

# Safety and Health in Japan

A Newsletter from Japan Industrial Safety and Health Association (JISHA)



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# Reflections on JISHA's 40th Anniversary



Kazuo HIROMI  
President  
JISHA

**A**ugust 1, 2004 marked the 40th anniversary of the Japan Industrial Safety and Health Association (JISHA). The year JISHA was founded, 1964, was also the year of the Tokyo Olympic Games and the year the Tokaido Shinkansen (bullet train) line opened. This was right in the midst of the period of rapid economic growth, but it was also the era with the most occupational accidents. JISHA was established to address this problem under the Industrial Accident Prevention Organization Law, and given the mission of increasing the level of safety and health and eliminating occupational accidents by promoting voluntary activities to prevent occupational accidents by employers and associations of employers.

Significant improvements have been made since then, with occupational accidents showing an overall decline over the long term. Today, Japan experiences only one-third or one-fourth the number of accidents that were reported back then. These achievements are mostly due to the efforts of the national government and many devoted people at private companies, but JISHA is also proud to have made significant contributions in a wide range of fields.

Nonetheless, many occupational safety and health challenges remain to be met. Since last summer, there has been a series of large accidents and disasters, such as explosions and fires, at workplaces owned by some of Japan's leading manufacturers. Also, serious accidents show no sign of decline, as evidenced by the large number of deaths that resulted from the steam leakage at a nuclear power plant in Fukui Prefecture. The number of serious occupational accidents that resulted in three or more injuries or deaths reported in 2003 was the highest of the past 25 years.

This situation raises many concerns. In recent years, companies have been reviewing and streamlining their organizations and personnel structures, reducing

costs, and adopting approaches that focus on efficiency. When these measures are applied to safety and health departments, however, serious problems can result. “Safety First” is not just a slogan. It is a principle to which adherence in the workplace is desperately needed. Some are concerned that there has been a reduction in safety awareness and a reduced sense of danger, while others are concerned by a decline of field-oriented experience, including a lack of continuity in skills and techniques related to safety and health in the workplace. Several problems pertaining to safety and health still need to be addressed by small and medium-sized enterprises.

Changes in socioeconomic and workplace conditions are occurring rapidly and on a large scale, yielding various effects on safety and health. It is crucial that we respond appropriately to these impacts. Among the issues that need to be addressed is the need to establish consistent safety and health management practices at workplaces that have been made more complex by the evolution of diverse work patterns. There are many other important issues, including appropriate risk management measures for machinery and chemical substances, measures related to the increasing number of elderly and female workers, and the development of measures for addressing mental health concerns.

To address these issues, we need to do everything we can to strengthen the voluntary safety management efforts of companies, especially their integrated implementation of OSHMS and the Zero-Accident Campaign. We also need to promote efforts to get top executives more involved in safety and health, thereby encouraging the development of a safety culture in the workplace. Building on JISHA’s 40-year history, we are committed to continuing our tireless efforts to further improve occupational safety and health in Japan.

# Activities of Industrial Safety and Health Organizations

## Seminar and Reception Held to Commemorate JISHA's 40th Anniversary

A special lecture and reception were held on September 13, 2004 to commemorate JISHA's 40th anniversary, which was August 1, 2004.

The seminar speaker was Mr. Kunio YANAGIDA, non-fiction writer and literary critic. Mr. Kazuo HIROMI, President, JISHA, gave opening remarks, after which Mr. Yanagida gave a presentation on "Where Are the 'Pitfalls' of Safety? Examining Automation, System Expansion, and Increased Complexity." The auditorium was packed for the interesting talk, which was based on numerous case studies of past accidents.

The reception, which was held in a separate room following the lecture, began with remarks by Mr. Koremasa ANAMI, Vice-Chairperson, JISHA, who described the initial impetus for JISHA's establishment—the prevalence of occupational accidents in the 1960s—and gave an overview of the progress that has been made in safety and health activities over the past 40 years, and the current situation of occupational accidents in Japan. He pledged, "We would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to do everything in our power to offer creative and resourceful



Special lecture by Mr. Kunio YANAGIDA

safety and health services that meet the needs of the industrial sector." Additional remarks were given by distinguished guest Mr. Chikara SAKAGUCHI, former Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, and the toast was offered by Mr. Tsuyoshi TAKAYAMA, Vice-Chairperson, JISHA. Invited guests in various fields related to safety and health filled the room, and spent an enjoyable evening reminiscing and enthusiastically discussing future prospects for safety and health initiatives in Japan.

## JISHA Conducts 40th Anniversary China Industrial Safety and Health Study Tour

Continuing its many years of sending delegations on Overseas Industrial Safety and Health Study Tours, JISHA sent this year's China Industrial Safety and Health Study Tour group to Beijing and Shanghai from August 30 to September 5, 2004, as part of its 40th anniversary program. The tour group was comprised of 26 individuals from workplaces and organizations that are JISHA members.

In addition to participating in the 2nd China International Forum on Work Safety which was held during the period, the 20th annual conference of the Asia Pacific Occupational Safety & Health Organization, APOSHO 20, and the concurrent China International



Mr. Chikara SAKAGUCHI, at the reception



Industrial Safety and Health Study Tour in China

Occupational Safety and Health Exhibition, the tour group visited China's State Administration of Work Safety (SAWS), the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, and the Japanese Embassy in Beijing. They also were taken on tours of factories located in the suburbs of Beijing and Shanghai.

The 2nd China International Forum on Work Safety, jointly sponsored by SAWS and the International Labour Organization (ILO), attracted approximately 700 participants and was focused on the theme of "Safety, Health and Development." Following the opening ceremony at the Great Hall of the People, seminars and research presentations were given at a hotel in

Beijing. Mr. Kazuo HIROMI, President, JISHA, gave a keynote presentation on "OSH Challenges of JISHA on the 40th Anniversary."

APOSHO 20, which was supported this year by the China Occupational Safety and Health Association (COSHA), was held in Beijing and attracted approximately 400 participants.

The China International Occupational Safety and Health Exhibition featured displays created by about 130 businesses and organizations, including several from Japan, and attracted about 7,000 visitors during the exhibition period.

During visits to SAWS and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, tour participants heard from top

officials about the activities of those bodies and enthusiastically participated in Q&A sessions following the briefings. The delegation was also invited to the Japanese Embassy under the kind auspices of the Labour Attache, who spoke with the visitors about labour conditions in China.

Tour members also visited a high-pressure gas cylinder factory, an electronics parts factory, and an auto parts factory and auto model test laboratory.

The opportunities that tour members had to attend a ceremony at the Great Hall of the People, to visit the Japanese Embassy, to hear about and discuss China's administrative policies with

high-level officials from Chinese governmental offices, and to visit Chinese factories were incredibly valuable experiences that would not have been possible on a usual overseas visit.

### **Proposal for Improving the Safety and Health of Home Care Workers**

**J**ISHA has compiled a proposal regarding policies that need to be developed by employers, associations of employers, and relevant government institutions to maintain and improve the occupational safety and health of home care workers.

This proposal was incorporated in the report of the Research Committee on the Working Conditions and Management Status of Home Care Workers. In drafting the proposal, the committee conducted surveys at approximately 2,000 home care workplaces and conducted hearings with 11 other such workplaces.

The findings showed that, among those workplaces with 50 or more employees, 32.3% had established safety and health committees, 38.4% had appointed industrial physicians, and 46.5% had appointed safety and health supervisors. As many as 36% did not have an appointed industrial physician or similar person responsible for safety and health. Periodic medical examinations are provided to 86.7% of full-time

workers and 75.4% of non full-time workers, but to only 54.4% of registered aides. Medical examinations were provided at the time of hiring to only 47.5% of full-time workers, 41.4% of non full-time workers, and 33.4% of registered aides. Generally speaking, many workplaces do not offer adequate safety and health measures for home care providers. They attribute this to the pressures of an excessive regular workload and their inability to take on the extra work required to develop a safety and health system. Not only were there some workplaces at which workplace managers did not adequately recognize the importance of safety and health, there were also wide disparities among workplaces in the level of safety and health-related knowledge and experience possessed by safety and health management personnel.

Home care work is performed under significantly different working conditions than those found at a production site or administrative office. That is, since the recipient of care services is the priority, and patient health conditions and mobility vary by individual, the provider often has to deal with tensions between the care recipient and his or her family members. Thus, to promote safety and health, we need to investigate policies based on an understanding of these unique characteristics and challenges.

The proposal requires employers to ensure general working conditions for

all home care workers, regardless of their status as full-time or non full-time workers or registered aides, and makes employers legally responsible for ensuring the safety and health of care providers. It also requires that employer associations actively provide instruction in and support for information gathering and workplace safety and health activities, and that relevant government institutions help disseminate information about laws and provide support for employer associations.

This year, JISHA has started working on a two-year project commissioned by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) to promote voluntary safety and health activities in the care services industry.

### **National Occupational Health Week 2004**

**T**he 55th National Occupational Health Week was held October 1 to 7, 2004, following a preparatory period lasting from September 1 to 30. The Week was promoted by the MHLW and JISHA with the cooperation of five sector-specific industrial safety and health associations, and workplaces nationwide participated.

This year's theme was "Maintain Physical and Mental Health before Being Given a Red Card" (a "red card"

indicates that a worker has been diagnosed with a specific health problem that may impact his or her work). Aimed at further promoting voluntary occupational safety and health management activities, the Week featured workplace patrols, work environment monitoring, and poster displays and other occupational health educational activities at various workplaces.

### 2004 Year-End and New Year Zero-Accident Slogan and Slogan for 2004

**J**ISHA collects suggestions annually for its Year-End and New Year Zero-Accident slogan and slogan for the next year.

From the 1,340 and 3,079 slogan suggestions received for the 2004 Year-End and New Year Zero-Accident slogan and the slogan for 2005, respectively, the following have been selected.

#### 2004 Year-End and New Year Zero-Accident Slogan (prizewinner)

*“Take the time to check! Follow the safety rules during the year-end and New Year!”*

Two other entries received an honorable mention.

#### 2005 Slogan (prizewinner)

*“Identify any degree of risk and improve safety in the workplace”*

Two other entries received an honorable mention.



2004 Year-End and New Year Zero-Accident Slogan poster

# Labour Administrative Activities

## Results of Investigation on Chemical Substance Management Practices

Given the heightened social interest and international trends in chemical substances since May 2003, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), which has held ten meetings to investigate chemical substance management practices in the workplace, issued a report in May 2004 that further promotes voluntary chemical substance management in the workplace and incorporates policies developed in response to the United Nations' Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS) advisory regarding the labeling of chemical substance hazards.

This report indicates that it is necessary for businesses to further promote voluntary chemical substance management. However, it also points out that it is difficult to entrust all chemical substance management to the employer. Risk assessments need to be performed by the government on harmful unregulated chemical substances as necessary, and risk management efforts, such as the establishment of regulations, need to be conducted based on those results. Guidelines also need to be issued by the government to help employers voluntarily promote health impairment prevention measures.

Currently, the labeling and issuance of Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for hazardous chemical substances in Japan is based on the Industrial Safety and Health Law. These need to be performed in accordance with the UN's GHS advisory. The GHS stipulates that chemical substance hazards be labeled with a pictogram, such as a skull and crossbones.

## 2004 White Paper on Health, Labour and Welfare

The MHLW has released the 2004 White Paper on Health, Labour and Welfare. The white paper, entitled "Health Risks in Contemporary Life: Safety and Security through Information and Cooperation," describes the issues being addressed by Japan's health, labour and welfare administration with a special emphasis on the key phrase "health risks."

Defining "health risks" as "personal health disorders, and the frequency or seriousness of their occurrence," the white paper identifies the current status of efforts to reduce health risks in various categories and proposes measures needed for the future. It argues for the basic concept that society as a whole must work to promote "risk communication" in which relevant parties share ideas about various policies based on the results of "risk assessments"

performed to identify health risks, and "risk management," a process of monitoring the emergence of new health risks and examining the policies that are introduced.

The chapter on methods for addressing health risks in everyday life calls attention to the importance of "overwork countermeasures" alongside such measures as "health promotion policies" and "allergy countermeasures." Overwork has a negative effect not only on the worker, but also on the employer. In addition to insisting that employers enact the necessary policies, the white paper highlights the importance of promoting various measures, such as the enactment of policies to prevent health impairment due to overwork by the government.

The white paper also gives significant attention to the handling of mental health problems, pointing out that mental diseases, such as depression, are on the rise. In addition to promoting efforts in the workplace to address mental health issues through the development of the Guidelines for Promoting Mental Health Care in Enterprises, it argues that workplaces must not work alone, but rather in partnership with their communities, to address these issues.

The white paper also identifies the need to establish measures to combat infectious diseases and lifestyle-related diseases, measures to ensure food safety, and measures to ensure medical safety, as well as the need to restore



trust in the healthcare system. It suggested that the creation of a network consisting of vertical and horizontal ties between relevant parties is the key to preparing against health risks, and that the cooperation of society as a whole, through information sharing and dialogue, is needed.

All of the above content is in section one. Section two provides detailed descriptions of efforts undertaken by the health, labour and welfare administration.

### **Self-Diagnosis Checklist for Level of Worker's Fatigue Accumulation Now Available**

The MHLW enacted the Comprehensive Program for the Prevention of Health Impairment Due to Overwork in February 2002, and is now striving to disseminate information about reducing overtime work and about the health management measures workers can take when they have to work more than a certain number of overtime hours. To encourage workers to take an active role in their own health management, the MHLW has created a checklist (posted on its web site) that they can use to determine their level of accumulated fatigue. The current

version was revised based on studies of the trial version that was released last year.

The completed checklist asks respondents to indicate the degree and frequency of their symptoms over the past month. There are 13 items pertaining to known symptoms, such as irritability and anxiety, and seven items related to work conditions, such as "Overtime work beyond usual monthly schedule" and "Burdens accompanying business trips." A score is assigned based on the degree indicated for each symptom, and these points are then added up. The respondent is assigned to one of four rankings based on the total of their scores in each of the known symptoms and work conditions categories. These rankings are then used to determine their position in a matrix of the possible ranking combinations, allowing them to comprehensively measure their work-related stress. Advice on how to prevent fatigue accumulation is also provided.

Another checklist has also been created to allow the family members of a worker to evaluate that worker's accumulated fatigue.

The list can be accessed (currently in Japanese only) at the MHLW web site ([www.mhlw.go.jp](http://www.mhlw.go.jp)) or the JISHA web site ([www.jisha.or.jp](http://www.jisha.or.jp)).

### **MHLW Calls for Prevention of Asbestos Exposure due to Mortar Additives**

The Industrial Safety and Health Law regulates the manufacture and sale of asbestos and products containing asbestos, but products containing asbestos have been discovered in the mortar additives used in plastering work. The MHLW has therefore alerted the relevant parties to exercise caution in the handling of this material and has called for the prevention of exposure to asbestos due to the use of these products.

Materials containing a considerable amount of asbestos were detected in a serpentine mortar additive for plastering labeled as "asbestos free" during an analysis conducted by the National Institute of Industrial Health (NIIH). Based on this information, the MHLW asked JISHA to establish an Investigatory Committee Regarding Methods of Measuring Asbestos Content in Mortar Additives for Plastering, and the committee has since conducted several investigations of the methods used to analyze these products.

Based on the results, the MHLW has instructed the Prefectural Labour Offices to identify which workplaces are manufacturing these products, to provide guidance to manufacturers regarding the analysis of the asbestos

content of products, and to educate manufacturers regarding the labeling of products that contain asbestos. The ministry also asked employers that manufacture any of the seven products that were found to contain asbestos in the analysis conducted by the NIIH to strengthen measures based on the Industrial Safety and Health Law.

### **Report Issued by the Committee on Future Approaches to Occupational Safety and Health**

**S**erious occupational accidents, such as frequent explosions and fires, have occurred in Japan since the summer of 2003. Further, the social and economic environment has been changing, driven by trends such as the diversification of organizations and business models caused by corporate consolidation and spin-offs. In response to the situation, the MHLW invited academic experts to participate in the Committee on Future Approaches to Occupational Safety and Health, which met six times between March and August 4, 2004. A report has now been issued by the Committee.

In light of the high number of serious occupational accidents, including explosions and fires, that have occurred, the report identifies a lack of efforts led by top management, a lack of measures against hazards, a lack of

coordination with subcontractors, and the inadequate transmission of safety knowledge and experience. It stipulates that top management needs to establish clear policies and to strengthen the tools and organizational mechanisms available for preventing accidents. The increase in subcontracting, ongoing corporate consolidation and spin-offs, and changes in work styles, such as the use of part-time and temporary workers, all require the development of safety and health management systems that can meet new needs.

Policies therefore need to be established: (1) to foster an environment that encourages employers to engage in voluntary safety and health efforts; (2) to build safety and health management systems through master employers; and (3) to implement support measures for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Based on the committee's report, the MHLW will propose revisions to the Industrial Safety and Health Law to the Labour Policy Council within the year, and will submit a tentative revised version of that law for discussion during the next session of the Diet.

### **Report Issued by the Committee on Overwork and Mental Health Policies**

**W**ith interest in overwork and mental health policies increasing as a result of the

various changes that have taken place in the labour environment, the MHLW's Committee on Overwork and Mental Health Policies, which has been exploring directions for future policy, has compiled a report of its findings and issued recommendations.

The number of approved workmen's accident compensation claims for cerebrovascular and ischemic heart diseases and mental disorders due to overwork has been rising, and more than 30,000 suicides have been reported for six consecutive years in Japan. Of these suicides, workers accounted for more than 9,000 for the first time ever last year. Given these trends, the committee has identified the need to further strengthen the Comprehensive Program for the Prevention of Health Impairment Due to Overwork and the Guidelines for the Promotion of Workers' Mental Health at Work, both of which were developed by the MHLW to address the issues of overwork and mental health in the workplace.

The committee proposed institutionalizing the implementation of one-on-one counseling, including mental health check-ups with a physician, in cases where there is an increased risk of cerebrovascular or ischemic heart disease due to overwork.

The report indicates a need to establish structures both inside and outside of the workplace that people can use if they are concerned about their own mental well-being or that of a family

member or coworker. It also demonstrates the necessity of measures such as educating workers, training supervisors, and developing counseling structures.

The MHLW plans to look into ways that these recommendations can be incorporated into law.

### Tokyo Labour Office Implements Emergency Policy to Eliminate Construction Accidents

**C**onstruction accidents in Tokyo have been on the rise since April 2004, with six fatalities

in both July and August and a serious occupational accident (simultaneous work-related death of three or more workers) in September. The situation is a matter of urgent concern. With a recovery in the amount of construction work, especially private construction work, there are concerns that safety and health management activities have stagnated at construction sites in Tokyo. The Tokyo Labour Office has therefore adopted an Emergency Policy to Eliminate Construction Accidents. The period is from October 1 to December 31, 2004.

Given the specific characteristics of the fatal accidents that have occurred, the Tokyo Labour Office and Labour

Standards Inspection Offices in Tokyo offered simultaneous inspection and individual guidance at about 300 construction sites in Tokyo from October 1 to 15, 2004, and assessed whether basic safety policies, such as those for preventing falling accidents, were being followed. Based on the results, the offices conducted group guidance for companies as needed. The Tokyo Labour Office also requested industrial associations to conduct voluntary patrols during the implementation period and to report back with their findings.



Mr. Hisami OKUDA (second from left), Director, Tokyo Labour Office, personally provides guidance at a construction site (October 4, 2004).

# Research and Statistics

## No Reduction in “Smoke Harassment”

While more workplaces are designating separate smoking areas and adopting no smoking rules in accordance with the enforcement of the Health Promotion Law, a study conducted by the Smoking Cessation Information Center (SCIC) has shown that there are still many non-smokers who are concerned about smoke damage and that there has been no decline in “smoke harassment” by smoking superiors against their non-smoking subordinates. This survey was conducted over the Internet among a total of 600 male company employees, including 300 smokers and 300 non-smokers, aged 20 and older throughout Japan.

According to the survey, 41% of non-smokers reported being unable to ask their superiors not to smoke, while only 6% reported being unable to ask their subordinates not to smoke. Even when asked by their superiors for permission to smoke, 58% of subordinates reported being unable to refuse the request even if they wanted to.

The SCIC states, “In the workplace, where harmony in human relationships is very important, workers are especially likely to yield to their superiors’ wishes. Superiors who smoke should be considerate of their subordinates, and

managers should actively strive to develop smoking policies.”

## Results of Comprehensive Survey on the Diversification of Work Styles

Given the increase in the number of non-permanent workers, such as part-time and temporary workers, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) conducts a periodic survey on work styles. The most recent survey was conducted among about 16,000 randomly selected workplaces nationwide with five or more full-time employees, and asked about conditions as of the end of 2003. The results showed that non-permanent workers, such as part-time and temporary workers, are employed at about 35% of workplaces nationwide.

The percent of all employees who are non-permanent rose to 34.6%, up 7.1 points since the last survey (1999). This was the first time in the three surveys conducted to date for that figure to exceed 30%. Part-time workers accounted for the highest share of this group, representing approximately two-thirds of all non-permanent employees. The percentage of workplaces that expect their ratio of non-permanent employees to increase rose to 19.8%, confirming the assumption that work styles are continuing to grow more diversified.

The most common reason for hiring non-permanent employees was “to save money.”

The most common reasons that non-permanent workers have chosen this employment option are, in order of most popular, “to bring in a little extra income for the household,” “to have greater flexibility in work hours,” and “because there weren’t any companies that would hire me as a permanent employee.”

## Suicides Increase to Worst-ever Level in 2003 (34,427 Deaths)

According to an announcement by the National Police Agency, the number of suicides in 2003 in Japan rose by 7.1% from the previous year to 34,427, the highest number ever reported. There were 24,963 male suicides, accounting for 72.5% of the total. A breakdown by age shows the highest numbers of suicide deaths among those 60 and older, at 11,529 (33.5%), followed by 8,614 among people in their 50s (25.0%), and 5,419 among people in their 40s (15.7%). By employment status, the unemployed accounted for 47.4% of the total at 16,307 suicides. There were 8,474 suicides among employed people, which, combined with the number of suicides among people in managerial positions, brings the total to 9,209

suicides among working people. This is the first time for this number to exceed 9,000. The most common cause or motivation for committing suicide was health problems, indicated in 15,416 of cases, followed by financial problems (8,897), family problems (2,928), and work problems (1,878).

### **2003 Regular Inspections: Legal Infraction Rate of 65.6% Higher Than Last Year**

The MHLW has announced the results of 2003 regular inspections stipulated by the Labour Standards Law and other regulations. According to the results, 65.6% of workplaces were found in some degree of infraction of the Labour Standards Law or Industrial Safety and Health Law, up approximately 3 percentage points from 2002.

Inspections were performed at 121,031 workplaces in 2003. Of these, 79,394 workplaces (65.6% of the total) were found to be in some degree of violation—including minor infractions—of the Labour Standards Law, Minimum Wage Law, Industrial Safety and Health Law, or Pneumoconiosis Law. The largest share of the infractions, 27,737 cases, were related to the issue of working hours, governed by Articles 32 and 40 of the Labour Standards Law. This was followed by 22,977

infractions related to safety standards related to the Industrial Safety and Health Law. The highest rate of infraction was reported in the film/theater industry, at 84.0%, followed by the education/research industry at 78.7%, the health service industry at 76.0%, and the transportation industries at 74.1%.

The number of cases referred for prosecution of legal violations was 1,399, up 5.3% from the 1,328 cases of the previous year. Of these 709 (50.7%) were violations of the Labour Standards Law and 681 (48.7%) were violations of the Industrial Safety and Health Law. The largest share of violations came from the construction industry with 593 cases (42.4%), followed by the manufacturing industry with 346 cases (24.7%) and commerce with 122 cases (8.7%).

### **Results of Survey on Visual Display Terminal (VDT) Operations Released**

Although the 2003 Survey on Technological Innovation and Labour conducted by the MHLW showed that physical fatigue is reported by 78.0% of workers who perform VDT operations and that mental fatigue is reported by 34.8%, workplace response measures tended to consist only of work environment policies,

with only 10% of workplaces offering work time management or VDT medical examinations. This study was conducted among about 12,000 workplaces selected from workplaces nationwide with 10 or more full-time employees, and involved about 14,000 workers selected from those workplaces.

The results of the workplace survey show that 26.8% of workplaces have seen an “increase in the number of people complaining of eye fatigue” along with the use of computer equipment, 19.4% have seen an “increase in the number of people complaining of physical fatigue, such as shoulder stiffness,” and 6.5% have seen an “increase in the number of people complaining of mental stress.” As many as 99.5% of workplaces, including regular business offices and sales floors, are implementing VDT work environment policies. The most common measures consisted of “lighting and natural lighting measures” implemented at 69.4% of workplaces, followed by “ventilation measures” at 67.2% of workplaces, and “temperature/humidity measures” at 62.8% of workplaces. By contrast, only 11.1% of workplaces are implementing VDT work time management policies, and only 12.9% of workplaces had implemented VDT examinations in the past year.

In the survey conducted among workers, meanwhile, 17.7% of respondents reported their average daily

VDT operation hours as “less than one hour,” 19.7% as “1-2 hours,” 25.1% as “2-4 hours,” 16.9% as “4-6 hours,” and 20.6% as “more than 6 hours.” The percentage of workers who experienced mental fatigue or stress as a result of their computer use was 34.8%. Of these, 59.7% were temporary workers, 35.5% were full-time employees, and 19.2% were part-time workers. In terms of physical fatigue, 78.0% of workers experienced physical fatigue or symptoms when using VDT. The symptom most frequently reported by these workers, “eye fatigue/strain,” was reported by 91.6%, followed by “neck and shoulder stiffness/strain” (70.4%), “lower back fatigue/strain” (26.6%), and “arm, hands, finger fatigue/strain” (20.2%).

### Larger Companies Report More Mental Illness

According to the Survey on Mental Health Measures conducted by the Japan Productivity Center for Socio-Economic Development, the larger the company, the more employees take time off work due to mental illness. The survey also showed that mental illness occurs most frequently among people in their 30s. Survey results were obtained from the human resources administrators of 268 listed companies (response rate of 10%).

The results showed that 58.2% of companies have seen an “increasing trend” in the number of cases of mental illness in the past three years. The larger the size of the company, the higher was the percentage of companies reporting this increase. This increase was indicated by 45.2% of companies with fewer than 1,000 employees, 65.7% of companies with 1,000 – 2,999 employees, and 71.2% of companies with 3,000 or more employees. The most frequently reported mental illness was depression, at 85.8%, and mental illnesses were most commonly reported by people in their 30s (49.3%), followed by people in their 40s (22.0%), and people in their teens and 20s (10.4%).

The most common mental health policies adopted in the workplace are “education for managers” (62.3%), followed by “PR through a corporate newsletter” (47.4%), “education for regular employees” (41.4%), “requests for services to outside counseling institutions” (40.3%), and “mental health check-ups” (38.8%).

In addition, 52.6% of companies promote mental health efforts through a safety and health committee, but 11.2% do not, and as many as 33.2% could not respond to this question one way or the other. A total of 61.9% of companies have discussed mental health measures at labour-management conferences within the past year.

# Domestic Topics

## Five Workers Die in Steam Blast at Nuclear Power Plant

On August 9, 2004, an alarm sounded at the Mihama Nuclear Power Plant (an 826 megawatt pressurized light-water reactor) in Fukui Prefecture, indicating an abnormality in an active power-generation turbine and causing the automatic, consecutive shutdown of the turbine and reactor. A ruptured pipe in the three-story turbine room (a facility where power is generated by turbines driven by high-pressure steam) resulted in a blast of high-pressure steam that killed five workers and injured six others, some seriously. The eleven individuals had been doing preliminary work for a regular inspection on the second floor. Although there were no radiation leaks, this was the worst accident at an active reactor in the history of Japan's nuclear power program.

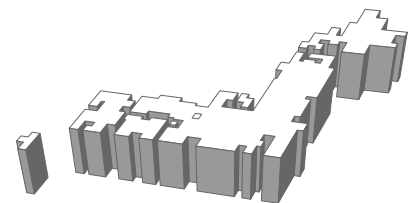
The ruptured pipe had not been tested or replaced even once in the 27 years since the plant first went into operation in 1976. As a result of this accident, the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry instructed power producers to conduct comprehensive inspections of all of the nation's 52 commercial nuclear power plants. Thermal power plants that use the same kind of piping as the damaged reactor were also asked to conduct comprehensive inspections. As a result of the large number of fatalities and injuries, and to address risks at other nuclear power facilities as well, the Fukui Labour Office has taken the extraordinary action of establishing a Serious Occupational Accident Countermeasures Headquarters. This office will investigate safety management structures, such as whether the proper work procedures are being followed, whether safety and health supervisors have been appointed, and whether work is being done according to established manuals.

## Japan's Supreme Court Approves New Workmen's Accident Compensation Claim: Worsening of Chronic Illness Due to International Business Trips

Claiming that a chronic duodenum ulcer was worsened by stress while on a business trip overseas, a former trading company employee filed a lawsuit against the Chief of the Kobe Higashi Labour Standards Inspection Office. The suit demanded that the Labour Standards Inspection Office pay the full medical compensation benefit. The appeal hearing ruling on the case was handed down by the Third Petty Bench of the Supreme Court on August 7, 2004.

The plaintiff won the case due to the court's recognition of the cause-and-effect relationship between work and illness, as indicated in its written opinion, "It appears that the duodenum ulcer rapidly worsened due to the plaintiff's heavy workload, which constituted an unusually heavy mental and physical burden." Because of the difficulty of objectively identifying stress as the cause of an illness, it has thus far been difficult to obtain approval for a workmen's accident compensation claim unless the claimant could show a psychological burden that had accumulated over many years. This was the first time for the Supreme Court to approve Workmen's Accident Compensation eligibility for a chronic digestive system illness attributed to work-related stress.

After going on business trips to four destinations in Japan between November 20 and 24, 1989, the plaintiff in this case was allowed only one day off before being sent on a 12-day international business trip that included visits to six countries and regions, including South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand. While in Hong Kong, just prior to returning home, the man was diagnosed with a duodenum ulcer that had worsened due to stress, and underwent surgery. During this period, the man spent a total of 68 hours on domestic business trips and 144 hours on overseas business trips, primarily engaging in business meetings and business-related entertainment. In addition to his long working hours, the plaintiff's psychological stress mounted in the face of difficult business meetings and climate changes due to nearly constant travel. In March 1990, he filed a claim for medical compensation benefits under the Workmen's Accident Compensation Insurance Law with the Chief of the Kobe Higashi Labour Standards Inspection Office, but the Chief then filed an injunction stopping any further payment of benefits in July of the same year; he filed a lawsuit in response. The lawsuit was dismissed in its first and second rulings.



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JISHA was established in 1964 under the Industrial Accident Prevention Organization Law. Its purpose is to eliminate industrial accidents by improving Japan's industrial safety and health levels through voluntary accident prevention activities among businesses throughout Japan.

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