

CEC Bulletin

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International Labour Organization – Code of Practice on Safety and Health in the Iron and Steel Industry

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Background

In 1981 the ILO published a Code of Practice on Health and Safety in the Iron and Steel industry. In accordance with the decision taken by the Governing Body of the ILO in November 2003, a Meeting of Experts on Safety and Health in the Iron and Steel Industry was convened in Geneva in February, 2005. The purpose of this meeting was to draft and adopt a revised code of practice on safety and health in the Iron and Steel industry (the “Code”).

The CEC approached Dofasco in the Fall of 2004 to ask if we would be interested in participating in the process to revise the Code. Dofasco accepted the offer and participated in the review and revision process.

I represented the CEC and IISI. Eight employer experts from France, Spain, Australia, Germany, Canada, Mexico, Czech Republic, and Russia were approved by the IOE to represent the employer group in the ILO process. I acted as chairperson/spokesperson for the employer group during the negotiation process. There were 7 government and 8 worker representatives also participating in the process. The worker group was chaired by Mike Wright from the USWA.

What is In the Revised Code

The Code is based on principles established in international instruments relevant to the protection of workers’ occupational safety and health (“OSH”). The first two chapters deal with the objectives and application of the Code. The next two chapters address, within a national framework, the responsibilities, duties and rights of the competent authority, the labour inspectorate, employers, workers and their organizations, suppliers, manufacturers and designers, and contractors, and OSH management systems and services and OSH reporting.

Part II of the Code addresses different operations commonly used in the production of iron and steel - from coke ovens to steel furnaces and foundries, to rolling mills, coating lines and recycling. It also covers transport, competence and training, personal protective equipment, emergency preparedness, and special protection and hygiene issues. Each section describes hazards, assesses risk and provides guidance on eliminating or controlling risk.

The practical recommendations of ILO codes of practice are intended for the use of all those, both in the public and private sectors who have responsibility for safety and health management in relation to specific occupational hazards (e.g. chemicals, heat noise and vibration), sectors of activity (e.g. forestry, mining), or equipment. Codes of practice are not intended to replace national laws or regulations or accepted standards. They are drafted with the objective of providing guidance in accordance with the provisions of national laws and regulations, to all those who may be engaged through social dialogue, in the framing of provisions of this kind or in elaborating programs of prevention and protection at the national or enterprise levels. They are addressed in particular to governmental and public authorities, employers and workers and their organizations as well as management and safety and health committees in related enterprises.

Further, the ILO's Codes of Practice are primarily designed as a basis for prevention and protective measures and are considered as ILO technical standards in occupational safety and health. They contain general principles and specific guidance which concern in particular the surveillance of the working environment and of workers' health education and training; record-keeping; the role and duties of the competent authority, employers, workers, manufacturers and suppliers; and consultation and cooperation.

The provisions of the Code are to be read in the context of the conditions in the country proposing to use the guidance it contains, the scale of operation involved and technical possibilities. In this regard, the needs of developing countries are also taken into consideration.

What is Not in the Code

The workers and, to some degree, the governments wanted to include in the Code:

1. An explicit connection between industry impact on the environment and health issues of the surrounding communities. They will continue to try and connect external health issues using health and safety as a platform. The employers acknowledged that the environmental health and safety issues are linked but objected to connecting the health and safety management system directly to the environmental impacts.

2. A requirement that industry must adopt this Code even if the national or local governments did not. Employers objected to this recommendation. In fact, we almost walked out of the negotiations on this point. The workers finally withdrew the recommendation otherwise it would have ended the process and there would not have been a revised Code.
3. A section of psychosocial concerns – that would have included stress and violence in the workplace. We did not get to these issues because we ran out of time. As a note, a number of jurisdictions in Canada have already included violence in their health and safety legislation. Ontario is considering whether or not it should follow suit.

Next Steps

Next, the ILO will:

1. Adopt the Code after approval by the governing body;
2. Publish the final version on their web site; and
3. Conduct education sessions

The Canadian Employers Council (CEC) prepares and distributes the CEC Bulletin for its members' individual use only. This message is composed in MS Outlook and contains hyperlinks that require an HTML-enabled email program. For inquiries or comments, please contact Andrew Finlay of Scotiabank, Chair of the CEC, at andrew.finlay@scotiabank.com or Brian Burkett of Heenan Blaikie, Counsel to the CEC, at bburkett@heenan.ca.
