

Training on Occupational Health and Safety for Shipbuilding Workers

Workers of all six units of Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd, a Public Sector undertaking, assembled at 10 am on 17 February 2018 at Paharpur Road, Kolkata to participate in the OSH training organized by Worker's Initiative - Kolkata (WI). The training was organized with the support of DWOI – AIHA and Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network. More than 50 leading activists of the GRSE Ltd Workmen's Union participated in the training. Well known labour law expert Mr. Debasis Sengupta, Advocate participated in the training and provided his valuable inputs.

The training program mainly dealt with two broad aspects –

- (a) legal rights of the workers relates to Occupational health and Safety
- (b) After completion of training what will be the role of participants.

GRSE is a heavy engineering company which makes Warships and frigates for the Indian Navy, and nature of work involves serious hazards. Employment injuries are a routine phenomenon in GRSE mainly due to absence of safety measures and awareness among the workers. Management of the Company is not committed for the safe working conditions and even not honoring the minimum statutory obligations relating to occupational health and safety. However even workers are not aware about their rights and privileges and safe working practices.

GRSE Ltd Workmen's Union (affiliate member of Worker's Initiative - Kolkata) is engaged to educate and enlighten the workers for their right and privileges related to Occupational health and Safety. In the month of October 2017, another OSH workshop was conducted wherein Dr Ashish Mittal enlightened the workers about work hazards and its preventive measures. The February 2018 training was focused on legal rights and various statutory provisions.

53 workers of the Union from all the six units situated in different part of Kolkata namely (i) Rajabagan Dockyard (ii) Fitting out Jetty (iii) 61 Park (iv) Taratall Unit (v) Baranagar Unit (vi) Main Unit participated in the training and remained present throughout the day. 23 of the participants have been recently nominated into the Unit Safety Committee of Company and therefore, they were very much interested to know the legal rights with regards to the Safety issues and raised several questions and queries to Debasis Sengupta, Advocate during the training. Some important points raised were as follows:

- (a) Bro Amit Chakraborty wanted to know if the Management carryout any work without any safety arrangement and if the workers refuse to carry out the same, in that case whether Management can take any action against the workers?
- (b) Bro Karamat Hossain wanted to know that if the Inspector of Factories doesn't play his role than what we can do? (Inspector of Factories is Govt. official to look after the safety related issues)
- (c) Bro Indranil Chakraborty wanted to know the role of Safety officer of the Company.

- (d) Bro Krishna Sharma informed that our view points are not recorded in the minutes of the Safety Committee meeting.

In response to the same Mr. Sengupta by referring the Factories Act, 1948 and allied West Bengal state Rules explained to the participants about its objectives and mode of implementation.

He emphasized that whatever may be in the statute, if the workers and their representatives don't play their active role, the Factories Inspector, Safety officer and management will do anything that pleases them. He added that workers must play the role of watchdog to arrest the possibilities of workplace accidents. He also said that the first thing is to take the preventive measures and second if the incidents occur than identify its reasons so that it will not occur in future. Mr. Sengupta also explained and referred to the sections relating to role and responsibilities of the Safety Committee.

Bro Chinmoy Jana, Gen Secy of GRSE WMU in his deliberation said that we are not a lawyer therefore, it is not possible to understand all the legal aspects but we should know and understand the minimum statutory provisions to deal with the OSH issues. He also proposed the following:

- a) All the participants must conduct the departmental meeting of the workers and try to explain what we are gathering in this training program within one month.
- b) After the group meetings we must identify minimum three workers each from different departments who are interested on OSH issues and in the last week of May we will sit together and review the conditions.
- c) We shall prepare a list sensitive work that involves hazardous operation i.e. Welding, Fire-fighting etc., and forward the same to our representatives in the Unit Safety Committee. The Safety Committee after scrutinizing the list will take up the matter in the Safety Committee Meeting for necessary action.

All the participants discussed the proposals in detail and it was decided that the next meeting of the participants will be held on 26 May 2018. In the meantime, department level group meetings will be conducted. It was also decided by the participants to publish a small booklet in local languages wherein we have to explain the rights of the workers on OSH in simple language. Bro Kamal Tewary has been entrusted to prepare the booklet and submit the same in the next meeting on 26/05/2018.

Training program ends expressing thanks to all the participants. Mr. Debasish Sengupta Adv and also expressing gratitude to DWOI - AIHA, Maquiladora health & Safety Support Network who supported this training program.

Date 27 February 2018