

**Manganese- A Public Health Concern.
Its Relevance for Occupational Health and Safety Policy and Regulation in South Africa.**

ABSTRACT

Concerns about the effects of manganese exposure on human health arise at a time when South Africa finds itself in competition with newcomers to the market economy, China and the CIS. This case study illustrates how decisions about occupational health and safety and the environment are influenced by competing interests, incompleteness of scientific knowledge, differences over what is fair or just, and the compartmentalisation of public policy. In addition, an assessment is made of the ability of the occupational health and safety system in South Africa in its current form to address the challenges posed by manganese-related issues. The importance of tracking developments abroad, strengthening participatory processes, developing national policy, linking economic policy and OHS policy, and establishing appropriate trade agreements are stressed.

Keywords

Manganese, South Africa, public policy, health and safety systems, competing interests.

TRENDS IN OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY AND REGULATION – ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR SOUTH AFRICA

ABSTRACT

Changes in South African legislation have been inspired by an approach to OHS policy and regulation which first emerged in the 1970s and which broke with traditions established over more than a century ago, at the time of the industrial revolution in Europe. This paper examines the broad features of the “new” OHS model, assesses whether it facilitates the resolution of basic conflicts and then evaluates the changes that have occurred in South Africa. The paper concludes with a discussion of the challenges facing South Africa. It is shown that the new OHS model involves changes in the form and substance of policy and regulation that have significant ramifications for institutional design and practice. Changes in form encompass the emergence of national policy, the adoption of national legislation and the creation of national institutions. Changes in substance emphasise prevention, participatory processes, performance standards and mechanisms aimed at reconciling competing pressures. It is argued that despite sweeping changes to OHS law in the last decade, South Africa’s system remains seriously deficient in a number of respects. The complex and fragmented structure of the overall OHS system remains virtually untouched. Not only is fragmentation and inconsistency a problem but also the system is inward looking, and the assumptions implicit in new legal formulae have not been fully appreciated. For example, changes in law have been driven by a deep and justifiable distrust of insular and unilateral decision-making and stress participatory processes. However, the application of rights which support participatory processes, such as the right to participate, to representation and to know, is not straightforward. It is necessary to satisfy a number of conditions if these rights are to be made meaningful. Finally new concepts introduced such as risk assessment, are not uncontested. While risk assessment provides a basis for evaluating and prioritising risk, it is not value free. New uncertainties and tensions are introduced. Further structural and programmatic change is required if the changes introduced in the last decade are to yield the desired results.

Keywords

Occupational health and safety, policy, regulation, trends, South Africa