



ILO Standards on Safety and Health

One of the key functions of the International Labour Organization from its inception has been the establishment of international standards on labour and social matters. These international labour standards take the form of [Conventions and Recommendations](#). About 70 of them deal with occupational safety and health matters.

In addition to the ILO Conventions and Recommendations dealing with occupational safety and health matters, further guidance is provided in [Codes of Practice](#) and manuals which are used as reference material by those in charge of formulating detailed regulations or responsible for occupational safety and health.

In some cases [other instruments](#) like resolutions have been introduced to address a certain problem.

Conventions and Recommendations

Conventions are comparable to multilateral international treaties: they are open to ratification by member States and, once ratified, create specific, binding obligations. A State that has ratified a Convention is expected to apply its provisions by legislation or by other appropriate means as indicated in the text of the Convention. The Government is required to report regularly on the application of ratified Conventions; the extent of compliance is subject to examination and public comment by ILO machinery; complaints about alleged non-compliance may be made by the governments of other ratifying States or by employers' or workers' organizations and procedures exist for investigating and acting upon such complaints. Conventions that have not been ratified have the same value as Recommendations.

Recommendations are intended to offer guidelines for action by member States. Often, a particular Recommendation will elaborate upon the provisions of a Convention on the same subject. Member States have certain important procedural obligations in respect of Recommendations - namely, to submit the texts to their legislative bodies, to report on the action resulting and to report occasionally at the request of the Governing Body on the measures taken or envisaged to give effect to the provisions. But no specific substantive obligations are entailed.

It is fair to say that both Conventions and Recommendations have influenced laws and regulations of member States. Many texts have been modeled on the relevant provisions

of ILO instruments; drafts of new legislation or amendments are often prepared with ILO standards in mind so as to ensure compliance with ratified Conventions or to permit the ratification of other Conventions; trade unions use ILO standards to support arguments in bargaining and in promoting legislation; governments frequently consult the ILO, both formally and informally, about the compatibility of proposed texts with international labour standards.

Occupational safety and health standards broadly fall into four categories:

- [Guiding policies for action](#);
- [Protection in given branches of economic activity](#): e.g. construction industry, commerce and offices and dock work;
- [Protection against specific risks](#): e.g. ionising radiation, benzene, asbestos, guarding of machinery;
- [Measures of protection](#): e.g. medical examinations of young workers, maximum weight of loads to be transported by a single worker, prevention of occupational accidents on board ship, prevention of occupational cancer, prevention of air pollution, noise and vibration in the working environment.

In the following section you can find links to the text of most of the Conventions and Recommendations on occupational safety and health, as retrieved from the *ILOLEX database*. Be our guest to run [your own FREE search](#) in the database to find other documents relevant to your subject.

Guiding policies for action

- The new [Promotional Framework Convention on Occupational Safety and Health](#) and its [accompanying Recommendation](#) adopted at the 95th annual Conference of the ILO in June 2006.
- The [List of Occupational Diseases Recommendation, 2002 No. 194](#) a recommendation concerning the list of occupational diseases and the recording and notification of occupational accidents and diseases.
- [The Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 No. 155](#) and its accompanying [Recommendation \(No. 164\)](#). These standards prescribe the progressive application of comprehensive preventive measures and the adoption of a coherent national policy on occupational safety and health, while establishing

the responsibility of employers for making work and equipment safe and without risk to health, as well as the duties and rights of workers.

The [Protocol 2002](#) to the Convention as adopted by the International Labour Conference on its 90th session.

- [The Occupational Health Services Convention, 1985 \(No.161\)](#) and its accompanying [Recommendation \(No. 171\)](#). These standards stress that occupational health services are entrusted essentially with preventive functions and responsible for advising employers, workers and their representatives on maintaining a safe and health working environment, as well as on the adaptation of work to the capabilities of workers. The emphasis of these instruments are on roles, best use of resources and cooperation rather than on administrative structures that are not always flexible.
- [Working Environment Convention, 1977 \(No.148\)](#) and its accompanying [Recommendation, 1977 \(No.156\)](#).

Protection in given branches of economic activity

- [The Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 \(No.184\)](#) and its accompanying [Recommendation \(No. 192\)](#)
- [The Safety and Health in Construction Convention, 1988 \(No.167\)](#) and its accompanying [Recommendation \(No. 175\)](#) which lay down the basic principles and measures to promote safety and health of workers in construction.
- [The Safety and Health in Mines Convention, 1995 \(No. 176\)](#) and its accompanying [Recommendation \(No. 183\)](#) address the risks unique to mining and applies to all mining activities whether on the surface or underground, as well as to the preparation of extracted material.
- [Hygiene \(Commerce and Offices\) Convention, 1964 \(No.120\)](#)
- [Safety Provisions \(Building\) Convention, 1937 \(No.62\)](#) and [Safety Provisions \(Building\) Recommendation, 1937 \(No.53\)](#).
- [Marking of Weight\(packages Transported by Vessels\) Convention,1929 \(No.27\)](#).
- [Protection against Accidents \(Dockers\) Convention,1929 \(No.28\)](#) and [Protection against Accidents \(Dockers\) Convention \(Revised\),1932 \(No.32\)](#).

- [Occupational Safety and Health \(Dock Work\) Convention, 1979 \(No.152\)](#) and [Occupational Safety and Health \(Dock Work\) Recommendation, 1979 \(No.160\)](#).
- [Plantations Convention, 1958 \(No.110\)](#).

Protection against specific risks

- [The Chemicals Convention, 1990 \(No.170\)](#) and its accompanying [Recommendation \(No.177\)](#) represent international efforts to upgrade the national measures and harmonize regulatory standards. They emphasise the need to establish a coherent national policy of chemical safety ranging from the classification and labelling of chemicals to the control in all aspects of the use of chemicals. Particular emphasis would thus be placed on roles and responsibility of the competent authority, suppliers and employers, as well as duties and rights of workers.
- [The Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents Convention, 1993 \(No. 174\)](#) and its accompanying [Recommendation 1993 \(No. 181\)](#) aims to protect workers, the public and the environment from major industrial accidents, in particular through the prevention of major accidents involving hazardous substances and the limitation of the consequences of such accidents. It applies to major hazard installations with the exception of nuclear installations and radioactive materials processing, military installations and transport outside the site of an installation other than pipeline.
- [The Asbestos Convention, 1986 \(No.162\)](#) and its accompanying [Recommendation \(No.172\)](#) advances organizational, technical and medical measures to protect workers against hazardous asbestos dust.
- [Anthrax Prevention Recommendation, 1919 \(No.3\)](#).
- [White Lead \(Painting\) Convention, 1921 \(No. 13\)](#).
- [Radiation Protection Convention, 1960 \(No.115\)](#) and [Radiation Protection Recommendation, 1960 \(No.114\)](#).
- [Benzene Convention, 1971 \(No.136\)](#) and [Benzene Recommendation, 1971 \(No.144\)](#).
- [Occupational Cancer Convention, 1974 \(No.139\)](#) and [Occupational Cancer Recommendation, 1974 \(No.147\)](#).
- [Guarding of Machinery Convention, 1963 \(No.119\)](#) and [Guarding of Machinery Recommendation, 1963 \(No.118\)](#).

Labour inspection

- [Labour Inspection \(Health Services\) Recommendation, 1919 \(No.5\)](#)
- [Labour Inspection Recommendation, 1923 \(No.20\)](#)
- [Labour Inspection \(Seamen\) Recommendation, 1926 \(No.28\)](#)
- [Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 \(No.81\)](#) and [Protocol of 1995 to the Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 \(No.81\)](#) and [Labour Inspection Recommendation, 1947 \(No.81\)](#)
- [Labour Inspection \(Mining and Transport\) Recommendation, 1947 \(No.82\)](#)
- [Labour Inspection \(Agriculture\) Convention, 1969 \(No.129\)](#) and [Labour Inspection \(Agriculture\) Recommendation, 1969 \(No.133\)](#)
- [Labour Inspection \(Seafarers\) Convention, 1996 \(No.178\)](#) and [Labour Inspection \(Seafarers\) Recommendation, 1996 \(No.185\)](#).

Measures of protection

- [Maximum Weight Convention, 1967 \(No.127\)](#) and [Maximum Weight Recommendation, 1967 \(No.128\)](#).
- [Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 \(No.3\)](#), [Maternity Protection Convention \(Revised\), 1952 \(No.103\)](#), [Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 \(No.183\)](#), [Maternity Protection Recommendation, 2000 \(No.191\)](#), [Night Work \(Women\) Convention \(Revised\), 1948 \(No.89\)](#), and [Night Work \(Women\) Protocol, 1990](#), [Underground Work \(Women\) Convention, 1935 \(No.45\)](#).
- [Minimum Age Convention 1973 \(No.138\)](#), [Night Work of Young Persons \(Non-Industrial Occupations\) Convention, 1946 \(No.79\)](#), [Night Work of Young Persons \(Industry\) Convention \(Revised\), 1948 \(No.90\)](#), [Medical Examination of Young Persons \(Industry\) Convention, 1946 \(No.77\)](#), [Medical Examination of Young Persons \(Non-Industrial Occupations\) Convention, 1946 \(No.78\)](#), [Medical Examination of Young Persons \(Underground Work\) Convention, 1965 \(No.124\)](#).
- [Migrant Workers \(Supplementary Provisions\) Convention, 1975 No.143](#).

Codes of Practice

The ILO has prepared and published a series of codes of practice relating to various sectors of economic activity and various types of dangerous equipment or agents. Presented in the form of detailed technical specifications, these publications are intended to assist governments, employers' and workers' organizations in drawing up national regulations and guidelines, work regulations and collective agreements. They also suggest practical solutions for the application of ILO international standards. The recommendations they contain are usually finalized and approved by tripartite panels of experts.

More than 35 codes of practice have been drawn up so far, covering either different sectors of activity (such as mines, agriculture, forestry, construction, iron and steel, etc.) or particular risks (ionizing radiations, noise and vibration, exposure to airborne substances, use of synthetic vitreous fibre insulation wools), as well as transfer of technology.

Codes of practice indicate "what should be done". They are prepared by tripartite meetings of experts and their publications are approved by the ILO Governing Body.

SafeWork maintains the [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#) language list of model codes and codes of practice published at ILO since 1950. For some of them you can consult the text on-line, for the rest see [ILO Publications](#).

Other Instruments

Resolutions

The International Labour Conference also adopted at the 80th Session in 1993 a resolution concerning exposure to and safety in the use of biological agents at work. The resolution requests the Director-General to take steps to address the question of exposure to and safety in the use of biological agents at work, and to consider the need for new international instruments in order to minimize the risks to workers, the public and the environment.