

Health and Safety at Work in Ireland 1992 – 2002

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Health and Safety at Work in Ireland

1992 – 2002

Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

Published in May 2005 by the Health and Safety Authority, 10 Hogan Place, Dublin 2.

© All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Health and Safety Authority.

I KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: INTRODUCTION

Health and Safety at Work in Ireland, 1992–2002 draws on a range of demographic and health and safety statistics to give a picture of occupational health and safety in Ireland over the 10-year period from 1992 to 2002. Four specific questions are addressed in the document.

- What is the trend of health and safety in Ireland?
- What are the characteristics of the health and safety problems specific to Ireland?
- What actions are needed in what areas?
- What kinds of information are available and what kinds are missing?

(a) Trend of health and safety in Ireland

In the past decade, both the population and the number of people in employment in the Republic of Ireland have increased significantly. This has meant an increase in the number of less experienced people in work and an increase in the total number of people exposed to occupational hazards.

The statistics on Irish workplaces and intervention indicate that the quality of health and safety management has improved in various economic sectors, that more education and information have become available, and that legal requirements have been more rigorously enforced over the past decade.

The available data suggest that, overall, workplace injuries declined over the period 1992–2002. This is despite the rapid increase in employment in the same period, especially in the construction sector, and the improvements made as a result of the various intervention efforts mentioned above. While most economic sectors have improved in terms of lower rates of workplace accidents, the existing data show little sign of improvement in the agriculture and fishing sectors.

Statistics have yet to be established that will allow observation of a long-term trend in work-related illnesses. However, the existing data show that both the number and rate of combined work-related injury and illness among those who are not in the labour force have increased between 1999 and 2002. This suggests that some work-related injuries or illnesses have resulted in long-term illness.

(b) Characteristics of health and safety in Ireland

The latest comparable statistics for 2001 show that Ireland has the lowest non-fatal accident rate in the EU. However, Ireland's fatality rate was the sixth lowest among the 15 member states for the same year.

Ireland had a larger proportion of agriculture and construction sector workers than the EU-15 average, and this determines the characteristics of the risk and nature of hazard exposure in total. Overall, Ireland's health and safety performance is very positive. However, the statistics indicate a poor profile for the agriculture sector in respect of both health and safety management and outcomes.

The adverse effect of workplace injury and illness on employment and the economy was found to be more serious than previously perceived. Among those who had a workplace injury or work-related illness during 2002, an estimated 25,300 people were not at work at the end of that year. In the same year, an estimated 1.2 million working days were lost among those in employment due to work-related injury and ill health.

Among those who had a work-related illness, half of the cases resulted from a bone, joint, or muscle problem; therefore the majority of occupational health problems in Ireland relate to injury. Other problems identified are stress, depression or anxiety, and breathing or lung problems. Heart or circulatory problems are also often mentioned both within and beyond the workplace.

Regarding general long-standing health problems, whether they are work-related or not, chest or breathing problems are the most common type of problem and are particularly high in the hotels and restaurants (including pubs) sector. In the light of this finding, the introduction of a smoking ban in workplaces was an appropriate measure to take, and its impact will be assessed in future statistics.

(c) Recommended actions

The analysis of the existing information suggests that one of the single most important work-related health issues is back injury. This is the most prevalent and widespread problem across all the economic sectors and represents a cost to the Irish economy and society in the form of absenteeism and unemployability. Back injury hazards in every type of workplace should be highlighted and prevention programmes should be introduced. In view of the high number of people who leave the workforce following a back injury, recovery support and assistance programmes to enable an early return to work should also be considered.

The available information suggests different needs in different sectors and occupations; therefore specific programmes need to be targeted at selected groups.

The agriculture, forestry and hunting and fishing sectors show common features in all the aspects of working conditions concerned: workplace hazard exposure, workplace intervention, and health and safety outcomes. The challenges that exist in these sectors – such as small scale enterprise, physical nature of work, long working hours, openness to family members and visitors, lack of resources for health and safety, and lower awareness – should be addressed

The mining and quarrying sector has a high fatality rate. This sector often does not show up in statistics as a separate entity because of the small size of the industry. However, its high-risk nature – sometimes higher than the construction sector – should not be overlooked, and continuous efforts are needed for further improvements.

Construction continues to be a high-risk sector, and the number of workers in this sector has rapidly increased during the past decade. A number of initiatives have been undertaken to minimise the risk associated with construction work. More than a third of reported accidents occurred to workers with less than one year's experience. This should be considered by the industry in recognising the importance of training and awareness programmes.

The hotels and restaurants sector has not been regarded as a high-risk sector in the past. It has a high proportion of temporary workers and self-employed, and has long working hours. It has been found to have high male injury rate, the highest multiple injury rate, and its workers have the highest rate of long-standing chest or breathing problems. The sector tends to have a high rate of staff turnover. It is recommended that the industry considers putting in place appropriate training and prevention programmes.

The health and social work sector also shows a relatively unhealthy profile. It is one of the highest risk sectors for female workers for both work-related injury and illness, with a high incidence of musculo-

skeletal problems. The workers in this sector also have the second highest rate of long-standing health problems after the agriculture and fishing sectors, and stress-related conditions are also common.

(d) Information gap

There are reasonably detailed sources of information on the short-term outcomes of health and safety in Ireland. Further observation of existing data, particularly the QNHS statistics, would help us to understand the long-term outcomes, and additional information specifically on the long-term effects would be valuable.

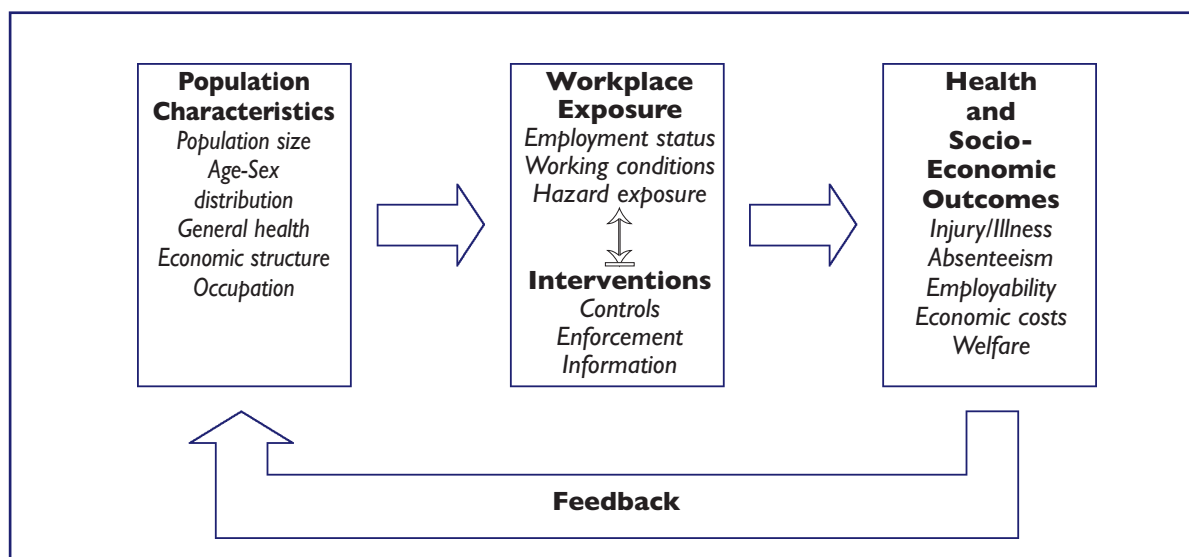
There is a need to develop a database of workplace exposure and intervention that would allow sectoral comparisons and trend observations. A large part of the working conditions and hazard exposure information came from the European Survey on Working Conditions conducted by the European Foundation. This is useful for European comparisons but does not facilitate sectoral or other comparisons within Ireland. To enable effective national policy-making, such information at the national level is needed.

There is also a need to develop a data collection system for the circumstances, and the cause of work-related illness that can be used to inform an effective prevention programme. The QNHS can give an indication of the magnitude of the problem, but a data collection system that can gather information on individual cases, would be beneficial to inform programmes for the prevention of work-related illness incidents.

2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The document was structured to correspond to the relationship between factors affecting health and safety performance shown in Figure 1. Each section's findings are summarised below.

Figure 1: Factors affecting health and safety performance



(a) Population characteristics

- The population of the Republic of Ireland has grown to its highest level in recent history, and the last decade was marked by a particularly high growth rate.
- The growth is concentrated in urban areas and Leinster.
- Population growth is almost equally due to natural increase and migration.
- More than half of migrants are returned migrants, but the foreign-born population has also increased.
- Life expectancy at birth in Ireland is improving, although it was still one of the worst when the EU comprised 15 member states.¹
- The most common cause of death is heart disease.
- As well as the increase in the size of the labour force, employment has increased so that Ireland's unemployment rate was one of the lowest in the EU in 2002.
- The number of workers has increased most substantially in the services sectors, for males in the construction sector and for females in the education and health sectors.

¹ All references to the EU and the EU average in this document relate to an EU of 15 member states, prior to the May 2004 enlargement to 25 member states.

- In comparison to the EU average, Ireland has a large proportion of workers employed in the agriculture and construction sectors.
- The number of workers has increased in all the occupational groups with the largest group being managers and administrators, the proportion of whom is larger than the EU average.

(b) The Irish workplace

- Most of the recent growth in employment has been in the number of employees rather than in the self-employed.
- Ireland has the fifth highest proportion of self-employed in the EU in 2002.
- Over 80 per cent of Irish workers are employees.
- 85 per cent of employers employ fewer than 10 workers.
- There are over 132,000 employers and 113,000 self-employed.
- The hotel and restaurant sector (12 per cent) and the wholesale and retail trade sector (seven per cent) have the highest proportion of workers in temporary employment.
- Over half of all workers in the agriculture sector are in part-time employment.
- The percentage of Irish workers doing shift work (17 per cent) is slightly above the EU average.
- Self-employed workers work an average of 50 hours a week, with those in the agriculture, and hotels and restaurants sectors working above-average hours.
- Employees work an average of 40 hours a week with agricultural, and mines and quarries workers working above-average hours.
- Irish workers work more or less the same hours as the EU average.
- Ireland has the second highest level of workers in the EU who sometimes or always work at home (15 per cent).
- Irish workers wear personal protective equipment (PPE) more frequently than almost all other workers in the EU in 2000.
- A high percentage of Irish workers are exposed to noise, compared to the EU average.
- Fewer Irish workers are exposed to ergonomic problems at work than the EU average.
- More Irish workers perform monotonous tasks at work than the EU average.
- Irish workers experience more or less the same level of violence (1.6 per cent from co-workers and 4.3 per cent from outsiders) and intimidation (9.7 per cent) at work as the EU average.
- Irish workers are less likely to experience discrimination at work than the EU average.

(c) Workplace intervention

- Most workplaces give high priority to health and safety standards, but this is significantly lower in the agriculture sector.
- Managers responsible for safety say that laws and codes of practice, moral obligation, costs of

accidents and insurance, and HSA inspection are important factors for improving health and safety in their workplace.

- The agriculture and fishing sectors have poorer health and safety management records in terms of both accident reporting and safety statement preparation than other sectors.
- Compared with most EU workers, Irish workers are more likely to have enough time allocated for their jobs, and to use teamwork and task rotation.
- Irish workers are about average in relation to being informed about risks and being consulted, compared to other EU workers.
- A range of health and safety courses has become available and a large number of people have received formal health and safety education in the last decade.
- A number of campaigns to raise awareness of various aspects of health and safety at work has taken place in recent years.
- The number of inspections has increased since 1999, but inspections per thousand workers has not, due to the increase in the numbers employed.
- The percentage of complaint and accident investigations has increased in comparison to routine inspections.
- The proportion of inspections relating to construction has increased from 28 per cent in 1995 to 47 per cent in 2002.
- There were 20,000 workers per inspector in 2002.
- More than 80 per cent of persons inspected were either very satisfied (45 per cent) or satisfied (43 per cent) with the inspection.
- The number of prohibition notices issued each year has increased from fewer than 100 in 1992 to 684 in 2002.
- Site closure was first introduced in 2000 as a means of enforcement.
- The number of prosecutions taken each year more than quadrupled between 1992 and 2002.
- Prosecutions on indictment were first heard in 2000.

(d) Outcomes of workplace health and safety

(i) Fatality

- There is a modest declining trend in the rate of work-related fatalities.
- The agriculture, forestry, fishing and construction sectors have the highest fatality rates per 100,000 workers, and their trends are not declining to any significant extent.
- A further breakdown of sectors reveals an extremely high fatality rate in the fishing sector (1 in 1,000) and a higher fatality rate in the mining/quarrying sector than in the agriculture and the construction sectors.
- Self-employed workers are significantly more likely to suffer a fatal injury than employees.

- Males are significantly more at risk of suffering a fatal injury.
- Most deaths occur in the 20–34 and 45–59 age groups, except in agriculture where the 0–14 and 65+ age groups suffer the most deaths.
- The most common type of fatal injury involves a fall from a height, the next most common involves workplace transport.
- Male children aged five to nine are more likely to die in a work-related accident (often in farming) than in a road traffic accident.
- Ireland had the sixth lowest fatality rate of the (former) 15 EU states in 2000.

(ii) Injury and illness

- It was estimated that 117,800 persons aged 15 or over were affected by occupational injury or illness in 2002 (injury: 45,800 persons; illness: 72,000 persons).
- The injury and illness rate fell between 1999 and 2002 for those in the labour force, but this fall was almost cancelled out by a rise in the rate for those not in the labour force.
- The rate of occupational illness is highest for those who are not in the labour force, indicating that a significant number of people may be leaving the labour force due to work-related illness.
- Males are much more likely to suffer injury or illness than females at all age groups, with three per cent of those aged 30–34 affected by injury and six per cent of those aged 55–64 affected by illness.
- Workplace injury is most common in the construction sector.
- Males in the hotels and restaurants sector have an injury rate nearly as high as in the construction sector, and are the most likely to have multiple injuries.
- For males, the self-employed and those assisting relatives have the highest injury and illness rates.
- For females, the self-employed have the highest illness rate.
- The health sector is one of the highest-risk sectors for female workers.
- Work-related illness is most common in agriculture, forestry and fishing.
- Bone, joint, and muscle problems are by far the most common type of work-related illness.
- Self-employed with no paid employees are most likely to have bone, joint, or muscle problems, and self-employed with paid employees are most likely to have stress, depression or anxiety problems.
- 25 per cent of persons injured in 2002 suffered more than one injury.
- Ireland had the lowest rate of workplace accidents in the EU in 2000.
- The age group with the greatest number of reported accidents is 25–29.
- Accidents are most common at around 11 a.m. with a smaller peak occurring around 3 p.m.. The construction sector is unusual in that the peak at 3 p.m. is almost as large as the 11 a.m. peak.
- Agricultural accidents are most likely to occur in August and October.

- Over 35 per cent of the reported accidents in the construction sector in 2002 occurred to workers with less than one year's experience with the employer.
- Long-standing health problems are most common in the agriculture and fishing sectors.
- Chest or breathing problems are the most common type of long-standing health problem, and are particularly high in the hotels and restaurants (including pubs) sector.
- Mesothelioma is most common among those aged 50 and over.

(iii) Economic issues

- Over 1.2 million working days were lost among those in employment in 2002 due to occupational injury or illness.
- On average, 14 working days were lost per injury case and 17 working days were lost per illness case.
- Over 35 per cent of injuries and 40 per cent of illnesses resulted in no days lost.
- The largest number of working days per incident was lost in the public administration and defence sectors.
- Self-employed people are less likely to take days off as a result of occupational injury or illness.
- Over 60 per cent of people with a long-standing health problem or disability experience restrictions to the kind and amount of work they do or can do.
- 8 per cent of people in employment with a long-standing health problem or disability are provided with assistance to facilitate their work. Mental, nervous or emotional problems are most well provided for.
- 13 per cent of people not in employment with a long-standing health problem or disability need assistance in order for them to work, most commonly with vision difficulties.
- Occupational Injury Benefit payments increased from €45 million in 1992 to €77 million in 2002.
- The net incurred costs of employer's liability insurance increased from €173 million in 1998 to €290 million in 2002.
- The total fines arising from prosecutions increased from €19,141 in 1993 to €697,950 in 2003.

(iv) Workplace satisfaction

- Over 70 per cent of those whose workplace was inspected by the Authority agreed that the inspection reduced the chance of an injury occurring at their workplace.
- Ireland has a high percentage of workplaces where discussion with employees leads to workplace improvements.
- Over 50 per cent of Irish workers felt they would still be able to do their current job at 60 years of age.
- Over 90 per cent of Irish workers are satisfied with their working conditions.

*Achieving a
Healthy
and Safe
Working Life
-Together*

**HEALTH AND SAFETY
AUTHORITY HEADQUARTERS**

10 Hogan Place, Dublin 2

Tel. 1890 289 389

Fax. (01) 614 7020

website: www.hsa.ie



**HEALTH AND SAFETY
AUTHORITY**

ISBN No. 1-84496-020-X

Athlone Field Office

Government Buildings
Pearse Street

Athlone

Co Westmeath

Tel: 1890 289 389

Fax: (090) 64 92914

Cork Field Office

3rd Floor

1A South Mall

Cork

Tel: (021) 4251212

Fax: (021) 4251217

Galway Field Office

Odeon House

Eyre Square

Galway

Tel: (091) 563985

Fax: (091) 564091

Limerick Field Office

Ground Floor

Park House

1-2 Barrington Street

Limerick

Tel: (061) 419900

Fax: (061) 419559

Sligo Field Office

Government Offices

Cranmore Road

Sligo

Tel: 1890 289 389

Fax: (071) 91 44078

Waterford Field Office

5th Floor

Government Buildings

The Glen

Waterford

Ph: 051-875892

Fax: 051-870610