

**IV SYMPOSIUM:
“HEALTH HAZARDS IN THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT”
Łódź, Poland, 7–9 November, 1996**

IV Symposium: ‘Health Hazards in the Working Environment’ took place in Łódź on 7–9 November, 1996. It was organised by the Polish Society of Industrial Hygienists, the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine, the Commission for Labour Hygiene and Occupational Diseases of the Sanitary and Epidemiological Council and the Commission on Workplace Environment of the Committee on Human Ecology and Health Promotion, Polish Academy of Sciences. The Organising Committee was headed by Professor Janusz A. Indulski, M.D. Ph.D. The sessions were held at the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine.

The Symposium assembled 250 persons representing scientific research institutes, universities, the State Sanitary Inspection, the State Labour Inspection, various enterprises and other institutions.

During plenary sessions 17 invited papers were presented and during individual sessions devoted to occupational medicine, chemical hazards, physical factors, toxicology, dusts and biological factors, analytical methods and quality control of laboratory tests 78 contributed findings were demonstrated.

Professor *J.A. Indulski* stressed in his presentation that the workers’ health status and working conditions in Poland depart considerably from those observed in highly developed countries (shorter life span, excess male mortality, increasing number of accidents and occupational diseases). Therefore, the major goal of the occupational health services (OHS) is to reduce the incidence of diseases which involve the largest social and economic losses (pneumoconioses, asthma, neoplasms, diseases of the locomotor system). To this end, the priority should be given to the improvement of OHS and bodies responsible for supervising working conditions, the development of reliable information systems available at all levels of risk management and research, and the promotion of vocational training and other relevant fields of activity.

Dr *L. Dawydzik* discussed the process of the OHS reforms and highlighted recent significant developments in this area. Due to new legislation the former industrial health services have been replaced by the subsystem operating independently from economic subjects, and the establishment of two separate sources of financing: one allocating funds for prophylactic programmes and the other for medical services, have facilitated the advancement of preventive medicine. However, an attempt has not as yet been made to stimulate the improvement of working conditions through offering economic incentives, and the reforms of the State Sanitary Inspection, including the labour hygiene section, essential in identifying needs and evaluating the work environment, have been delayed.

J. Kowalski MSc (Director, Department of Work Conditions, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy) addressed the issue of the present state of working conditions in Poland, underlying that in 1995 the number of the injured due to accidents at work increased by 9.7% in comparison to 1994, however, the number of fatal and acute cases decreased at that time by 2.4% and 6.5%, respectively. The incidence of occupational diseases is still high, and their total number diagnosed in 1995 accounted for 11,320. The data presented confirm an unsatisfactory state of work safety and hygiene throughout the country.

Z. Wieczorek MSc, presented the results of inspections carried out by the State Labour Inspectorate in various enterprises and factories. They indicated a certain improvement in the identification of factors harmful to health and the size of exposures, however, information on occupational risk and the knowledge of self-protection among workers are far from being satisfactory.

Professor *J. Zagórski* addressed the issue of work hygiene in rural areas stressing the need for establishing prophylactic programmes for farmers in view of specific working conditions in agriculture.

Professor *E. Więcek* discussed health hazards in the working environment. He emphasized the need for improving the present state through a concerted approach and involvement of all state bodies, research institutes and scientific societies which should be committed to develop and implement a modern work hygiene programme. Such a programme should embrace, *inter alia*, legal recognition of industrial hygiene as a profession together with a possible specialisation (certification), and education of work hygienists following the curricula of highly developed countries. A comprehensive evaluation of all work posts including those outside industry and agriculture as well as identification and elimination of occupational stress were also recommended.

Dr *W. Renke* spoke about difficult working and living conditions of crews employed in Polish maritime transport and Polish crews flying foreign flags.

Professor *J. Filikowski* and Dr *S. Tymański* focused on issues concerning health problems in cold climate (arctic and antarctic weather).

Ass. Professor *T. Makowiec-Dąbrowska* devoted her paper to physical and mental loads among women engaged in professional work. She emphasized that mental load should not be neglected in the job description even if the physical effort appears to be an essential burdening factor.

R. Musiol MSc (Eng.) focused on the research carried out in the field of the working environment in the Member States of the European Union and discussed the European norms in this area (EN 482 and EN 689).

Dr *M. Dobecki* stressed the need for adhering the management principles and technical activities of work hygiene laboratories to the EU requirements and norms (EN 45001 and guidelines ISO/EC-25).



The issues concerning the assessment of chemical exposure-related health risks were discussed by Dr *R. Rolecki* and Dr *W. Szymczak* who underlined that the risk assessment is an essential element in the control of chemical pollution of the environment as well as in the risk management.

Professor *M. Jakubowski*, Ass. Professor *S. Czerczak* and Dr *J. Majka* focused on the evaluation of exposure to certain heavy metals (lead, cadmium, arsenic), factors affecting working environment in the rubber industry, and the role and responsibility of employers for chemical safety in their enterprises.

To sum up, IV Symposium: "Health Hazards in the Working Environment" provided a clear picture of the present state of work safety and hygiene. The participants outlined major activities which should be undertaken immediately or in the near future in order to improve working conditions. Particular attention was turned to an urgent need for reforming the State Sanitary Inspection and its section of work hygiene, recognising work hygiene as a profession, educating work hygienists and providing financial means for work hygiene promotion and research in this area.

Professor *Edward Więcek*
Deputy Chairman of the
Organising Committee

