

Safety and Health in Japan

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



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Safety and Health Education at JISHA



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Although the number of Japan's work-related accidents has been on a downward trend for decades, annual statistics in recent years still show some 540,000 injuries and 1,600 deaths. As the number of serious occupational accidents (involving three or more simultaneous casualties, including fatalities) has climbed in recent years, the development of industrial technologies, the aging of the working population, and the growth of service industries have raised new issues for safety and health management activities in the workplace.

Occupational accidents occur as a result of inappropriate behavior by workers and unsafe or unhealthy workplace conditions. Worker education, which enables workers to obtain the required safety and health knowledge, and top manager education, which enables top managers to improve their awareness of workplace safety, are therefore keys to hazard-free workplaces, though the introduction of failsafe machines and improvements in the work environment are also important.

In order to help improve safety and health on the job and facilitate the creation of comfortable workplaces, JISHA offers and implements various safety and health programs. These programs include safety and health education, lectures, dissemination of information, consulting and technical support services, and other programs whose purpose is to assist the private sector's voluntary efforts to prevent accidents. Here, I would like to describe the safety and health education programs.

JISHA recognizes the importance of providing workers with safety and health education because they can play active roles in creating accident-free workplaces. To help promote educational initiatives by companies, JISHA holds a number of safety and health awareness seminars and in-class training sessions at the JISHA head office and seven other regional safety and health service centers. In these seminars and training sessions, participants learn about Occupational Safety and Health Management Systems (OSHMS), risk assessment procedures, technical problems and solutions, and other approaches to minimizing hazards at work.

Based on the conviction that preventing occupational accidents begins with an awareness of safety and health issues among top management and other managers, we offer training programs and seminars designed specifically for the highest levels of management as well as for various ranks of managers. We offer field-specific training and seminars for workers in specific jobs, as well as training programs and seminars to promote the Zero-Accident Campaign and the Total Health Promotion (THP) Plan.

JISHA also offers educational programs—which Japan’s safety-and-health-related laws and regulations require—to enable safety supervisors and safety and health promoters to improve their skills. Similarly, to meet the needs of the private sector, we hold seminars on risk assessment, hazard prediction activities, human error prevention strategies, work-procedure reviews and other safety and health-related issues. Home-study courses using distance communication are also included in JISHA’s educational programs.

At the Tokyo Occupational Safety and Health Education Center and the Osaka Occupational Safety and Health Education Center, both of which were established by the national government, JISHA works under government contract to provide various types of overnight training programs. These include instructor-training courses for those who will be in charge of safety and health training sessions, and for those who will be responsible for special education on dust generating work and robot manipulation. Moreover, we offer overnight training courses for inspectors of specified machines that are subject to voluntary inspections under the law, and classes to train safety and health management personnel.

Safety and health education is so important that the safety and health related laws and regulations specify that employers must provide safety and health education to workers upon employment, to managers and supervisors, and to workers who will be engaged in hazardous or potentially harmful operations. Nonetheless, with all the accidents in the news in recent months, we cannot help but pose some questions. Have all of the workers at the company received an adequate level of safety and health education? Were the educational programs conducted systematically and appropriately so that the skills and the knowledge imparted could be applied effectively enough in work activities? Did the educational programs include specific components that allowed workers to emotionally experience the hazards? Was training repeatedly provided so as to successfully improve workers’ awareness of safety? Were the educational programs effective enough to fully convey the key components of safety and health management strategies?

As we strive to improve safety and health management levels in the workplace and to eliminate occupational accidents, JISHA will continue to learn from past accidents, and will make even greater efforts to offer better educational programs that will support workplaces’ safety and health education activities in the future.

Activities of Industrial Safety and Health Organizations

FY2004 Mental Health Promotion Symposium

The FY2004 Mental Health Promotion Symposium, jointly organized by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) and JISHA, was held on January 14, 2005 in Tokyo at Kudan Kaikan Hall. The theme for this year's symposium was "Developing Networks to Advance the Promotion of Mental Health." The event drew an estimated 650 attendees.

Opening remarks were given by Kazuo HIROMI, then President of JISHA, and Seichi ODA, Director-General of the Industrial Safety and Health Department, MHLW. The first half of the program featured a symposium on "Developing Networks to Advance the Promotion of Mental Health: Connecting with Workplace Colleagues and Using Resources outside the Workplace." Chairperson Satoru SHIMA, Professor at Tokyo Keizai University, led off with a presentation on the topic of "How to Set Up and Utilize Resources outside the Workplace." He explained the workplace resources that are currently available for addressing mental health issues, outlined the advantages and disadvantages of using them, and discussed future issues. Presentations on this theme were also given from the perspectives of personnel management



Prof. Yoro gives his presentation.

and labour affairs, in-house occupational health, and occupational health promoting organizations outside the workplace. The presentations were followed by a lively Q&A session.

The second half of the symposium featured a special presentation on "Mental Health" by Takeshi YORO, Professor at Kitasato University Graduate School (and professor emeritus at Tokyo University).

Safety and Health Forum

The FY2004 Safety and Health Forum was held on March 25, 2005 at the Tokyo Grand Hotel, and was attended by JISHA member associations of employers and industrial accident prevention organizations.

The forum, which was sponsored by JISHA, began with opening remarks by Mr. Hiromi, then President of JISHA, regarding JISHA's fundamental approach to program development. He discussed JISHA's commitment to contributing to the voluntary safety and health efforts of firms which are striving to cultivate the practical skills needed in the workplace (or "field-oriented experience") in a culture of safety and implementing various programs that align with the new direction indicated by the amendments to the Industrial Safety and Health Law, which were submitted to the Diet in March 2005.

The forum featured an explanation of the "Administration of Occupational Health and Safety in 2005" and presentations on "Support for the Promotion of Voluntary Safety and Health Activities" and "Present Situation and Future Prospects of Chemical Hazard Surveys."

Practicum Seminars Offered at the First Safety, Health and Comfort Fair

The Safety, Health and Comfort Fair, a general exhibition offering the latest information on safety and health, was held May 18 to 20, 2005 at Tokyo Big Sight. Practicum seminars were held in conjunction with this event for newly

appointed safety and health management personnel and other safety and health staff. Addressing relevant, contemporary themes related to occupational safety and health which firms are dealing with today, the seminars were conducted by presenters who included renowned experts and businesspeople who explained problem-solving methods using actual examples from business. The topics of the practicum seminars were as follows:

- (1) Preventing Heat Stroke
- (2) Moving Forward on Human Error Prevention Policies
- (3) Why Rush to Die? Preventing Suicide among Workers: Managing Evident Mental Health Risks and Dealing with Depression
- (4) Safety Campaigns Promoted as Traffic KY (Hazard Prediction) Activities
- (5) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The 22nd Kubota Award Winner

The Kubota Award was established in 1984 with a donation from the family of the late Dr. Juko KUBOTA, the first director of JISHA's Occupational Health Service Center. Dr. Kubota made significant contributions toward improving the level of occupational health in Japan.

The award recognizes the meritorious service of individuals or organizations for their achievements in promoting occupational safety and health.

This year's 22nd Kubota Award was presented to Akira HIROSE on April 11, 2005. Having worked for many years as an industrial physician in the prevention of occupational diseases, Mr. Hirose has played a central role on the occupational health committees of various relevant industry associations and has used his wide range of experiences in occupational health management to enlighten many people. He was presented with this award in recognition of his many contributions to improving the level of occupational health in Japan.

National Safety Week 2005

The 78th National Safety Week was held by the MHLW and JISHA with the support of five sector-specific industrial safety and health associations. Following the preparatory period (June 1 to 30), the National Safety Week is being held at workplaces across the nation from July 1 to 7, 2005.

This year's slogan is "Management leadership and employee involvement are important strategies for reducing hidden risks and improving workplace

safety." To ensure workplace safety, top management needs to take the lead in actively promoting safety and health measures by announcing safety and health policies. National Safety Week emphasizes the importance of cultivating a personal awareness of and commitment to safety among all workers, and of the importance of effectively reducing workplace risk.



National Safety Week 2005 poster.

JICOSH Training Programs in FY2004

The Japan International Center for Occupational Safety and Health (JICOSH) invites



JICOSH technical training session participants.

corporate safety and health management personnel and workers at safety and health organizations from developing countries where Japanese joint ventures do business to Japan, and it conducts technical training programs for them. In FY2004, JICOSH conducted the following 11 training programs—all but numbers 8 and 11 were offered in English or with English interpretation services—for 109 overseas trainees from a total of 10 countries and regions.

- (1) Safety Management in Construction Work
- (2) Zero Accident Activities (KYT)
- (3) Safety Operation of Boilers
- (4) Diagnosis and Prevention of Pneumoconiosis
- (5) OSHMS (Risk Assessment)
- (6) Ergonomics
- (7) Safe Operation of Lifting Appliances
- (8) Zero Accident Activities (KYT)—in Thai
- (9) Safety Assessment of Construction Work Plans
- (10) Safety Management of Machinery (Presses and Woodwork Machines)
- (11) Zero Accident Activities (KYT)—in Mongolian

Labour Administrative Activities

Committee Report on the Review of Rules Regarding the Establishment of Workmen's Accident Compensation Insurance Premium Rates

Following the recommendations of the report issued by the Council for Regulatory Reform (December 2003), which identified the need to review premium rates for Workmen's Accident Compensation Insurance based on the risks associated with specific industrial classifications, and in light of recent changes in the industrial and employment structures, the Committee on the Establishment of Workmen's Accident Compensation Insurance Rates of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) has examined the major issues related to the existing premium rates from three perspectives: (1) premium rates; (2) industrial classifications; and (3) the merit system. The committee has issued a report of its findings and the matters that were confirmed.

(1) Premium rates: Fundamentally, the report finds that the rates should be set by industrial classification and revised, in principle, every three years, just as before. It outlines the basic financial formulas involved in setting premium rates by industry type and discusses the notion of flat rates that have been imposed across

all industries. It also touches on measures to limit drastic changes in insurance rates.

(2) Industrial classifications: The report recommends focusing on business groups that have similar working conditions or types of accidents and confirming categories based on the accident rates of each group. It also recommends taking into consideration the scale of each business group as an "insurance group" and its classification under the Japan Standard Industrial Classification. As a new strategy, it recommends dividing the current "Other industry types" classification into "Newspaper, publishing, and communications industries," "Wholesale, retail, restaurant, and hotel industries," and "Finance, insurance, or real estate industries" and establishing these as new industrial classifications. To maintain the financial stability of insurance groups, the report suggests that it would be desirable to consider the integration of small-scale insurance groups while considering trends such as changes in the number of workers in the groups.

(3) Merit system: The report recommends that eligibility requirements remain unchanged, that continuing businesses maintain their current level of rate increase/decrease ($\pm 40\%$), and that defined-term

enterprises adopt the same level of increase/decrease (currently at $\pm 35\%$) as continuing businesses. To promote the introduction of safety and health measures among small and medium-sized enterprises, the report also recommends adding safety and health measures to the criteria for examination under special merit systems.

This report will serve as the basis for future studies conducted by the council. Based on this report, the council will revise the basic rules regarding the establishment of workmen's accident compensation insurance rates, and will require that any insurance rate revisions be introduced by following the appropriate procedures, including the disclosure of materials.

The council plans to conduct various studies based on this report in preparation for the next set of revisions to the workmen's accident compensation insurance rates, scheduled for enactment in March 2006.

Bill to Partially Amend the Industrial Safety and Health Law and Other Laws Submitted to the Diet

To ensure that workers have safe and healthy work environments, and in light of

changes affecting the working environment and society as a whole, a bill making revisions to (1) the Industrial Safety and Health Law, (2) the Workmen's Accident Compensation Insurance Law, (3) the Law Pertaining to the Collection of Workers' Accident Compensation Insurance Premiums, and (4) the Law concerning Temporary Measures for the Shortening of Work Hours has been submitted to the Diet.

An overview of the amendments pertaining to the Industrial Safety and Health Law is as follows:

- (1) Enhanced measures required of employers for reducing dangers and hazards
 - (a) Requires employers to enhance measures for identifying and reducing dangers and hazards. To encourage employers to undertake such efforts voluntarily, the bill exempts employers that have been shown to have implemented such measures from preliminary reporting requirements for machines and other equipment.
 - (b) In the area of dangerous/hazardous chemical substances, it improves the systems for the labeling of containers and packages and for the issuance of documents when transferring or supplying materials.
 - (c) Since the restructuring, repair, and cleaning of equipment are being outsourced with greater fre-

quency, employers are required to provide necessary information regarding potentially explosive chemical equipment to the contractors hired to perform these services.

- (d) To accommodate the increased use of contractors in the manufacturing industry, the master employers are required to coordinate communication between all relevant service providers.
- (2) Enhanced overtime and mental health policies
 - (a) Requires employers to have workers who work more than a certain number of hours undergo counseling with a physician.

Ordinance on Prevention of Hazards Due to Asbestos Enacted

The MHLW recently issued the Ordinance on Prevention of Hazards Due to Asbestos. It is the first independent ordinance to be issued under the Industrial Safety and Health Law to prevent health hazards in 25 years, since the enactment of the Ordinance on Prevention of Hazards Due to Dust. It goes into effect on July 1, 2005.

The asbestos ordinance requires employers to take necessary measures to prevent lung cancer, mesothelioma, and other health impairments in

workers caused by asbestos. Specifically, it regulates measures pertaining to the preliminary surveys, work plans, and reporting requirements involved in performing work that could potentially produce asbestos dust, as well as the removal of sprayed asbestos, insulation and fireproofing materials containing asbestos. It also regulates such matters as local exhaust ventilation systems, rest areas, work environment measurements, health examinations, and the selection and training of operations chiefs for the work of handling asbestos.

Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport Calls for a Survey of Earthquake Resistance of Window Glass in Existing Buildings

The earthquake epicentered off the west coast of Fukuoka Prefecture on March 30, 2005 caused glass in buildings throughout Fukuoka City to break and fall into the roads. In light of this, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MLIT) has requested local authorities nationwide to survey highly vulnerable buildings and make recommendations for their repair. The MLIT will survey buildings three stories or taller that were constructed prior to March 31, 1979 in regions with floor-area ratios of 400%

or more (downtown areas) where the threat of damage caused by falling glass is greatest. It will pay particular attention to the installation of permanently set windows that face streets and evacuation routes.

Railway Companies and Airlines Instructed to Conduct Shipping Safety Inspections

In light of the number of accidents in the railway and airline industries believed to be caused by human error, the MLIT has asked railway companies, airline companies, and air traffic control organizations to conduct emergency safety inspections.

The inspection criteria differ by industry, but some common criteria include the provision of manuals suited to the on-site work conditions and the thorough dissemination of such information. The inspections will also examine internal systems, such as the rules for reporting and confirming on-site problems and the systems for examining and preventing the recurrence of problems. These will generally be voluntary inspections conducted by individual employers. However, those employers are being asked to appoint emergency inspection officers to conduct the inspections systematically and produce a report of their findings, rather than merely assigning the task to on-site coordinators.

MHLW Launches Clean-up of Companies Avoiding Labour Insurance Procedures

The MHLW launched efforts in FY2005 to bring the number of companies avoiding required employment labour insurance procedures to zero.

All companies have been required to subscribe to labour insurance (workmen's accident compensation insurance and employment insurance) since 1975, and employers that employ one or more persons are generally required to complete all necessary subscription procedures. The reality, however, is that there are still a considerable number of employers, especially small-scale merchants like retail stores and service providers, that have not taken these procedures. The MHLW has issued a strong recommendation to identify and subscribe these businesses, in order to ensure the sound management of the labour insurance system, provide for the even distribution of costs, and improve the welfare of workers.

The MHLW is providing strengthened cooperation for the prefectural labour offices, labour standards inspection offices, and public employment security offices in their efforts to increase subscription, as these various government offices provide guidance to employers on the required procedures.

Effects of Endocrine Disruptive Chemicals (EDCs) on Humans Still Unconfirmed

The MHLW committee that is examining the health effects of endocrine disruptive chemicals (EDCs) recently issued its Interim Report Addendum 2. According to the report, the results of research conducted thus far on EDCs have not revealed any cases, with the exception of cases indicating the pharmacological effects of a synthetic hormone, that confirm the effects of EDCs on humans. The notion that endocrine disruption on humans may be caused by exposure to chemical substances cannot be completely disregarded, but the periods in which humans might be expected to sustain damage as a result of exposure are generally confined to the fetal period and early adolescence. A great deal of knowledge has been amassed regarding the mechanisms underlying toxicity, and efforts are now being made to identify the issues and conduct ongoing research and investigations.



**Labour
Administrative Activities**

Research and Statistics

Fatalities and Serious Occupational Accidents in 2004

Occupational fatalities decline, but the number of serious occupational accidents rises to 270 for the first time in 30 years

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) recently published its data on the fatal occupational accidents that occurred in 2004. According to the data, the number of fatalities due to occupational accidents was down by eight from the

previous year, to 1,620, an all-time low. Of those 1,620 fatalities, the construction industry accounted for the highest number, 594, up 36 from the previous year. The next largest number was accounted for by the manufacturing industry, which, at 293, was down five from the previous year.

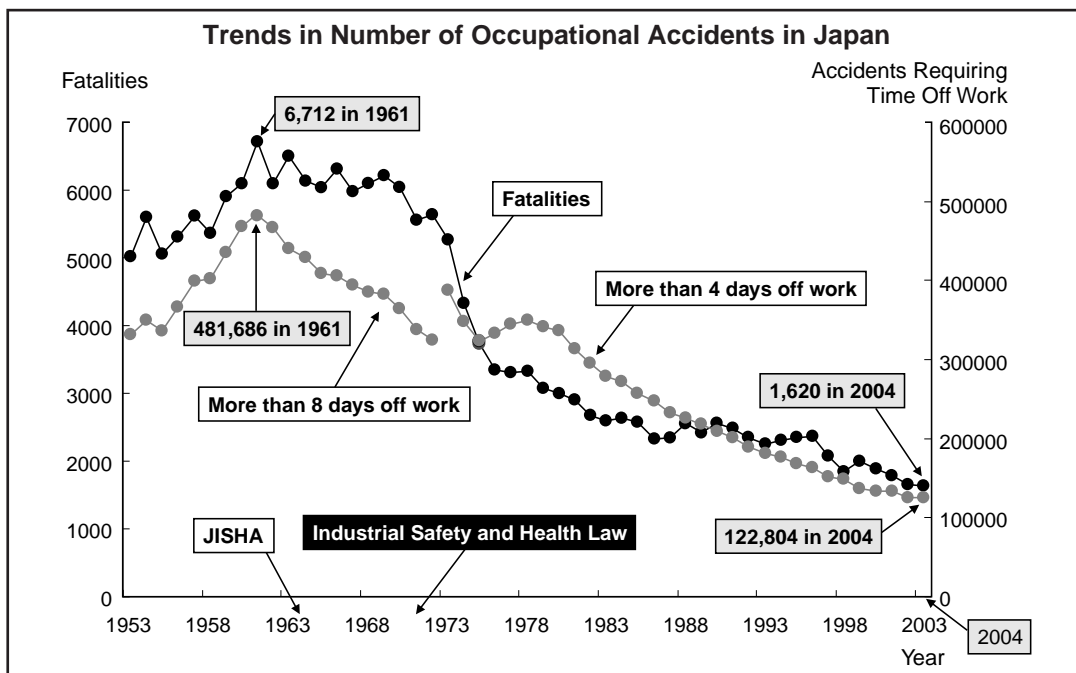
Meanwhile, the number of serious occupational accidents (accidents involving three or more simultaneous work-related deaths, injuries, or illnesses) rose to 274. A breakdown by type reveals that there were 134 traffic accidents, followed by 49 cases of poisoning or chemical injuries, 21 incidents involving fire or high-temperature objects, 14 explosions, and 11 cases involving falls.

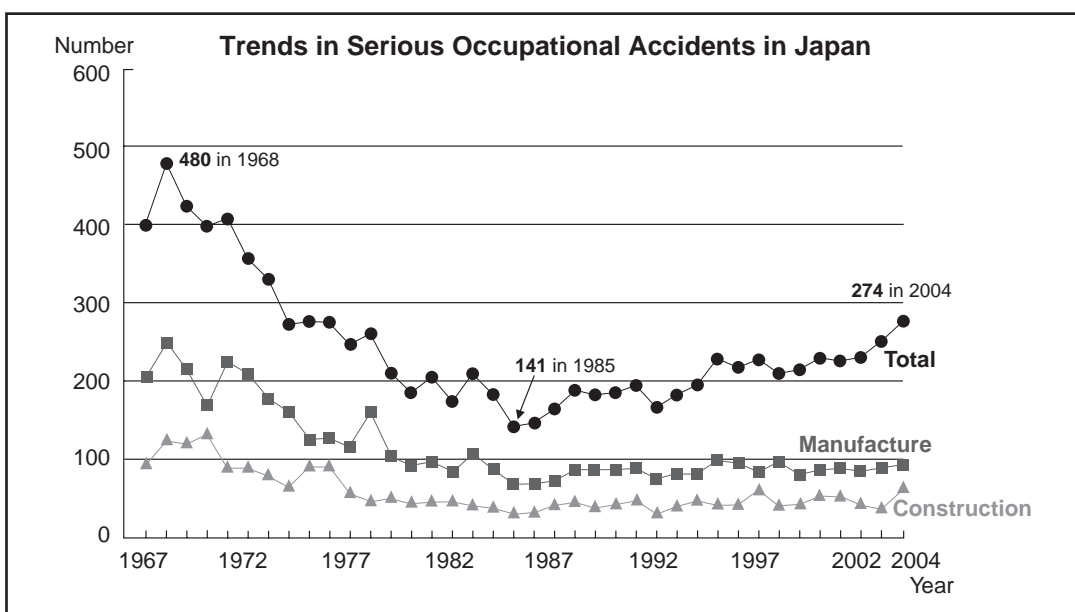
The peak year for serious occupational accidents was 1968, with 480 incidents. The number fell from 480 that year to a low of 141 in 1985, and has continued to climb since then. The figure in 2004, 274 incidents, is close to the figures recorded 30 years ago.

Few Organizations Making Efforts to Invest Human and Financial Resources in Safety

In light of the frequency of serious occupational accidents that have taken place in manufacturing workplaces since August 2003, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and

Industry (METI) has taken measures aimed at the prevention of industrial accidents, such as the establishment of the Industrial Accident Policy Council, which is comprised of 17 organizations in 12 business sectors. METI has announced accident prevention policies in its Interim Report on the Results of the Industrial Accident Survey, which recognizes: (1) the importance of the role of top management;





Based on these findings, METI recommended that more aggressive efforts be made to prevent accidents—not only for the sake of reducing human casualties, but also to prevent the harmful effects that the temporary shutdown of a company’s operations has on industry as a whole. METI is asking that these findings be distributed to all organizations as a wake-up

(2) the importance of human error prevention strategies; (3) the importance of risk management for equipment and parts; and (4) the sharing of accident information. The ministry has asked the council’s member organizations to promote measures based on these policies, and conducted a questionnaire survey of industrial accident prevention measures that have been implemented in the industry or whose implementation is being investigated.

The survey results show that, in various industries, top management has taken steps to implement activities that can be immediately launched, such as the implementation of safety patrols, the issue of a message from management regarding safety improvements, and the strengthening of safety and disaster prevention education. On the

other hand, there were few organizations making efforts “To secure management resources in long-term human resources planning for adding personnel to safety divisions,” “To support safety management at affiliated companies,” or “To implement education at partner companies.” Many organizations have adopted “The introduction and adoption of risk assessment techniques” and “Corrective measures, such as thorough examination of accident risk and equipment maintenance standards,” as measures for managing risks associated with equipment and parts. However, only a few organizations recognized the need for investments in equipment, through “Reviewing plans for updating dilapidated equipment” and “Introducing automatic risk assessment tools.”

call, and recommends that necessary measures continue to be taken in terms of the training of personnel and the development of technologies for ensuring safety.

More Firms Recognize that Overwork Leads to Health Impairment

To ensure the widespread dissemination of information on the Comprehensive Program for the Prevention of Health Impairment Due to Overwork, the Tokyo Labour Office has been implementing the Campaign to Prevent Health Impairment Due to Overwork since July 2003. As part of this campaign,

surveys were conducted among firms with 300 or more employees whose head offices are located in the Tokyo metropolitan area, on their health management and other efforts. These were conducted in FY2002 and FY2003, and now the results of the FY2004 survey have been announced (total respondents: 1,071 companies).

The FY2004 survey results show that 38.3% of firms are concerned about incidences of cerebrovascular and ischemic heart diseases due to overwork, a 3.0 point increase from the 35.3% in the FY2003 survey. This suggests that the percentage of firms that are concerned about health problems related to overwork is steadily rising.

A total of 620 firms (57.9%) indicated that their employees sometimes work “Long work hours (100 hours of overtime per month, or working more than an average of 80 hours of overtime, including time on days off, per month over two to six months)” or reported “The future possibility of long work hours.” This figure is up 3.9% from the 54.0% reported in the FY2003 survey. Of these 620 firms, 485 (78.2%) have taken some kind of measures regarding this issue, while the number of firms that “Haven’t really done anything” declined. Specific measures taken by firms included “Made efforts to accurately ascertain the number of hours worked” (48.4%), “Ascertained employees’ health status through periodic health exams”

(35.3%), and “Required employees who had worked 100 hours of overtime per month or more than an average of 80 hours of overtime per month over two to six months, to undergo counseling with an industrial physician and provided them with health advice” (26.3%), but few companies actually took direct measures to reduce work hours. For example, only 6.6% “Decreased overtime work” and 19.2% “Strictly required employees to take their annual paid vacations and consecutive days off.”

Based on these findings, the Tokyo Labour Office has decided to make efforts to further disseminate its Mandatory Measures for Employers to Prevent Health Impairment Due to Overwork and Guidelines for the Promotion of Workers’ Mental Health at Work.

Overtime Hours Worked Increase for Third Consecutive Year, Salaries Decrease for Fourth Consecutive Year

Overview of Final Results of Monthly Labour Survey for 2004

According to the Overview of Final Results of the Monthly Labour Survey for 2004

released by the MHLW, overtime hours worked increased for the third consecutive year in 2004, resulting in the first increase in total actual hours worked in four years.

The average number of total actual hours worked per month at companies with five or more employees increased 0.1% from the previous year to 151.3 hours, the first increase in four years. Of the number of total actual hours worked, regular working hours was down 0.1% to 141.0 hours, but overtime hours worked increased for the third consecutive year, rising 2.7% to 10.3 hours per month.

The average monthly salary in 2004 was down 0.7% from the previous year to ¥332,784, representing the fourth consecutive year of decline. Of this amount, base salaries were down 0.4% to ¥272,047, and special cash earnings, including bonuses, were also down 1.9% to ¥60,737. Of the base salaries, ¥272,047, income derived from fixed working hours was down 0.6% to ¥253,105, while that from extra working hours was up 3.9% to ¥18,942. Real wages fell for the fourth consecutive year, coming in 0.7% below the previous year.

The number of regular employees—full time and part time workers—rose for the first time in seven years, by 0.4% over the previous year. This reflects a decrease in full time workers of 1.1%, for a seventh consecutive year of decline, but a 5.5% increase in part

time workers, a figure which has continued to rise. In the manufacturing industry, the decline in the number of regular employees was kept down to only 0.9%, but this still marked the 12th consecutive year of decline.

Analysis of Issues Involved in Achieving Women's Work Aspirations

The MHLW recently released its 2004 White Paper on Working Women, entitled "Actual Situation of Women at Work." This report shows that the population of working women in Japan rose to 27.37 million, the first increase in three years, but that the women's labour force participation rate remained at exactly the same level as the previous year, 48.3%. The labour force participation rate of Japanese women follows an M-shaped curve, with many women leaving the labour force upon marriage (or childbirth) and then reentering it after having completed the first stage of childrearing. However, the labour force participation rate for women aged 30-34, at the bottom of the M, is continuing to climb, increasing 1.1 percentage points from last year's 60.3% to 61.4%.

This year's white paper, under the theme of "Achieving Women's Work Aspirations," examines the topic of working women from a variety of

perspectives. While the number and percentage of full-time female employees with children is decreasing overall, the figure for women with children under the age of six is increasing. Also, the number of women in part-time jobs is increasing. The 2004 data on women with part-time jobs shows a sharp increase of 12.0% over the previous year, while that of women in full time jobs shows a gradual increase of 4.4%. Similarly, the number of women in part-time jobs for less than one year at each company is increasing, while the number of women who stay in their part-time jobs for five or more years is decreasing. By examining such information about women's ongoing working conditions, conducting comparisons with other countries (for example, the labour force participation rate is low among women with a high educational background in Japan), and analyzing regional differences (for example, women's participation rates are lower in cities, where the bottom of the M is even lower than in rural areas), it is possible to identify the conditions under which women are able to continue working.

Based on these findings, the report concludes that to elicit women's desire to work, efforts must be made to offer flexible work opportunities in terms of work hours, to provide fair and equal treatment in the workplace, and to provide social support that enables women to work while raising children.

Domestic Topics



Train Derailment Kills 107 in Amagasaki, Hyogo Prefecture

On April 25, 2005, five of the seven cars of a crowded commuter train jumped the tracks in Amagasaki, Hyogo Prefecture, sending the first two cars smashing into an adjacent apartment building. As many as 107 died in the accident (including the driver), and more than 460 were injured (figures as of May 2, 2005). The possible causes of the crash determined thus far are as follows:

1. Excessive speed

The speed limit was 70 km/hour, but the train is believed to have been traveling at 100 km/hour at the time of the crash. The emergency brake was applied, but the committee investigating the crash has said that, in addition to a speed that exceeded the limit by 30 km/hour, the strong centrifugal force generated by going around a curve tipped the train's balance. They are proceeding with an analysis of the matter that adhered to the train. According to the West Japan Railway Co. (JR West), the driver of the train had overrun the last station it stopped at before the crash by 40 meters, and many feel that he was probably speeding to try to make up the 90 seconds he had lost as a result.

2. Outdated Automatic Train Stop (ATS)

According to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, the Automatic Train Stop (ATS) system installed at the location where the train jumped the tracks was the oldest model in use, and was not capable of triggering the brakes on a train that was traveling at excessive speeds.

3. Light weight of the railcars

Since the early 1980s, railway companies have been converting to trains made of stainless steel and aluminum, materials that enable greater speed and energy savings because of their light weight, and which offer maintenance cost benefits by virtue of their reduced need for repainting. The damage caused to the train by its collision with the solid, reinforced concrete apartment building was exacerbated as a result of the railcars' diminished strength.

4. Indirect factors

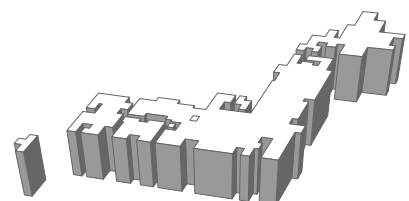
High speeds and tight schedules resulting from competition with private railroad companies have become a major problem. JR West requires that delays be reported in one-second increments, and the significant pressure on drivers to avoid delays could be a factor that contributed to human error.

Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare Hidehisa OTSUJI has stated the importance of providing full medical care, including emotional support, to the victims, and of accelerating the processing of workmen's accident compensation claims.

Mito District Court Recognizes Workmen's Accident Compensation Claim for Doctor's Suicide

Having determined in February 2005 that the April 1992 suicide of a male doctor who had been working in Tsuchiura, Ibaraki Prefecture was a result of depression caused by overwork, the Mito District Court overturned a decision in which a claim for compensation for the bereaved family had been denied. According to the judge, "There was no evidence to make me believe that he could have taken a vacation. The emotional burden he had to bear at work was heavy enough to lead to depression." The judge therefore recognized the causal relationship between the working conditions, the depression, and the suicide, and overturned the denial.

According to the decision, the doctor had regularly worked long hours of 12 hours or more per day, with virtually no time off, and was frequently called to work in the middle of the night. In two and a half years, he logged an average of 170.6 hours of overtime work per month, with the peak number of overtime hours in a month at 259.5 hours. In the month before he committed suicide, he had logged 204 hours of overtime. This is the first time that a court recognized a workmen's accident compensation claim for a doctor's suicide.



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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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