



STEPS FOR **SAFETY** IN **AGRICULTURE**

A safer working environment on estates and farms could boost efficiency, productivity and profits





There are hidden costs in accidents and near accidents in the workplace, including estates and farms. These work out to eight to 33 times more than the direct costs.

In Malaysia, workplace safety is regulated by the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 (OSHA), which outlines procedures, delegates responsibility and prescribes penalties for offences.

Designed to protect the safety, health and welfare of employees arising out of their daily work routine, the Act stipulates the creation of a safety and health policy if the workplace has more than five workers. Premises with more than 40 employees must set up a safety and health committee.

The government has shown that it is serious about implementation, even going so far as to take employers to court. Deterrent fines, jail sentences and closure of the workplace await offenders.

Last year, the Human Resources Ministry pointed out: “By having a good safety management programme, you can avoid farm injuries and unplanned incidents that are costly, time-consuming, stressful and inconvenient. This makes good economic sense.”

In April 2000, the government introduced regulations on the Use and Standards of Exposure to Chemicals Hazardous to Health (USECHH), as part of the OSHA.

The regulations contain significant provisions on the use of such chemicals on estates and farms. Chemicals hazardous to health refer to those listed in Schedule 1 of the regulations – covering 94 preparations comprising insecticides, herbicides, fungicides and rodenticides.

USECHH requirements

Several measures have to be implemented under these regulations, to ensure that the plantation and farming sectors adopt a more systematic approach to storing and spraying pesticides. Efficient and safe application of pesticides is the key to reducing or eliminating contamination of spray operators.



Tea Plantation



Identification and Records

All hazardous chemicals must be identified and recorded in a register, which must be maintained in good order and updated periodically. The register must include a list of the chemicals used; current safety data sheet for each chemical; amount used; work area where it is used; name and address of the supplier.



Assessment

An assessor must conduct a written assessment on the risks to employees' health when using hazardous chemicals. This evaluation must be reviewed whenever there is a significant change in the work or types of chemicals used. Where action to eliminate exposure (actual or potential) is needed, the employer must undertake this within a month of the report being received. The report must be kept in good order for at least 30 years.



Exposure Monitoring

If the assessment report indicates a need for monitoring of exposure to hazardous chemicals, this must use approved methods of monitoring and analysis. The monitoring must be repeated every six months until the assessor is satisfied that further checks are not needed. A hygiene technician should conduct these exercises. All records must be kept in good order for a minimum of 30 years.



Health Surveillance

Such programmes must be conducted by an occupational health doctor, at intervals not exceeding 12 months. Employers must not allow workers to engage in work that exposes them to hazardous chemicals, especially if the individual has a medical condition that could be exacerbated – this covers pregnant and breastfeeding employees. Records should be kept in good order for up to 30 years. Employees are allowed access to their personal data.



Instruction and Training

The employer must provide information, instruction and training to workers, who have the right to know the risk posed to their health by exposure to hazardous chemicals; and the precautions to be taken when using these chemicals. Training must be conducted by supervisors at least once every two years. The programme must be documented and kept for inspection by an Occupational Safety and Health officer.



Labeling

All chemicals hazardous to health must be labelled. The labels must not be removed, defaced, modified or altered – should this happen, the employer has to relabel the containers. Pre-mixed solutions that are not used immediately must also be labelled with the trade name of the chemical.



Warning signs

These must be placed at prominent locations and at every entrance to areas where hazardous chemicals are stored. The warnings can be accompanied by other relevant information. The signs must state the hazards in Bahasa Malaysia and English, and be printed in dark red against a white background.



Personal Protective Equipment

Workers must be given approved equipment to protect them from exposure to hazardous chemicals. Employers must implement procedures on issuance, maintenance, inspection and training in the use of protective equipment. The equipment must be suitable to the type of work done, fit the employee, and be readily available. It should not adversely affect the worker's health.



Risk management

Broadly speaking, OSHA is all about managing risks and hazards in the workplace. To ensure maximum benefits, employers must carry out a proper and structured management of safety.

Risk Management

OSHA Management is all about managing risks and hazards. Here is a simple guide of what you would have to do to initiate the proper and structured management of safety and health to ensure maximum benefits

	Things to do	Objective	Work to be carried out
1	Identify the hazard	To prevent it from causing injury or harm	Employers are advised to make regular hazard spotting surveys. Employees are encouraged to report hazards that could cause injury or harm. Example: 1) Pesticides usage 2) Unnecessary manual handling 3) Lack of training and supervision 4) Lack of safe procedures
2	Assess the risk in two ways a. How likely it is to cause injury or harm? b. How serious would the consequences be if the accident happened?	To determine the degree and severity of a hazard or risk when an accident occurs	If the risk to injury is high, then immediate steps must be taken to rectify the situation.
3	Make the changes	To minimise the risk of injury or harm to acceptable level	Discuss with those involved, including neighbours, on the best way to remove the hazard. Implement the changes quickly.
4	Review the changes	To ensure they are effective	All solutions are to be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that the changes are successful and that risk has been minimised or eliminated.

Ultimately, a safer working environment on estates and farms would require the use of alternatives that enhance occupational safety and health. For instance, suitable and comfortable protective equipment,

improved safety designs in spraying equipment, and use of semi-mechanisation will all help safety and productivity.

It will not be easy to change suddenly or adjust to new practices, but employers and

employers who understand the concept will have no difficulty in implementing OSHA.

Jagdish Singh Gill
Bayer CropScience (M) Sdn Bhd