

Occupational Health and safety in agriculture: situation and priorities at the beginning of the third millennium

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SUMMARY

Agriculture is a human activity, which includes a number of different tasks and occupies a huge number of people worldwide. Estimates of World Bank for 2003 suggest that 51% of global population lives in rural areas. ILO estimates that 1.3 billion of workers are engaged in agriculture, and they represent almost a half of the total number of economically active subjects (2,838,897,404). In developed countries, agriculture workers are only a small fraction of the whole work force (up to 9% according to ILO data), while in developing countries, especially in Asia, agriculture workers represent up to the 60% of the total work force. Most agriculture workers reside in Asia, in the Pacific (74%) and in Africa (16%). ILO estimates suggest that half of fatal occupational injuries in the world are attributable to agriculture. This means that around 170,000 agriculture workers die every year as a consequence of occupational injuries. Using the same estimate, half of the fatal accidents could be linked to agricultural activities (more than 130 million). Comparing this estimate with the 6.328.217 people injured in war in 2002 or with the 20-50 million injured victims of road accidents, one has a much clearer picture about the importance of preventing agricultural injuries. In a complicated situation such as occupational health and safety problems in agriculture, it is not so easy to select priorities clearly. But "legalization" of agriculture workers could be a key to solving all the other problems. Actual data on fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries in agriculture show that occupational health and safety issues are among the top priorities for that discipline.