY2008–2012) that 'more promotion is necessary to make students to understand the importance of OSH before start working'. This message represents OSH activities at every school as an essential factor in enhancing the level of OSH in the real work settings.

Taken together, the following five goals need to be accomplished: (1) The school environment should be reviewed in light of health and safety with the consensus of OSH as a priority among all school personnel and students. For example, take a careful look inside classrooms and you will see many problems that have to be fixed on platforms, desks, seats and so on. (2) More effort is necessary to promote OSH by the combination of education and practice, so that we are able to effectively develop the technology specific to safety and health of school and cultivate next generation human resources. For example, at departments of engineering and technical high schools it is indispensable to upgrade infrastructures to meet OSHA standard and to execute systematic education on OSH. (3) Decide adequate educational contents, make curriculum and teaching materials, and also to train the teachers and technical personnel for OSH education. There are two ways to add the OSH course in already running curriculum: teaching independently or adding in the related courses. For primary and secondary educations the latter

is more feasible, but for tertiary education both ways are necessary. (4) ICC should be promoted between schools. A few schools have already advanced ICC, and we can share their practical experiences and accomplishments. (5) OSH education at schools overseas needs to be investigated and to be made use of for us. As far as I can tell, Finland, Canada, Malaysia, and the Philippines have been practicing OSH education in an active manner.

Forgetting the “common” sense that OSH education is the matter in companies, our attempt of incorporating

safety and health education into school curriculum may be still in the beginning stage. However, I can say that the OSH education to students combined with the OSH activities in schools will contribute to upgrading the OSH levels of common workplaces in Japan in the future. I am truly hoping that students will study safely and healthily at schools, work safely and healthily, produce safe and healthy products, and consequently contribute to the society.

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