

# Safety and Health in Japan

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



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# Fostering a Culture of Safety



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In response to a critical accident at a uranium processing facility in 1999 and the failed launch of the H-II rocket, the Japanese government established an accident prevention and safety measures council and mandated the development of a “culture of safety” as a basic principle for achieving a safe society. In doing so, it emphasized the importance of cultivating an ethos or resolve among organizations and individuals that would ensure that the highest possible priority is placed on safety throughout the entire society, and outlined the measures that employers are required to take toward that end.

Since the summer of 2003, a series of explosions and fires have occurred at the factories of several of Japan’s leading manufacturers. Thus, although the 2004 occupational accident statistics show that the number of fatal accidents and accidents requiring four or more days off work declined from the previous year, as did the number of fatalities, there were 274 serious occupational accidents involving the simultaneous work-related death, injury, or illness of three or more workers. This figure was not only up 25 from the previous year, but was higher than any year in the past quarter century.

These accident statistics raise concerns that the awareness of the importance of safety, which has thus far been a high priority among Japanese companies, has waned, and that safety and health management functions have declined.

Thus, fostering and instilling a culture of safety is going to be critical in promoting safety and health in the future.

JISHA, given its goal of providing active support for the voluntary adoption of safety measures among companies, is undertaking a wide variety of efforts to prevent occupational accidents among companies and to ensure a high level of safety management. As part of its efforts, JISHA conducts research and surveys required for the prevention of occupational accidents. Since FY2004, JISHA has been carrying out specific research on what companies can do to cultivate and instill a culture of safety in the workplace.

Unfortunately, the findings of this study are not yet available because it is still underway. Questionnaires and interviews are being conducted among workplace managers, safety and health staff, and operations managers in workplaces with 50 or more employees in non-lumber and non-mining industries that are required to have an appointed safety manager.

This survey is unique in three ways: (1) it asks respondents to rate (subjectively) the level of their own company's culture of safety on a five-point scale, and analyzes this response in relation to other criteria (the importance of the position of safety and health in the workplace, areas and situations in which safety and health is emphasized, the level of safety and health awareness among employees, expressions of the importance of safety and health in the company's mission statement, the provision of information on safety and health to workplace managers, the frequency with which workplace managers issue instructions regarding safety and health, efforts to engage in safety and health activities, the degree of cooperation from work sites and production lines in promoting safety and health measures, the transmission of safety and health know-how, and other criteria in assessing workplaces' safety management systems); (2) it asks the three categories of respondents (workplace managers, safety and health staff, and operations managers) about their views on safety and health; and (3) it asks respondents' opinions regarding school education in safety and health.

The declaration issued at the National Industrial Safety and Health Convention held in Hiroshima in 2005 states, "Ensuring the safety and health of working people needs to be treated with the highest priority in any era. All employees, including top management, must recommit themselves to the original tenet that 'production cannot occur without safety' and establish a corporate culture that places the highest priority on the safety and health of workers, regardless of the size of the enterprise or the nature of its industry, as well as continue to devote their efforts toward achieving this level of safety awareness." JISHA's research and surveys are conducted in the hope that they will help foster and infuse a culture of safety in Japanese companies.

# Activities of Industrial Safety and Health Organizations

## Second Safety and Health Photo Contest Winners Selected

A Safety and Health Photo Contest was held for the second consecutive year to spread the word about ending occupational accidents and promoting the safety and health of working people. The 2005 slogan was “Identify any degree of risk and improve safety in the workplace.” One gold prize, two silver prizes, three bronze prizes, and one special judge’s prize were awarded to deserving works from among the 241 works submitted. The winning pieces were displayed at

the Tokyo and Osaka Industrial Safety Exhibition Centers. The gold prize winner, shown below, is entitled “Starting this morning once again with the point-and-confirm process.”

## 2005 Year-End and New Year Zero-Accident Campaign

The Year-End and New Year Zero-Accident Campaign is held in workplaces nationwide by JISHA with the support of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) for the purpose of preventing the occupational accidents that tend to



2005 Year-End and New Year Zero-Accident Slogan poster



Gold prize winning photograph

occur frequently around the year-end and New Year period.

2005 marked the 35th anniversary of the campaign, which extended from December 15, 2005 to January 15, 2006.

The slogan for this year was “Maintain safety awareness during the New Year season.” During this campaign, participating workplaces conducted various activities aimed at promoting occupational safety and health, such as promoting safety and health management reviews and improvements, offering medical guidance, and conducting educational activities like displaying posters on occupational safety and health-related issues.

## JISHA Smoking Room Compliance Registration Program Begins

To support smoking measures taken in workplaces, JISHA launched its smoking room compliance registration program in December 2005. Under this program, JISHA certifies whether smoking rooms and non-smoking corners established at workplaces comply with the Guidelines for Measures on Smoking at Work issued by the MHLW. Specifically, a specialist in occupational health measures the air quality in each smoking room in the workplace, evaluates whether the room complies with the registration standards stipulated in the guidelines, and provides technical advice as needed. Companies with compliant smoking rooms will be issued a compliance certificate and allowed to display a special compliance mark.

### Registration Standards

#### (1) Air Quality Standards

In smoking rooms, measures must have been taken to ensure that cigarette smoke is absorbed and vented outside the room before it can be dispersed, and the air quality inside the smoking room must conform to standards set for various measurement criteria.



Compliance mark

#### (2) Standards Regarding Smoking Behavior

The standards regarding smoking behavior must be displayed inside the smoking room.

## 2005 Overseas Seminars on Industrial Safety and Health Management

To promote industrial safety and health measures among companies beginning operations outside Japan and for Japanese workers on overseas assignments, JISHA holds Seminars on Industrial Safety and Health Management for those working for Japanese companies in several Asian countries. When conducting these seminars, JISHA strives to provide training that meets the needs of the host country and to strengthen its



Overseas seminar in Hanoi, Vietnam

relationships with the organizations concerned in that country to ensure that the seminars are effective. The following seminars were held in FY2005.

1) Hanoi, Vietnam

Dates: November 30 – December 1, 2005

Theme: Safety management of chemicals

Co-Sponsor: National Institute of Labour Protection (NILP)

2) Colombo, Sri Lanka

Dates: December 13-14, 2005

Theme: Occupational safety and health in the workplace and applications of biological monitoring to occupational health management

Co-Sponsor: Division of Occupational Hygiene, Ministry of Labour

3) Jakarta, Indonesia

Dates: January 11-13, 2006

Theme: Japan's experience with occupational safety and health measures and personal protective equipment

Co-Sponsor: The Indonesian National Safety and Health Council (DK3N)

### JICA Group Training Programs Held in FY2005

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has commissioned JISHA to hold group training programs aimed at



JICA trainees

transferring safety and health technologies to the employees of government agencies in developing countries. The following training programs were held in FY2005.

- “Environmental Risk Management in the Workplace” by the JISHA Osaka Occupational Health Service Center  
May 30 – August 6, 2005  
(11 trainees, from 10 countries)
- “Seminar on Policy of Industrial Safety and Health” by the JISHA International Cooperation Division  
October 3 – November 4, 2005  
(11 trainees, from 11 countries)

- “Ergonomics in the Workplace” by the JISHA Osaka Occupational Health Service Center  
January 30 – March 10, 2006  
(11 trainees, from 6 countries)

# Labour Administrative Activities

## MHLW Releases Proposed Budget for FY2006

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) recently released its proposed budget for FY2006. The top budget priorities included the thorough implementation of the Health Frontier Strategy, newly adopted in FY2005, and efforts to promote countermeasures to lifestyle diseases and nursing care prevention to help people live longer, healthier lives.

In workplace safety and health, the budget for shoring up asbestos measures was increased from ¥490 million in the FY2005 budget to ¥10.2 billion, with efforts to be devoted to better preventing the dispersal of asbestos during building demolition, complete prohibition of its use in manufacturing, and the health management of workers who previously worked in jobs involving asbestos. It also includes provisions for promoting voluntary safety and health activities among employers (such as the adoption of OSHMS), chemical substance management, and measures to prevent health impairment due to overwork, as well as for bolstering mental health measures.

A new item in the budget is the “development of new safety and health management methods using IT.” As part of the Ministry’s efforts to address the issue of technical inheritance that

has accompanied the aging of the baby-boomer generation, it is striving to develop new safety and health management methods that take advantage of information technologies.

In the area of labour relations, the budget included allowances for promoting work patterns that achieve a balance between work and home life, for implementing model projects aimed at introducing time proportional wages as a part-time labour measure, and for creating a system for encouraging companies that actively promote skills development.

This budget is now being deliberated in the current session of the Diet, and once approved will become effective at the start of the new fiscal year on April 1, 2006.

## Interim Report Released by the Committee for Investigating the Prevention of Public Transportation Accidents Caused by Human Error

To promote safety measures among public transportation providers, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport has released an interim report from its committee for investigating the prevention

of public transportation accidents caused by human error.

The committee was established because of a series of major public transportation accidents believed to have been caused by human error. To effectively promote safety measures, it is significant that this interim report examines not only the individuals who made the errors, but also the causal relationships involved in the accidents, and reviews the system as a whole and specifies measures to prevent recurrences. The report also investigates the accidents and problems attributable to human error that have occurred among the various public transportation providers, including airlines, railways, and vehicular services, and the mechanisms by which those accidents have occurred. It asks whether workplaces have work environments or corporate cultures that tolerate unsafe behaviors, and whether there is a lack of risk management awareness. It also makes suggestions about what needs to be done by companies and the national government in the future to cultivate corporate cultures that ensure safety, develop desirable organizational structures, educate individuals, engage in health management, and adopt accident-prevention technologies.

### **Meeting of Relevant Cabinet Ministers Passes Outline for New Asbestos Law: Expanding Those Eligible for Relief from Asbestos-Linked Health Problems**

**A**fter investigating the handling of the asbestos problem, the government convened a meeting of the relevant cabinet ministers on November 29, 2005 and compiled an Outline of Draft Legislation on Providing Relief for Asbestos-Linked Health Problems, which addressed the new asbestos law, a law regarding relief from such problems. This legislation was submitted to the ordinary session of the Diet on January 20. After enactment, it is expected to go into effect in April.

Those who will become eligible for relief are workers and their families and neighbors who died as a result of mesothelioma or lung cancer caused by asbestos but who were not eligible to receive workmen's accident compensation payments. Consideration is being given to providing benefits to cover the patient's share of medical expenses, medical care allowances to provide support for everyday living expenses, lump-sum benefits for bereaved families, and the payment of funeral

costs. The legislation will require the companies involved in the development of the worker's asbestos-linked health problems to cover these costs. The funds will be collected from all employers who employ workers and all ship owners who employ mariners. The government is also investigating ways of creating a relief fund and using some public funds for payments. It is using the Environmental Restoration and Conservation Agency as the main organization in the implementation of these relief measures, and developing a nationwide relief system to be operated through local health centers.

Also, measures equivalent to workmen's accident compensation will be taken in special cases in which workers die without workmen's accident compensation coverage. In addition, the government is examining the structures for resolving claim appeals and conflicts between patients and the companies where the problems originated.

### **Development of Guidelines for Risk Assessment Implementation**

**T**he MHLW is examining the development of guidelines for the effective implementation of risk assessments in the workplace

through an investigatory committee on risk assessments in the field of occupational safety and health. The Diet recently enacted legislation to revise part of the Industrial Safety and Health Law, and these revisions require employers to conduct surveys of risks and hazards, and to use their findings to take necessary measures to prevent danger and health impairment among workers. The same legislation stipulates that the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare will issue guidelines regarding the appropriate and effective implementation of these surveys and measures. It was based on this that the Director-General of the Industrial Safety and Health Department of the MHLW convened this investigatory committee. The guidelines to be enacted are based on the current Guidelines for Comprehensive Safety Standards of Machinery and the Guidelines for the Necessary Measures to Prevent Health Impairments to Workers Due to Chemical Substances, etc.

The components of the guidelines under investigation include the risk assessment implementation period, information that needs to be obtained before a risk assessment can be conducted (such as information for setting criteria for selecting workplaces that will be required to conduct risk assessments), standards for categorizing risks and hazards, risk assessment methods, matters that must be considered when performing risk assessments, standards



for determining whether risk reduction measures are necessary, and what to watch out for when investigating risk reduction measures. These guidelines cover all necessary matters regarding the implementation of safety and health risk assessments.

### Considerations Begin on Exercise Guidelines for Promoting Good Health

The MHLW recently established an exercise guidelines subcommittee to examine the exercise guidelines for promoting good health enacted in 1993. This subcommittee was established under the exercise requirements and guidelines development committee. In consideration of the exercise requirements that are already being examined, the subcommittee's goals are to improve each and every person's understanding of exercise as a means of maintaining and improving health, and to educate people about specific strategies for staying healthy.

The subcommittee is addressing the importance of prevention as a key strategy for combating the lifestyle diseases now being tackled by the ministry. Specifically, it proposes conducting health exams that incorporate the concept of metabolic syndrome and offering improved health guidance from

various angles. There are plans to give the exercise requirements and guidelines the user-friendly title of "Exercise Guide" and to use it along with the already planned "Balanced Eating Guide" to provide health guidance.

### MHLW Calls for Stricter Measures to Prevent Occupational Accidents in Expressway ETC Lanes

The MHLW recently called for the stricter implementation of equipment safety measures to prevent occupational accidents among toll collectors working in expressway electric toll collection system (ETC) lanes.

The directive affects the East Nippon Expressway Company and other expressway and regional roadway public corporations. Given that vehicles can pass through ETC lanes without stopping, the safety measures taken by the expressway corporations that manage those facilities are deemed to be essential.

Specifically, it suggests ensuring safety routes by which workers can safely approach the ETC when a problem occurs or taking measures such as installing barriers or other equipment to ensure that workers cannot easily

step into the ETC lanes. In situations where this is difficult, the MHLW suggests enabling workers to turn on a signal or guidance indicator when stepping into an ETC lane, and installing equipment that allows workers to block vehicle traffic remotely. It also calls for the development of a procedure manual for handling problem situations and for the provision of safety and health education to ensure that toll collectors are aware of the proper procedures they should follow.

When measures cannot be quickly taken, an annual plan should be created that clearly stipulates when measures will be implemented, and temporary interim safety measures should be taken by toll collectors when they need to cross ETC lanes, such as changing the signal to red before stepping into the roadway.

Accidents, such as toll collectors trying to deal with a problem being hit by passing cars when crossing lanes, are continuing to occur in the ETC lanes. More than 20 serious accidents have occurred since 2002, four of which resulted in fatalities. As ETC lanes come into more widespread use, there is concern that the number of accidents will increase.

### **MHLW Informs Prefectural Labour Offices: Depression Resulting from Sexual Harassment Covered by Workmen's Accident Compensation**

**T**he MHLW recently issued a statement to prefectural labour offices nationwide explaining that mental health problems such as depression resulting from sexual harassment in the workplace are eligible for workmen's accident compensation payments.

The former Ministry of Labour already ensured that problems caused by sexual harassment were covered by its 1999 guidelines for recognizing workmen's accident compensation claims involving a mental disorder, but a reminder was issued because of the disparate ways in which sexual harassment was being handled and guidelines applied at different labour standards inspection offices.

The announcement, dated December 1, 2005, included the following stipulations: (1) cases of social assault, such as sexual harassment, involve a person's work life and are therefore covered by workmen's accident compensation; and (2) evaluators must not only base their judgments on the incidence of sexual harassment itself, but

on the business employer's response and the changes implemented in the workplace environment as a result.

# Research and Statistics

## Labour-Management Gap in Attitudes about Communication

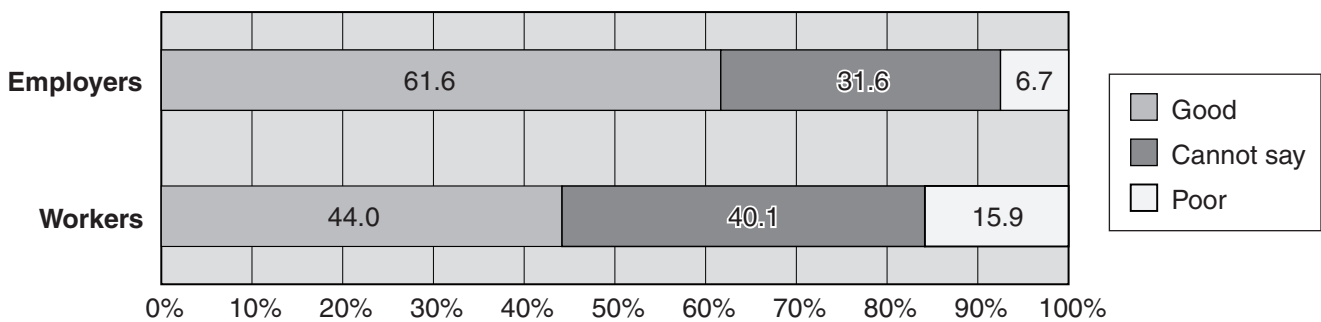
The results of the 2004 labour-management communications survey, recently released by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), show that there is a gap between management and labour when it comes to attitudes and knowledge about communication issues. For example, communication between labour and management was rated as “good” (extremely or somewhat good) by

61.6% of employers, as “cannot say” by 31.6% of employers, and as “poor” (somewhat or extremely poor) by 6.7% of employers. Among workers, however, communication was rated as “good” by only 44.0%, “cannot say” by 40.1%, and as “poor” by 15.9%. When asked in which areas good communication is especially important, both management and labour placed the most emphasis on “personal relationships in the workplace,” indicated by 66.4% of employers and 60.5% of workers. However, the next most frequent responses among employers were “everyday operational improvements”

(63.1%), “work environment improvements” (50.4%) and “working conditions such as wages and working hours” (43.8%), while those among workers were “working conditions such as wages and working hours” (50.9%), followed by “everyday operational improvements” (41.0%), and “work environment improvements” (37.7%).

Both management and labour recognize the importance of communication, but workers appear to be less satisfied with communication systems and their performance than employers.

**Figure 1: Communications between Labour and Management**



**Table 1: Results of the Labour-Management Communications Survey (In which areas is good communication especially important?)**

Employers		Workers	
1. Personal relationships in the workplace	66.4%	1. Personal relationships in the workplace	60.5%
2. Everyday operational improvements	63.1%	2. Working conditions such as wages and working hours	50.9%
3. Work environment improvements	50.4%	3. Everyday operational improvements	41.0%
4. Working conditions such as wages and working hours	43.8%	4. Work environment improvements	37.7%

### **A Majority Want Daylight-Saving Time, but Many Are Concerned That It Would Mean Increased Overtime**

According to a public opinion poll conducted by the Cabinet Office, the number of people concerned that overtime work will increase if daylight-saving time is introduced has increased by 10% from 2001 when the last poll was conducted. About 25% more people feel that they will not have any more activity options even if the number of lighter evening hours increases.

This poll was conducted as a public opinion poll regarding global warming, but it also asked about the introduction of the daylight-saving system, one of the measures being investigated as a means of combating global warming. Proponents of the new daylight-saving system (“in favor” + “more in favor of than opposed to” responses) increased to 51.9%, up one point from 50.9% in the last poll (2001), but were still down from the figure of the poll before that (1998), which was 54.0%. Opponents, meanwhile, increased to 30.2% (“opposed to” + “more opposed to than in favor of” responses), up 1.4 points from 28.8% in the previous poll. The increase in both proponents and

opponents of the new system reflects the decline in the number of people with no preference.

The most frequently cited reason for opposing the system, indicated by 38.1% of opponents, was “I do not think that my activity options will increase even if the number of lighter evening hours increases.” This was up 25.5 points from 12.6% in the previous poll. Among opponents, 37.9% indicated “I’m concerned that the change will have a negative physiological impact” (previously 33.8%), 36.7% indicated “I do not think it will have an effect on energy consumption,” (previously 33.4%), and 32.8% indicated “I’m concerned it will be difficult to leave work if it is still light outside at the end of the work day, and I will end up working more overtime” (up 10.7 points from 22.1% in the previous poll). Most of those who were concerned about an increase in overtime were in their 30s and 40s.

The most frequently cited reason for favoring the system, indicated by 66.2% of proponents, was the “energy-saving effects,” followed by 44.9% who believe their “activity options will increase if the number of lighter evening hours increases.” These responses were the opposite of the reasons cited by opponents.

### **Income First, Then Self-Actualization: Results of a Public Opinion Poll Regarding the Lives of the People**

The results of a public opinion poll recently conducted by the Cabinet Office regarding the lives of the people show that the number of people who think that the purpose of working is “to make money” and who want to “do work that produces a steady income” is rising. The nationwide poll, which was conducted among 10,000 adults aged 20 and older (valid response rate: 69.2%), asked questions on a wide array of topics that included people’s attitudes about their lifestyles and families.

The poll also asked respondents about their ways of life and attitudes in conjunction with their level of satisfaction with their lives and their prospects for the future. When asked about the “purpose of working,” 53.7% of respondents indicated that they “work to make money.” This is up 2.0 points from 51.7% in last year’s poll and far higher than the 19.8% who indicated that they “work to fulfill my life’s purpose” (down from 20.3% last year). Other purposes cited were “to fulfill my obligations as a member of society” (11.5% versus 11.7% last year) and “to demonstrate my talents and skills”

(7.6% versus 9.9% last year). The percentage of those indicating that they work to make money was highest among males in their 20s to 50s and among women in their 20s to 40s, while the percentage of those indicating that they work to fulfill their life's purpose was highest among both males and females in their 60s and 70s.

### Development of a Technology for Measuring Stress Using Saliva

The National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST), collaborating with SCIVAX Corporation, recently developed a technology for measuring stress using saliva. The substances in saliva that react to stress are measured and evaluated using a palm-sized card-shaped plate that is called a LabChip.

Thus far, blood-borne substances such as cortisol and adrenaline have been used as indicators of stress. However, accurate blood-based evaluations have been hindered by the fact that the very process of drawing blood can be stressful, causing blood vessel contraction and an increase in blood pressure. The substances in saliva that react to stress are secretory immunoglobulin A and cortisol. These two substances occur in saliva in small amounts and

concentrations, but are able to be effectively measured using this new technology. There are plans to commercialize this technology through the Human Stress Signal Research Center, an organization launched by the AIST.

### Consultations Regarding Lifestyle Disease Prevention Double at Rosai Hospitals

The Japan Labour Health and Welfare Organization (LHWO), which provides lifestyle disease prevention counseling for working people, recently filed a report on the number and types of counseling cases handled in FY2004. According to this report, 39,052 people received individual counseling in FY2004, more than twice as many as the 19,406 people who did in the previous year. Participants of workshops targeting families and health management staff of companies were up to 22,342 (1.56%) from 14,253 people. Participants of workshops targeting physicians and hygienists were up to 5,207 (1.48%) from 3,515 people in the previous year.

Individual counseling most often addressed health issues (30.8%), followed by exercise (27.5%), lifestyle (23.0%), and nutrition (18.7%). Of those who received counseling, 54.9% were male and 45.1% were female. By

age, the largest percentage were in their 50s (34.4%), followed by their 40s (23.5%), 60s (20.9%), and 30s (13.0%).

The lifestyle disease prevention counseling provided by the LHWO is offered to individuals who exhibit any of the four symptoms known to be risk factors in death by overwork and that make up the "quartet of death" (high blood pressure, high cholesterol, hyperglycemia, and obesity) during their regular health exams. Services include a combination of health counseling by physicians, nutrition counseling by registered dietitians, exercise counseling by physical therapists, and lifestyle counseling by hygienists. Services are provided at the preventive health clinics for workers established at *Rosai* hospitals, medical facilities run by the workmen's accident compensation scheme, throughout Japan. The increase in the number of consultations provided in FY2004 is attributable to an increase in the number of facilities where services are offered and to a significant improvement in workers' interest in lifestyle disease prevention and in their attitudes toward health.

### Fewer than 50% of Companies Require Workers Who Work Long Hours to Undergo Counseling

According to a survey of mental health care recently conducted by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT), no more than 45.5% of companies require workers who work more than a certain number of hours to undergo counseling. Among the respondents, 19.3% indicated that they “do not have a rule about it, but encourage workers to seek counseling,” while 35.5% reported that “no particular measures are in place.” The survey showed that about 80% of companies have seen an increase in worker mental health problems over the past five years. Likewise, about 80% of respondents expect the problem to grow in the future.

Among companies, 48.4% indicated that those who took days off due to mental health problems over the past five years were “older youth” in positions like supervisor or assistant manager, who had not yet reached section manager status. A distant 25.3% of companies indicated that those who took days off were “younger youth” who had joined the company within the past 10 years. A combined 65.2% of companies feel that mental health has

an impact on business activities, with 48.4% reporting that mental health problems “are related” to declines in productivity and the occurrence of serious accidents, and 16.8% reporting that they “are closely related.”

The partial amendment to the Industrial Safety and Health Law that was passed on October 26, 2005 (to go into effect on April 1, 2006) stipulates that: (1) employers must provide workers who meet certain criteria, such as a certain number of working hours, with in-person counseling provided by a physician, keep a record of the findings, listen to the physician’s advice regarding necessary measures, and take appropriate response measures; and (2) workers must participate in face-to-face counseling sessions arranged by their employer.

# Other

# Topics

## **Mesothelioma Fatality Rate 18 Times Higher Among Women in Neighborhoods Around Plant That Uses Asbestos**

According to Professor Norio KURUMATANI, an expert on industrial epidemiology from Nara Medical University who has conducted epidemiological studies of the health problems of people in neighborhoods around the plant of a large machine manufacturer that has used asbestos, the risk of fatality due to mesothelioma caused by asbestos in women who live within a 500-meter radius of those plants is 18.1 times higher than the national average.

The risk is also 10 times higher among men, but damage to women, few of whom suffer from work-related mesothelioma, is believed to more accurately reflect the situation. Professor Kurumatani also concluded that there were no other notable sources of asbestos other than the plant, and that the dispersal of the blue asbestos that was used at the plant is believed to have caused a wave of mesothelioma cases. This is the first study to be conducted in Japan that clarifies the relationship between asbestos and the outbreak of mesothelioma among ordinary residents.

## **Three People Fall from Gondola, Two Die**

On December 5, 2005, three of five workers who were riding in a materials-transport gondola at an erosion control dam construction project in Tsukui-cho, Kanagawa Prefecture fell from the gondola when it stopped suddenly. Two of the workers died on impact, and one suffered serious injuries, including a broken pelvis. The gondola, which had been ascending the aerial ropeway, suddenly started to descend at the halfway point, and the emergency brake was applied.

After an investigation, it was reported that this was a suspended gondola consisting of a rubber floor plate attached to a large steel net. The workers had been standing on the rubber floor. The gondola was moving along about 10 meters off the ground, suspended from cables installed up the slope of a mountain at a height of about 12 meters. The gondola's control panel was located halfway up the mountain and was being operated by a worker.

Because the gondola was designed for transporting materials, it was not equipped with safety belts or other equipment to prevent people from falling out. The Forests Section of Kanagawa Prefecture's Tsukui Region Prefectural Administration Center which ordered the construction said the gondola "should not have been ridden by people." According to the president of the construction company in Tsukui-cho that was performing the work, "I've been told that the gondola was used because it was snowing and the mountain road used to transport workers was slippery. This method was sometimes used to transport workers." The Tsukui Police Station (Kanagawa Prefecture) is investigating the company for involuntary manslaughter.

### Asbestos-Related Consultations from Ordinary Citizens Increase

The National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan has compiled a report on the asbestos-related consultation cases handled by consumer service centers nationwide. According to the report, the number of cases increased dramatically in July of this year, from 75 cases in all of FY2004 to 558 cases in July 2005 alone. Many questions were also received in August and beyond, and preliminary figures from early November show that 1,031 cases had already been reported in FY2005.

Of the 1,106 cases of consultation reported after FY2004, most (525 cases) were regarding products related to buildings or equipment, such as building materials. If another 175 cases regarding new construction and remodeling services are included, total consultations related to housing products and services reached 700 cases. In addition, there were 178 cases regarding household products such as wire fish grills, *kotatsu* (blanket-covered tables equipped with heaters), and heating pads, and 109 cases regarding health and hygiene products, such as mosquito-repellent mats and baby powder.

Many of the 175 inquiries regarding new construction and remodeling services were regarding door-to-door sales calls, such as, "I was visited by a remodeling company that told me that the walls of my home contain asbestos and need to be replaced immediately." Many inquiries regarding household products and health and hygiene products were regarding products that had been mentioned in the media.

The center advises consumers to take a rational approach and instructs those who are thinking about new construction or a remodel to do their research. It recommends people to consult a public organization, avoid signing any contracts in response to door-to-door sales calls, and consult a consumer services center if they are suspicious of a company that has contacted them.

Other

Topics

#### Japan Industrial Safety and Health Association (ILO-CIS Nation Centre in Japan)

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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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