



A hundred years of health & safety representation

**TRADE UNION SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES AND
DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT**

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation

A HUNDRED YEARS

A hundred years of health & safety representation

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DEVELOPMENTS IN THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

PHOTOS

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”In 1973, the Workers’ Protection Act was passed by Parliament, giving 85 000 health and safety reps considerably greater status and the right to make decisions on important issues connected with the workplace. It was the first law in Swedish history to be personally designed by those who, in their future activities, would be most affected by its dispositions. The new law was tangible proof that the workers had made important progress in their efforts to defend workers’ lives and health in the workplace.”

From Olof Palme’s book, published in 1974, “Att vilja gå vidare”
(Determined to Go Further)

The following Swedish abbreviations are frequently used in this book

- LO = The Swedish Trade Union Confederation
- TCO = The Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees
- Saco = The Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations
- PTK = The Council for Negotiation and Co-operation
- SAF = The Swedish Employers’ Confederation
- MBL = Act on Co-determination at Work

Many thanks to all trade union health and safety representatives

It is 2012 now and we are celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the passing of the law giving workers the right to appoint their own health and safety representatives. In this booklet, LO (the Swedish Trade Union Confederation) and its affiliated unions would like to express our gratitude to all the workers who during the last hundred years have accepted the task of representing their workmates in health and safety matters.

The trade union health and safety representative's job involves great responsibility, a serious commitment to the task and the necessary practical know-how; he or she is, in fact, a member of "the trade union team" and strengthen our demands for necessary changes in the workplace and improvements in the work environment.

As they go about their work, health and safety representatives gain the trust of fellow workers and union members, which puts them in a better position than most to identify potential injury and health risks in the workplace.

The employer is, in the first place, responsible for the work environment and for decisions on how production and distribution and organisation of work are carried out. The health and safety representative's job is to represent the employees and ensure that the employer fulfils his responsibilities. It is also the representative's job to insist that the employer makes any necessary changes in the work environment and in work organization. Investigation has demonstrated that health and safety representatives are generally trusted by the employer and are, in fact, usually consulted by him. This cooperation between health and safety representatives and the employer in most cases results in the adoption of necessary preventive measures in the workplace.



The health and safety representatives' task is, as a result, of vital importance to public health, production, economic growth and society as a whole.

LO and our affiliated unions' booklet gives an overall picture of how the role of health and safety representatives has changed since their introduction in 1912, and how new or amended legislation, agreements and social changes have influenced their work.

Ulla Lindqvist

Vice president, The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO)

1912–1959

In 1912, Parliament passes a new, more forceful law on occupational safety. Workers are authorised to appoint health and safety representatives.

The National Board of Health and Welfare creates a health and safety bureau.

Revised legislation of obligatory, employer funded collective employment accident insurance for all workers.

Founding of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Legislation of the right to collective agreements.

Labour Court created.

Legislation concerning industrial disease insurance.

The Saltsjöbaden agreement between employers' and workers' organisations.

The first collective agreement on health and safety between LO and SAF (Swedish Employers' Association).

Creation of the Joint Occupational Safety Council with representatives of both parties.

Enforcement of a new law on occupational safety which included the right of certain private sector trade unions to appoint regional health and safety representatives. This law also gave workers the right to appoint health and safety reps in workplaces with more than five employees and stipulated the organisation of safety committees in companies with more than fifty employees.

Creation of the National Board for Occupational Safety and Health.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopts a recommendation of occupational health services.

THE FIRST 50 YEARS

THE FIRST 50 YEARS



Handen
Ditt viktigaste verktyg

Kom ihåg!
Stympad hand

ger stympad lön

SKYDDSARBETE LÖNAR SIG

“Remember! Your hands are your most important tools. A mutilated hand means mutilated wages. Health and safety in the workplace pays.” This was the slogan on the 1954 poster being shown to a mechanic.

Health and safety representatives were first introduced in 1912, when new, much stricter law of occupational safety gave workers, for the first time in history, the right to appoint their own representatives, although this right was limited to specific areas of the private sector. These first representatives were the pioneering forerunners of present-day trade union health and safety

representatives. In the years that followed up to the 1960s, the foundations of present-day working life were slowly but surely laid as workers and their health and safety representatives successively gained more legal rights. The 1912 law was the first step towards doing away with working conditions which today would be unthinkable.



The building sector was in the past, and still is, plagued by accidents in the workplace. This 1945 poster shows a bricklayer shouldering a hod of bricks.

Shouldn't there be more to life than work?

The LO, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, was founded in 1898. Even then the working environment was one of the unions' main issues; the eight-hour workday, for example was at that time the united trade unions' most pressing demand.

In those days working hours were not regulated. An employer, who might be the owner of an industrial concern, a large farm, a saw-mill or any other type of workplace, determined work conditions. Working hours were long, often as much as fifteen or sixteen hours a day. Only Sundays were, for religious reasons, official days off, although not for everybody, particularly farm workers. We must remember that agriculture was at that time Sweden's principal industry.

The main argument behind the unions' demand for an eight-hour workday was that fewer accidents would occur if workers were not physically and mentally exhausted. Another argument was that a shorter working day would give workers a certain amount of active free time.

It took Parliament till 1919 to adopt legislation on the eight-hour working day. It cut weekly work hours to forty-eight hours, a considerable reduction compared to the eighty to a hundred hours a week which until then was the norm.

Children performed adult tasks

Another of LO's early demands concerned child labour, which was prevalent at that time. While it is true that a first law had been passed in 1881 regulating infancy labour, it was insufficient and did not put a stop to what today we call child exploitation. In 1900, legislation protecting minors and women was passed, which somewhat ameliorated the situation.

The 1881 infancy regulation

This regulation applied to workers under the age of eighteen in factories, craftwork and other forms of production. Children must complete their schooling before they could be employed. Night work was forbidden, while children between the ages of twelve and fourteen were not permitted to work more than a maximum of six hours a day. For children aged fourteen to eighteen, the maximum was ten hours.

In the past, children's seasonal work was an important addition to the family income. The photo shows young girls making "Mayday Flowers" in Gothenburg in 1913. The first Mayday Flowers were sold in Gothenburg in 1907 in aid of people suffering from tuberculosis. Beda Hallberg was responsible for this initiative and the Mayday Flowers quickly spread throughout the country and farther afield. Nowadays sales of Mayday Flowers give a turnover of approximately 50 million Swedish crowns and are now sold in aid of efforts to eradicate child poverty.



Many children less than twelve years of age were in employment; the money they earned was in many cases vital in working class families. Transgression of the law was most common in quarries, stone-cutting workshops, iron-works, saw-mills and crafts in general. Adults could work as much as sixteen or seventeen hours a day, breaks included. Children under fifteen worked an average of twelve hours a day, including breaks. In weaving, spinning, the tobacco and match-making industries, children worked between twelve and thirteen hours a day.

The ban on night work was often ignored in workplaces where work went on round the clock and shifts included children under eighteen. Added to that, children worked in the same dangerous, filthy, poorly ventilated environment as adult workers and were often victims of accidents or suffered from ill health. Lung diseases were very common amongst children and women.

Agricultural Sweden

Sweden was for many centuries an agricultural country and legislation limiting children's working hours met strong opposition, mainly in the farming, forestry and other rural sectors. Farmers and employers on farms were in the majority in the Second Chamber of Parliament and as a rule opposed all official attempts to regulate workers' protection.

At the start of the 20th Century, over half of Sweden's population earned their livelihood from agriculture. Against this

background, a major problem was that farm workers were for many years not included in legislation of health and safety and working hours, in spite of the very hard conditions they worked under: long working days, constant risk of accidents and exposure to occupational diseases. Milkmaids, for example, suffered strain injuries to their hands, arms, neck and back.

Child labour was a tradition in agriculture and the number of farm accidents was about the same as in the textile industry, although there were probably a vast number of unreported cases. Farm workers, however, were excluded from the health and safety legislation, perhaps because their working conditions were not considered, by the general public, so obviously wretched as those of factory workers. This was also true of forestry, in spite of the extreme dangers involved in logging and timber-rafting.

It should also be remembered that it took workers in the agricultural sector much longer to become union members, and thus were not in a position to demand improvements in their working conditions backed by a union or political activity.

The early political struggle

Accident and sickness protection in working life was scant or non-existent at the beginning of the 20th century and government control extremely limited. It is true that, in 1889, Parliament did pass a law on dangerous work, though, and a national labour inspectorate was created in 1890, albeit with restricted authority. Labour inspectors



In the early part of the 20th century, agricultural workers constituted over 55 per cent of the Swedish population. By the early 1920s, the figure was still as high as 44 per cent. The photo shows hay-making at Billesholms state-owned property in Skåne in the 1910s.

were authorised to control, but not to oblige the employer to rectify existing conditions. This was the county councils' task.

Parliamentary activity was slow, characterised by infighting between conservative and liberal factions. However, the opposition of members of parliament to social reform gradually lessened and, at the turn of the century, legislation of a collective occupational accident insurance was pushed through. Employers were now forced to compensate workers for work-related accidents.

The Social Democratic Party was the main promoter of advances in worker's protection. During the following decades, cooperation between social democrats and social liberals achieved greater results; in the first ten years of the new century, several important industrial protection reforms were introduced.

The foundations were laid by the 1912 law governing worker's protection

In 1912, Parliament passed a new and stricter law of worker's protection, whose main objective was to prevent work associated accidents. This new law tightened up protection regulation and also saw the introduction of health and safety representatives, the pioneers of our present system.

The law gave workers the right to appoint their own representatives, although the term "health and safety representative" did not come into existence until 1938.

These representatives had at first no legal relationship with the trade unions, which did not happen until the 1930s. When the first representatives were appointed according to the 1912 legislation, trade unions



Health and safety reps (SO)

Employed at a workplace and appointed by the local employees' organisation to work within his/her own area at the workplace.

were not yet sufficiently powerful and were strongly opposed by employers.

A good example of the degree of employers' power at that time was agriculture. The 1912 law only applied to agricultural workers who operated machinery. This was probably because of the high rate of accidents during work in threshing-mills.

The representatives' mission was at first two-fold: to represent the workers and to ensure that the government's concern for healthier conditions in the workplace was enforced. The representatives' principal task was to represent workers during government labour inspectors' visits. It was not easy, however, to recruit health and safety representatives, especially in small or itinerant work categories. In construction work and forestry, for example, workers were afraid they would never get another job if they agreed to serve as health and safety representatives, which would include making demands of the employer, since their employment was often sporadic and for short periods of time.



The first occupational injury insurances

The 1912 law of workers' protection was, in 1916, followed by revised legislation of work accident insurance, which was now obligatory and in principle comprehended all wage and salary earners. As to occupational diseases, Parliament did not pass legislation of insurance coverage for some of those until 1929.

International progress

International progress was made after World War I, when The League of Nations, the forerunner of today's United Nations, was founded just after the war ended in 1919. Its purpose was not only to attempt to prevent future wars but also to work together on social issues.

In 1919, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) was created; it was one of the first agencies of the League of Nations. ILO is an independent body which represents the three stakeholders of the labour market and its conventions very soon became a regulatory model of future international development of reform of, for example, workers' protection.

Three-party organism, three-party cooperation

The ILO is here classed as a three-party organism, since it is made up of employers, employees and government representatives. This three-party cooperation is sometimes termed "corporativism".

Legal right to collective agreements

In 1928, Parliament passed a law concerning the right to negotiate collective agreements. As a consequence of this, the Industrial Tribunal was created on January 1st, 1929, for the purpose of arbitration if and when disputes arose over collective agreements.

It was hoped that this legislation would pour oil on the stormy waters of developments in the labour market. In the early 1930s, however, the worldwide financial crisis and the resulting mass unemployment had made cooperation between the parties harder than ever. The best example of this was demonstrations in Ådalen in 1931, when four workers and one bystander were killed by the military.

In some larger companies, health and safety committees were already at work before the financial crisis occurred, although the concept of cooperation between the parties involved in health and safety was not widely accepted until the late 1930s, when the crisis was over.

Health and safety reps become union representatives

An increasing number of health and safety reps in the 1930s

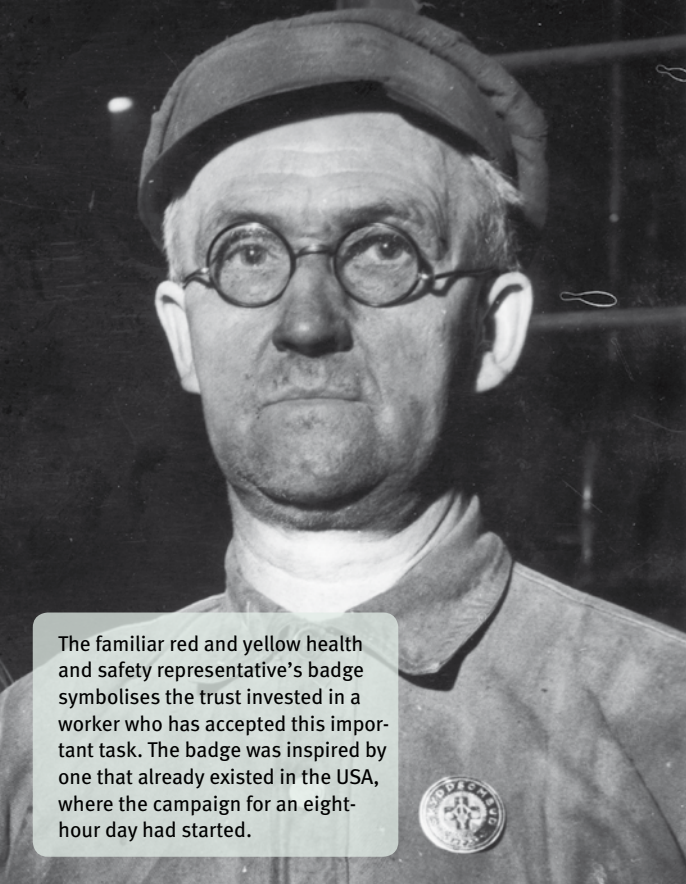
In 1930, there were health and safety reps in approximately 1 000 workplaces in Sweden. By 1935, their numbers had increased to 2 000 and 4 000 by 1940.

At present there are about 100 000 health and safety reps in Sweden, including those who are health and safety reps in their own workplaces and those with regional commitments. The majority belong to LO (The Swedish Trade Union Confederation) affiliated unions; unions affiliated to TCO (The Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees) and Saco (The Swedish Confederation of Professions) also have their health and safety reps.

In the 1930s, the Swedish law governing workers' protection was revised twice. The 1931 revision stipulated the appointment of health and safety reps in the workplace, while the 1938 revision introduced the obligation to create health and safety committees in large workplaces. In 1931 LO and SAF

Maids in a Stockholm residence in 1931. Dishes are being washed in a sink-unit which is far too low. The household research institute Hemmens Forskningsinstitut (HFI) had not yet been created. Women's work environment in the home was designed by men.





The familiar red and yellow health and safety representative's badge symbolises the trust invested in a worker who has accepted this important task. The badge was inspired by one that already existed in the USA, where the campaign for an eight-hour day had started.

agreed that health and safety reps could be appointed in companies which were willing to do so.

In reality, however, it was still just as difficult to recruit health and safety representatives as it was when legislation governing the right to appoint them was passed in 1912. One of the reasons for this was that the procedures involved in appointing health and safety reps was cumbersome; the workers themselves had to elect their reps, not their trade unions, and the reps they elected must be approved by a labour inspector. Another important handicap was the fact that SAF employers refused to regard health and safety reps as union representatives.

Opposition continued. In 1938, however, the revised law on worker's protection legalised the election of health and safety reps by the trade unions.

Yet another hindrance to recruiting of health and safety reps was the risk of harassment from employers. In 1938, the revised law stipulated that health and safety reps must not be prevented from carrying out their task. During the 30s, the number of health and safety reps rose quite spectacularly from 1 000 to 4 000.

Principal safety representative (HSO)

If there is more than one health and safety representative in a workplace, one of these must be appointed chief rep. Depending on the size of the workplace, there may be more than one chief health and safety representative.



1938 – The commencement of cooperation between the parties at central level and in collective agreements

Because of industrial unrest – there were numerous strikes – the social democratic government decided to intervene with legislation to protect third parties. In the LO and SAF, however, it was strongly felt that they should assume responsibility for labour market conditions without any government intervention. The threat of legislation, how-

ever, persuaded SAF and LO to sit down at the negotiating table and arrive at a solution that would guarantee satisfactory industrial relations through agreements, not legislation.

In 1938, discussion and investigation finally led to the signing of an agreement, the famous “Saltsjöbaden Agreement.”

With the Saltsjöbaden agreement, health and safety issues were now a question of co-

The Saltsjöbaden Agreement of 1938

The Saltsjöbaden Agreement introduced the so-called Swedish Model, according to which conditions in working life are regulated by the parties through collective agreements, without government intervention. The agreement regulated several central issues, such as how labour market conflict should be solved, negotiation procedures (local and central negotiation and, as a last resort, the Labour Court), and how notice of industrial action and dismissal should be given. As to notice of action, etc., the rules of the Saltsjöbaden Agreement were later replaced by the Employment Protection Act (LAS) and the Co-Determination Act (MBL).

The Saltsjöbaden Agreement has been revised several times since 1938, but is still the most important. In 2007, central negotiation on a principal agreement between LO, PTK (The Council for Negotiation and Co-operation; a joint organization of 26 affiliated unions in the private sector) and the SAF (Swedish Employers' Confederation; from 2001 Confederation of Swedish Enterprise) was initiated, cut short by the latter in 2009.

operation between the parties involved. The agreement laid the foundations of what was to become known as the “Swedish Model,” which meant that labour market related issues were in the future mainly to be dealt with in central agreements. These would be the model for agreements at lower levels and negotiated solutions would take preference over legislation.

In order to implement the Saltsjöbaden Agreement, the parties involved had to be forceful, organised and proactive, not just at national level but in the workplace itself. In other words, a number of cooperation agreements, related to the Saltsjöbaden Agreement, would have to be drawn up.

Workers' protection agreement between LO and SAF

Workers' protection was the first concrete reason for a cooperation agreement between the LO and SAF in the private sector. In 1942, an agreement was drawn up, called “General Rules for the Organisation of Local Health and Safety Work and Specific Rules for Implementation.”. The purpose of the agreement was to contribute to a unified organisation and the introduction of basic norms for local health and safety work.

LO affiliated unions introduced health and safety reps in 1942, following on this first agreement with SAF.

LO and SAF decided to create a joint commission, the Joint Occupational Safety Council, to promote healthier and safer workplaces. A national occupational safety council was created for the public sector.



A poster produced by the Joint Occupational Safety Council, featuring employers and employees.

The Joint Occupational Safety Council (now Prevent)

The first joint council was called the Joint Occupational Safety Council. Initially, LO and SAF were the only members, although at a later date the Council for Negotiation and Co-operation (PTK) also joined. In 2001, the council's name was changed to Prevent.

In the 1940s, other cooperation agreements were drawn up for work councils, professional training and time studies. These agreements basically involved recommendations. SAF's position was to avoid legislation and binding collective agreements on these issues, while the LO stood out for stricter regulation of "local safety work," in the form of a binding collective agreement. All that was agreed, however, was how harassment of health and safety reps should be dealt with as a binding collective agreement.

LO was compensated for this when, in 1949, the new law on occupational safety

included the most important rules of the agreement, that is, regulation of local safety work as well as cooperation between the parties in worker's protection. This legislation set guidelines for organising safety work, clarified by a related decree and instructions. The National Board of Occupational Safety and Health (now the Swedish Work Environment Authority) was created at the same time.

The first regional health and safety reps

The number of health and safety reps and committees in the workplace in Sweden increased spectacularly in the 1940s, a development reinforced by the 1949 Law on Occupational Safety, which stipulated that a safety committee for dialogue between the parties must be created in companies with more than fifty employees.

The 1949 law was doubly important in that it stipulated the right of certain trade unions to appoint regional health and safety

Regional health and safety reps (RSR)

Regional health and safety reps are appointed by the local trade union branch to represent their members and other employees in small and medium-sized enterprises which often do not have their own health and safety reps. Regional reps are not tied to a specific workplace but operate in the name of the union/region/section in a number of workplaces in a given geographic area.



reps in specific industrial sectors (e.g. building and forestry work), after application to the Labour Inspectorate. The system was not extended to include regional safety representatives until 1974, while the obligation to apply for and be approved by the Labour Inspectorate was abolished.

Legislative development

The 1949 law of occupational safety was revised from time to time but in essence remained unchanged until the new work environment legislation was introduced in the 1970s. The 1942 agreement between LO and SAF on local safety work was also revised and extended a number of times.

Cooperation between the parties – and with the government

When World War II ended, Sweden entered a period of prosperity, during which cooperation between the parties on the labour market, that is, LO and SAF, increased. In addition to the more buoyant financial situation, the social democratic government's policies aimed at a stable economy and welfare services, the now powerful trade union movement and the large numbers of organised employers also contributed.

The parties involved also cooperated with the government. Three-party cooperation to some extent already existed long before this, for example, with the occupational safety bureau of the National Board of

Health and Welfare, which was created as a result of the 1912 law. After the war, however, this tripartite cooperation in occupational health and safety matters gradually extended to include temporary government commissions and official inquiries.

More about tripartite cooperation

Three-party cooperation is not as usual in Sweden as it is in other comparable countries. In Sweden the parties involved in the labour market have other ways of exerting their influence on the legislative process.

Representatives of the parties may participate in government commissions as delegates, experts or in reference groups in connection with government investigation. Inquiries, ministry reports and bills presented in Parliament are also forwarded to the parties for comment.

Since the 1950s, representatives of the parties on the labour market have also been members of the boards of several authorities and government agencies.

In the course of time, the parties became more and more involved in the exercise of official authority. An expression of the Swedish cooperative model, for example, were the interested parties' representatives who were members of the boards of government authorities: the National Board of Occupational Safety and the Health and the National Labour Market Board.

The mid-50s saw the introduction in all Labour Inspectorate districts of regional committees with representation of the parties and local governments.

This co-operation model was strengthened by the fact that the Labour Inspectorate had been severely criticised by the trade union movement and others for being too lenient with employers.

In the 1950s, trade union demands for technical and organisational measures to prevent work related diseases and for improvements of the physical work environment increased. Unions with members who suffered from silicosis, for example, not only criticised their employers but also the Social Democratic Party and the LO for making little or no effort to campaign for stricter legislation. Other issues highlighted during the LO congress of 1951 was the serious risk of accidents and ill health in the workplace and the deterioration of job satisfaction, all results of the accelerated pace of industrial rationalisation.

The silicosis problem – one of several examples of “then – and again”

In the early decades of the 20th century, health and safety action chiefly targeted accident prevention or at least reduction, although this meant that other serious risks in the work environment, such as silicosis, were being neglected.

Another negative aspect of early health and safety regulation and associated agreements was the fact that work environment accidents

were in those days often understood to be the results of workers’ carelessness on the job. Risk assessment in the workplace, however, brought to light the fact that a wide variety of factors contributed to the incidence of work accidents: the worker’s lack of job experience, for example, or his or her limited familiarity with the appropriate manipulation of equipment. Added to this were technological and environmental factors and even personal relationships.

The fact that government measures targeted workers and not improvements in the work environment itself meant delays in research into possible solutions of the silicosis problem and also in the campaign against accidents. Representatives of the labour market also focused on workers’ behaviour and continued to do so for quite some time, with the result that the onus of responsibility for accident prevention was placed on the individual worker.

This concept of risk prevention in the work environment came to public notice during World War II when producer gas was used in motorised vehicles instead of gasoline. The health of many workers whose job involved driving was seriously affected by constant exposure to producer gas, with the result that many of them suffered from chronic ill health for the rest of their lives. According to a medical expert whose job it was to assess workers’ rights to insurance compensation in the case of professionally acquired illnesses, these drivers’ health problems were caused by their “fear of producer gas,” which induced “a psychosomatic reaction to the gas”. He was also of the opinion that tram-drivers’ sick pay might well be the actual “cause of disease”.



A 1940 producer gas powered bus is being filled with wood chips. Small producer gas generators were made for use in cars and buses in Sweden and other countries cut off from fossil fuel supplies during World War II. The generator was filled with wood chips which burned, giving off carbon monoxide, a gas containing about a third of the energy of fossil gas. Producer gas is no longer of commercial significance for vehicular traffic. However, since it is always best to be prepared, work on the technology involved in its production and use continues.

Focus on the individual, not on the work environment

Scientific research did nothing to improve the situation. Research carried out into “the human factor” led to a common belief in the existence of “accident-prone workers,” which influenced later research and the overall concept of workers’ health and safety. When the main objective was to create “safer workers,” rather than “safer workplaces”, the government took a cautious stance when making demands on employers.

This focus on individual workers rather than on the work environment itself did not disappear with the 1950s. Unfortunately, this focus on the individual worker has recently come to characterize, in particular, the employers’ attitude towards work environment problems, which has led to investment in health promotion and expecting the worker to be responsible for his or her own stress management, rather than in the adoption of systematic preventive action to create safer, healthier work environments.

1960–1969

Workers' protection legislation gives all employees, including those in the public sector, the right to appoint health and safety representatives in their workplace.

LO and SAF create a joint health and safety group.

LO-SAF agreement on occupational health services; a similar agreement was later drawn up for the public sector.

Extended educational responsibilities for the Joint Occupational Safety Council (now Prevent).

A government commission on occupational health services presents its proposed extension of occupational health services.

Warnings of the serious risks of prolonged exposure to asbestos and chemicals such as solvents.

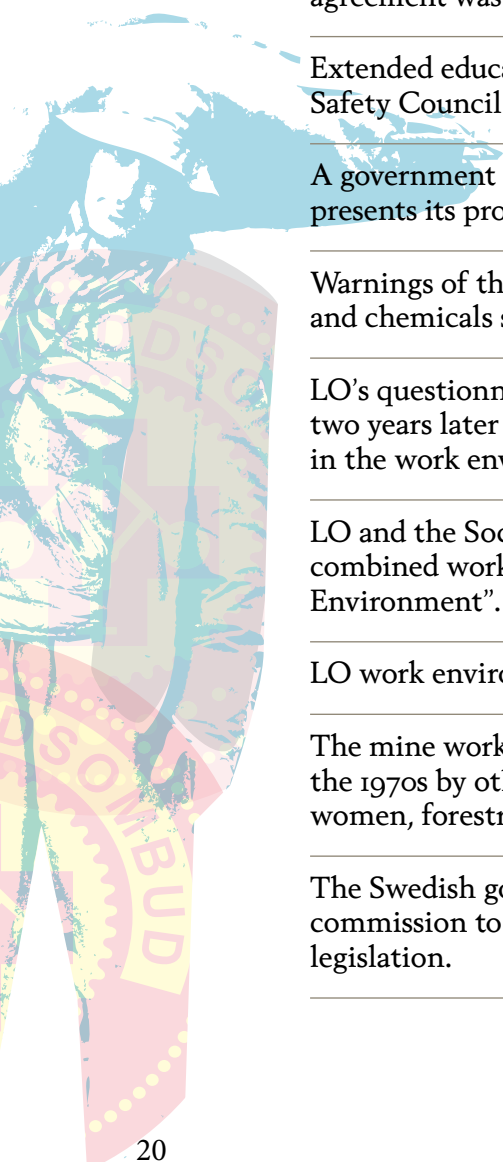
LO's questionnaire survey of the work environment; followed two years later by a supplementary survey of psycho-social risks in the work environment.

LO and the Social Democratic Party reach agreement on a combined work environment programme: "A Better Work Environment".

LO work environment experts contracted.

The mine workers' strike at LKAB in Norrbotten; followed in the 1970s by other wildcat strikes by, for example, cleaning-women, forestry workers and others.

The Swedish government appoints a work environment commission to review existing occupational health and safety legislation.





A worker with protective clothing during elimination of asbestos. Asbestos was widely used by the Swedish building industry, for everything from façades (cement sheeting) to ventilation shafts and fire protection. During elimination and elaboration of asbestos, small, volatile fibres are released in the air and may be inhaled by the workers. If these particles reach the lungs, they can cause asbestosis (pneumoconiosis), lung tumours or lung cancer. The use of asbestos has been strictly prohibited in Sweden since 1982.

THE 1960S

THE 1960S

Developments in the 1960s had important consequences for the trade union movement and society as a whole, with particular repercussions in the work environment, including democracy in the workplace. Standards of living had risen substantially and continuous economic growth was seen as a precondition for improvements in social welfare. The unions had to work to ensure that industrial growth also led to greater equality, higher salaries and better work conditions for workers.

At the same time, the negative consequences of demands for ever-increasing productivity, together with rapid technological development, became ever more apparent. The trade unions refused to accept that increased production efficiency entailed important human costs in the form of more work accidents and work related ill health, reduced job satisfaction and lack of influence in the workplace.

LO's demands and cooperation between the parties

Is it possible for rationalisation and industrial growth to go hand in hand with safety and worker participation? This was the principal question on the agenda in "The trade union movement and democracy in the workplace," the main subject of discussion at the 1961 LO Congress. The answer was a noncommittal "perhaps". The trade union movement doubted that worker protection standards could be maintained at a time when industry was undergoing a rapid process of rationalisation.



A stevedore in Hammarby harbour, Stockholm, 1960.

The 1961 Congress saw the start of LO's activities aimed at progress in work protection action. The debate continued after the 1966 Congress, when the negative effects of rapid technological development were once more on the agenda.

LO and SAF both believed that all parties involved should collaborate in these issues. A joint working party for discussion of worker protection was appointed, one of whose results was a collective agreement on occupational health and safety. The Joint Occupational Safety Council widened its radius to include correspondence courses such as "Ergonomics and Occupational Health and Safety" and a training programme, "The Work Environment".

At last there are health and safety representatives in the public sector

From 1964 on, employees in all sectors were authorised to appoint health and safety

reps. A fundamental change was made in the law on occupational safety giving all public sector employees the same rights as those in the private sector to appoint health and safety reps. Before 1964, only public sector employees in workshops and industry could do that.

The asbestos and chemical risks scare

Towards the end of the 1960s, the general left-wing tendency in society contributed to a great extent to public interest in workers' salaries or wages, influence in the workplace and the work environment. Pressure by the leftist movement without doubt helped to intensify efforts to improve work conditions.

The focus now was on LO union members and their work environment, a result of alarming reports presented at this time regarding workers whose health had been seriously damaged by exposure to asbestos and solvents. Stress and the psychological effects of unsatisfactory work conditions were now common knowledge and widely debated.

From 1968 to 1969, LO distributed a questionnaire survey on union member's personal physical experience of their work environment. The findings of this survey

were vital to LO and LO-affiliated unions' involvement in work environment issues.

Two years later, a second survey, "Stress in Swedish Workplaces," supplemented the original survey; in this instance, it aimed at identifying psycho-social risks in the workplace.

LO's work environment research began to get much more attention from the unions and political groups. In 1969, LO and the Social Democrats designed a work environment programme, "A Better Work Environment", where one of their demands was that health and safety reps' should have greater powers to intervene in the workplace, while supervision by the Labour Inspectorate must become more effective.

This programme put greater pressure on the government to appoint a commission on the work environment. The commission's activities and suggestions formed the basis of work environment legislation in the 1970s.

The LO questionnaire survey on the work environment, 1968–1969

The survey pointed out that approximately 80 per cent of those surveyed had suffered health problems in their work environment. Ergonomic stress, excessive noise and climate problems were mentioned, "to a large degree," by 40 per cent of those questioned. Dust and solvents were commonly cited; about 20 per cent of those questioned believed they had suffered from work related illnesses. The most common complaints were back and joint problems, skin diseases, hearing difficulties and lung and bronchial illnesses.



A pioneering trade union and political work environment programme

The fundamental aim of the LO and Social Democrat party's common programme was to adapt the work environment to the physical and psychic needs of employees – not the reverse. Their programme maintained that unsatisfactory and potentially dangerous work environments were relics of an antiquated class system – all existing historical deficiencies must be eliminated.

The programme insisted on a review of existing workers' protection legislation. The status of health and safety reps should be reinforced, as should the influence of employees in the workplace. Society should also intervene more vigorously and effectively in supervision of workers' health and safety rights.

Other demands included more local worker protection, more responsibility for health and safety reps and more support for health and safety representative training. In addition, work hours should be reduced to 40 hours a week.

The stress was now on the urgent need for local trade union representative training, especially of health and safety reps, as this would give them greater power to recommend that improvements in the work environment be included in the company's obligatory planning and decision-making.

With a view to enhancing the prestige of the "system" the work environment was part of, the programme recommended that resources should be assigned to the National

Board for Occupational Safety and Health and the Labour Inspectorate. More funds should be set aside for an expansion of occupational health services, the Institute of Occupational Medicine and health care units involved in occupational medicine. Research and development was another must; the programme suggested government funding for this purpose and the Occupational Safety and Health Fund was created in 1972.

Occupational health-care services

Extension of occupational health-care services was one of the demands included in LO and the Social Democratic Party's programmes. In 1959, the ILO accepted a recommendation of occupational health-care services. The importance of extending occupational health services was discussed at the LO Congress of 1966. Certain major industrial concerns had for quite some time had access to medical expertise, but occupational health care services were still practically non-existent. In 1967, an agreement was signed by LO and SAF on occupational health care services and clearer guidelines for appropriate training.

The government, on the other hand, appointed a commission – the Commission on Occupational Health Services – which presented its recommendations in 1968. The Commission had identified important deficiencies and proposed an extension of occupational health services. In 1968, roughly about 25 per cent of employees in industry

had access to occupational health-care services supervised by a medical officer.

In the 1960s, the need for more trade union health and safety experts was pointed out. Their task would be to monitor any developments of interest to the trade unions and to promote offensive trade union policies on work environment issues. There was an obvious need for more strenuous efforts by the LO and its affiliated unions. As a result, the LO contracted medical doctors and other work environment experts.

But if the employer still is the one who makes the decisions ...?

During the 1960s, criticism of cooperation between the parties on the labour market escalated. Left-wing groups, in and out of Parliament and within the trade union movement itself, believed that in this intimate cooperation, the trade union pressure group was clearly the loser. This was backed up by experts, who were suspicious of this policy of cooperation.

Criticism focused on the silicosis project; critics were of the opinion that the project was dominated by the SAF and by the employers' interests. They believed that politicians and the government should instead take into consideration the workers' own experience on the job and the unions' demands for a safer work environment and stricter legislation.

An example of this was the miners' strike at the LKAB company's state-owned mines



The wildcat strike of miners at the state-owned LKAB mine in Malmfälten 1969-70, where there were rowdy assemblies, was followed by several other strikes during the 1970s. Cleaning-women employed by the multinational company ASAB at Domnarvets Jernverk (steelworks) in Borlänge went on strike in 1974 for higher wages and better working conditions. The strike spread to Svappavaara, Kiruna, Malmfälten, Arlanda and Skövde. The photo shows Ella Eriksson making the victory sign after almost all their demands had been met.

in Norrbotten. Before the strike broke out in the autumn of 1969, research had commenced into the extent of workers' influence in their company's decision-making and continued during the strike. Researchers discovered that joint safety committees and work councils had not in fact empowered the workers to exert any real influence in their job or their work environment. On the contrary, rationalisation and the pace of work now demanded had speeded up, while the company's management control had become more rigid.

The LKAB miners' strike involved about 4 500 workers at the most and went on for two months. It was followed by other wildcat strikes, such as those of cleaning-women in 1974-1975 and forestry workers in 1975.

1970–1979

Creation of the Occupational Safety and Health Fund.

Revised legislation of occupational safety enters into force, giving greater power to health and safety reps, including the right to shut down activity, if they find it necessary. The regional health and safety reps system is empowered.

Central agreement between LO, PTK and SAF on work environment training.

A new agreement between LO, PTK and SAF on the work environment.

The government Work Environment Commission presents its final report.

Creation of the National Institute for Working Life for research into and training in co-determination and the working life.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act comes into force, replacing previous legislation of workers' protection.

New legislation of occupational safety insurance is passed.

New labour legislation is passed, including legislation of co-determination, the authority of trade union officials and participation on company boards.

PTK (a joint organization of 26 affiliated unions, representing 700 000 salaried employees in the private sector) enters as a third party in the Joint Occupational Safety Council.

LO's questionnaire survey on stress in the workplace

Major government investment in work environment training in collaboration with the Joint Occupational Safety Council. "Bättre arbetsmiljö" (A Better Work Environment) is published.

THE 1970S



A team of women sorting chocolates at Marabou, Sundbyberg, in 1971, checked by a foreman.



Many extremely noisy work environments were silenced in the 1970s when most Swedish textile and clothing companies closed down or were transferred to other countries. A total of 70 000 workers lost their jobs; most of the workers affected were women and older employees. Sonja Linnarsson had worked at Tabergs Yllefabrik in Småland for 38 years when this photo was taken in 1971. The company closed down in 1978. Algots (Borås), an important clothing company with 3 000 employees, had gone bankrupt the year before.

This was a decade of legislation, as far as the work environment and labour laws were concerned. The foundations of this legislation were laid in the 1960s, when trade union concern about the work environment increased. Research by LO and the Social Democratic Party, agreement negotiation between LO and SAF, together with government commissions, formed the basis of revised agreements on worker protection, increased investment in training and legislation passed in the 1970s.

The numerous legislative reforms and all new collective agreements signed during the 1970s laid the foundations of today's work on work environment and labour legislation.

The two main issues at the LO Congress in 1971 were the work environment and de-

mocracy in the workplace. Two programmes with closely related contents were presented to the Congress: "Internal democracy in the workplace" and "The trade union movement and the work environment".

The demand for greater employee intervention in planning and decision-making in the workplace was a central feature of the work environment programme. It would mean that the opinions of employees with regard to their own work environment would be taken into consideration when decisions were being made which would affect their working life and environment. This would be achieved by a combination of stricter legislation, effective government supervision and the introduction of more effective measures in the workplace, such as occupational health services.

Preventive action should focus on creating safe, healthy work environments, rather than "safe workers", while occupational health services should be oriented more towards preventive action. Ergonomics, the work climate (exposure to heat or cold, air quality, etc.), industrial dust, noise, chemical risks and psycho-social factors in the work environment were now given greater attention.

Trade union demands realized

The law on the work environment, which in 1978 replaced earlier legislation of workers' protection, may be said to be the direct result of the LO and the Social Democrat Party's joint working environment programme of the 1960s. Not only that, the law included a number of the demands

for action in the work environment put forward by the 1971 LO Congress, in particular, greater authority for health and safety reps.

Reformed legislation and new agreements

The results of research into asbestos, solvents and other chemical health risks in the 1970s contributed to a reform of existing legislation. The fact that such a lengthy period of time had passed before the dangers of exposure to asbestos were recognised, sounded the alarm which intensified action in the work environment. The LO played an important role in this respect by highlighting the relationship between cancer and asbestos.

The 1970s was a period of working life reform, with updated environment legislation on the work environment, co-determination, increased powers for trade union representatives and employee representation on company boards. This refurbished work environment legislation gave added authority to health and safety reps, just as legislative changes had done before. Furthermore, the National Board for Occupational Safety and Health was authorised to introduce binding regulations and stipulate preliminary inspection of all work processes, methods and installations before changes were made.

The social partners were also active in the 1970s and their cooperation resulted in new agreements on the work environment and occupational health services, changes

The silicosis problem solved. New health risks appear

One of the results of the new law governing the work environment was that the National Board for Occupational Safety and Health issued binding regulation of periodic measurement of industrial dust levels and imposed stricter standards for ventilation and other types of technical protective installations. The trade union members who suffered from silicosis, and the left-wing, had been demanding these measures for a long time.

The fight against silicosis, an occupational disease, was aided by more efficient technical and medical preventive measures.

The protracted silicosis problem, with all the difficulties involved in preventing health damage in exposed workers, is an example of how far the government's occupational safety efforts lagged behind in relation to well known work environment problems that many suffered from. Asbestos related contamination prevention, or the lack of it, is another example. There is, unfortunately, a risk that such slow reactions recur.

in working hours and improved health and occupational injury insurance.

Their cooperation with the government made for a fair degree of progress, with improvements in the work environment and the establishment of the Occupational Safety and Health Fund at the beginning of the decade. The board of this organisation included representatives of the social partners, and they were also on the boards

of several other authorities and institutions. The National Institute for Working Life was created for research into and development of work environment issues. Representatives of the social partners sat on the board of this institution as well.

Cooperation between the social partners was probably one of the conditions for the working life reforms in the 1970s.

Greater authority given to health and safety reps in 1974

The official Commission for the work environment (which was to lead to new legislation) was aware that many work environment issues demanded a rapid solution. The commission underlined how important it was that local work on workers' health and safety protection functioned well, adding that local reps were the basis for that.

The Commission's proposals led to important amendments of the revised law on occupational safety that came into force in 1974 and upgraded the authority of health and safety reps.

Since 1974, health and safety reps have been authorised to participate in planning of the workplace, its layout, methods employed, etc., while any new or altered premises should be subject to preliminary inspection. The reps could now carry out their activities during paid working hours and were given access to necessary documents and authorised to request and receive any essential information they required from the company or other sources. They were also authorised to shut down any po-

tentially dangerous work while awaiting the decision of the Labour Inspectorate. The regional health and safety reps system now had greater authority in its local activities in smaller workplaces. Requests for application to and the permission of the Labour Inspectorate were done away with.

The new Law on Occupational Safety – a breakthrough

The Law on Occupational Safety passed by Parliament in 1977 came into force on January 1st, 1978, and mainly applied to the physical work environment and chemical risks. The results of research, however, and debate at the beginning of the 1970s on stress and psycho-social work-related stress also influenced legislative developments. These factors were taken into consideration in proposals submitted by the work environment commission in 1976, a year before the parliamentary decision on the new law.

Amongst other innovations, this law established requirements for preliminary examination and planning of the work environment, specifying requirements for employer-employee cooperation and the creation of health and safety reps and their committees. These changes were meant to facilitate local work environment action in the workplace.



The Work Environment Act, a booklet in the LO series "Jobbet och lagarna" (Work and Law), 2006.

The most far-reaching innovation, as far as workers were concerned, was the right of health and safety reps to halt activity whenever there was evidence of serious and imminent risk and when the employer had done nothing to remedy previously identified risks. The Commission proposed that health and safety reps and trade unions should be liable for damages if the right to stop work were wilfully manipulated or abused. This suggestion, which was severely criticised, particularly in the workplace and by the LO, was in the end not included in the new legislation.

Health and safety reps authorised to shut down potentially dangerous work

Workers and unions were authorised, through their health and safety reps, to denounce potentially dangerous work conditions which might potentially be a source of serious work accidents or work related ill health. An employee could now refuse to carry out a task he or she considered dangerous, and the health and safety rep could decide to stop work temporarily while investigation was carried out.

This might happen in the following situations:

- When there is an imminent and serious threat to workers' life or health.
- When solitary work is considered unsafe.
- When a prohibition formulated by a supervising authority was being ignored.

This new work environment legislation was on the whole considered positive, al-

though some of its content was criticised. The LO, for example, criticised the fact that the possibilities to impose sanctions was too limited, while their influence on work organisation related issues was insufficient. The employers' main criticism was that this legislation put them the onus of ensuring that their employees did not carry out solitary work. The criticism was even stronger against the disposition that was to express the intentions of the law clearly and comprehensibly.

The Swedish Law on Occupational Safety is a framework law that requires regulations to be more specifically formulated. The regulations are important to enable employers and the Labour Inspectorate to fulfil their obligations to the letter of the law. The problem, however, was that work on the regulations to the 1978 law was never completed. Employers find it is easier to accept a framework law expressed in relatively general terms, while it is harder for them to accept more detailed regulation.

The most important change in the law was that it gave health and safety reps and committees much more authority. These advances are still in evidence in present day work environment legislation, according to which, health and safety committees are empowered to plan and supervise safety in the workplace. Health and safety reps are, in addition, entitled to sufficient time off to carry out their work. The law also authorises them to stop work when a situation is considered to be so dangerous that time should not be lost waiting for the Labour Inspectorate's assessment.

Results of cooperation between the parties involved and political initiatives

In the 1970s, the social partners came to agreement on how work environment activities should be carried out. For small companies there was now also a government funded regional organisation of health and safety reps.

Resources for work environment research increased, the Occupational Safety and Health Fund was created and the recently introduced work science discipline expanded. Intensive training courses principally recruited health and safety reps and workshop supervisors. LO and its affiliated unions' internal resources for work environment action were also augmented during the 1970s.

The Occupational Safety and Health Fund

From the start of the 1970s and for nearly 30 years, the Occupational Safety and Health Fund played an important role in the work environment. In 1975, the fund, financed by a fixed percentage of employer contributions, had approximately 90 million Swedish crowns at its disposal, while its later activities were backed by tens of millions. The fund's task was to promote practically oriented research and training specifically aimed at health and safety reps. The fund also made a valuable contribution to workshop supervisor and technician training. A considerable percentage of their funds went to financing basic health and safety rep training.

In the Congress period 1976-81, a new collective agreement on the work environment, by LO, PTK and SAF, came into force, followed by new agreements in the public sector and the cooperative movement.

The chief result of these agreements was probably the fact that health and safety committees now controlled occupational health care, while employees were in the majority on committees. These agreements thus reinforced the trade unions' influence on work environment issues in the workplace. There was one important restriction, however: the committees and trade unions had very limited power to influence company investment in improvements in the work environment.

Health and safety reps' opinions of work environment reforms in the 1970s

The 1970s were of epoch-making importance in relation to empowerment of the employees. The new Law on Occupational Safety, new collective agreements and other measures were great trade union successes, in spite of the fact that, at the same time, stress and the demands of modern working life were increasing.

This was demonstrated by LO research presented at the 1981 Congress in the report "Vad händer med arbetsmiljön?" (What's happening in the work environment?), which reflected health and safety reps' and union members' opinions of their work environment. This research once again

showed that old problems – physical and emotional stress, noise pollution, unsatisfactory work climates – were still major problems in the workplace.

Apart from this indirect comparison of union members' opinion of the work environment in 1970 and 1980, a direct question was put to health and safety reps and members: how has the work environment changed in the last five years?

Ergonomic problems and unsatisfactory climate conditions in the workplace were seen as the most common problems, according to health and safety reps and union members. Even more disappointing was the fact that few improvements, most of them very limited, were reported.

The most tangible problems reported referred to the psycho-social environment. Health and safety reps and union members reported that the psycho-social work environment was the area where most deterioration had been detected and most felt by workers. Relatively few had positive comments to make on developments in this area.

Health and safety reps were also questioned about action taken to prevent a variety of risks in the work environment during the previous five years. Ergonomic risks, which predominated in the workplace according to those who responded, were amongst the risks that received least attention. The findings indicated that greater efforts were called for in this area.



First of May demonstration in Stockholm, 1972.

Work environment training on the wider front

The new work environment legislation of 1978 was responsible for the greater authority enjoyed by health and safety reps and made training for health and safety reps, industrial managers and workshop supervisors, constructors and others a necessity.

The government allocated 75 million crowns from the Occupational Safety and Health Fund for this training. The Joint Occupational Safety Council became responsible for training and funds were also made available for specialised training in management of specific risks, such as noise pollution, unsuitable lighting in the workplace and exposure to chemicals, all of which were in the public eye in the 1970s.

“Bättre arbetsmiljö” (BAM, A Better Work Environment), a course sponsored by the Joint Occupational Safety Council, turned out to be one of the most comprehensive adult educational efforts in post World War II. It attracted international attention and was translated into approxi-



mately forty languages. An important factor behind this course and its importance was the funds from the Occupational Safety and Health Fund. The project work was carried out with the cooperation of educational associations such as ABF (the Workers' Educational Association) in study circles.

Yet another important condition was the LO, PTK and SAF's 1974 central agreement on training, giving health and safety reps in safety committees and workshop supervisors the right to forty hours for study during paid working hours. Two years later, a new central work environment agreement was arrived at and accepted as binding. This latest development included privately employed members of PTK, which from 1978 was the third most important member of the Joint Occupational Safety Council.

BAM is still going strong

BAM training is still going strong and is regularly updated and cooperation between the social partners in BAM continues. The Joint Occupational Safety Council is now known as Prevent.

The central agreement on education and other central work environment agreements are, however, no longer in force; they were terminated by SAF in the 1990s.



LO's demands for the 1980s

LO insisted that the National Board for Occupational Health and Safety increase its work towards developing measurement technology and analyses methods which would make it possible to fix limits values more accurately. LO also insisted on greater powers of intervention in the National Board for Health and Safety and the Labour Inspectorate's decisions on regulation and supervision.

Another of LO's demands was the creation of an independent authority to control the manipulation of chemical substances and products. This authority should have sufficient resources to enable it to cooperate with other authorities, in particular, the National Board for Health and Safety. This demand led to the creation of the Swedish Chemicals Agency, although this did not happen until 1986.



Assembly work at the Luxor factory in Norrköping in 1985. To avoid repetitive strain injuries to arms and shoulders, the women have both arms in a sling.

THE 1980S

THE
1980S

1980–1989

A complementary development agreement to the law on co-determination is signed by LO, PTK and SAF.

The LO Congress focuses on the work environment in a number of reports, amongst them “Krav på arbetsmiljön” (Demands upon the work environment) and “Vad händer med arbetsmiljön?” (What’s happening in the work environment?).

The Employment Protection Act, which is still valid, comes into force.

The National Board for Occupational Health and Safety publishes regulation on solitary work.

Creation of the Swedish Chemicals Agency.

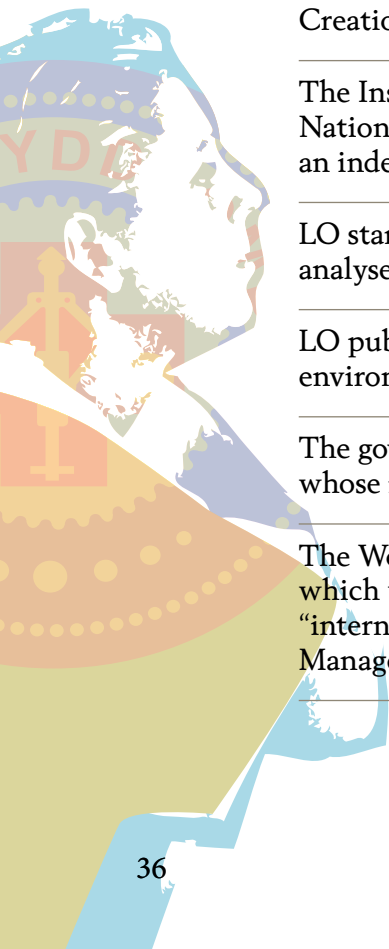
The Institute for Occupational Medicine separates from the National Board for Occupational Health and Safety to become an independent research institute.

LO starts to publish informative booklets with statistics and analyses of occupational injuries.

LO publishes programmes for improving women’s work environment.

The government creates the Work Environment Commission, whose role is to pinpoint Sweden’s 400 000 most dangerous jobs.

The Work Environment Commission puts forward proposals which will eventually result in the first regulation of “internal control” (now SAM, Systematic Work Environment Management at Workplaces).



The new law on conditions at the workplace increased local work environment activities. The authority of health and safety reps was extended and, during the LO Congress in 1981, a number of reports dealing with work environment issues were presented. However, it was not the work environment but democracy that most interested the trade union movement and general political debate during the first years of the 1980s.

The 1980s was also the decade when automation and stress became ever more prominent features of everyday work life.

Injuries and ill health caused by strain and repetitive movements increased dramatically, particularly affecting women. The Metal Workers' Union's report, "Det goda arbetet" (Good work), stressed that the work environment issues must be understood to

form an integral part of work organisation, co-determination and development in the workplace.



Democratic issues and the work environment

Democratic issues became more and more important towards the end of the 1970s and early 1980s. Two basic topics dominated the debate: employee funds and co-determination in the workplace. In both cases, the trade union movement saw an opportunity

Focus on the work environment in several LO reports in 1981

Work environment related issues were dealt with in the report "Krav på arbetsmiljön" (Demands on the work environment), and in other reports presented by the LO to the Congress in 1981. Amongst these was a report, "Vad händer med arbetsmiljön" (What is happening in the work environment?) which brought to light the results of a questionnaire survey, dating from the end of the 1970s, of health and safety reps' and trade union members' opinions of their work environments.

Another report, "Fackföreningsrörelsen och forskningen" (The trade union movement and research), included a series of demands for research into the work environment. A special report on this type of research was published, "Facklig datapolitik" (Trade union computer politics), which dealt with the significance of computer technology in the work environment. Yet another report, "Solidarisk personalpolitik" (HR policies based on solidarity), discussed the importance of the work environment in excluding people from the labour market and demanded more effective preventive measures.



to link democratic issues with the work environment.

The employee funds initially aimed at economic democracy. Many trade union members saw this as a precondition for basic changes in conditions in their working life and improvements in the work environment. The intentions never realized, however, and the funds were abolished at the beginning of the 1990s.

New legislation on co-determination, MBL, contributed to spreading the idea that co-determination and increased trade union intervention in the workplace would lead to progress in the work environment. The new law had made it possible to include the work environment in collective negotiation. The trade unions were convinced that many work organisation issues could well be discussed during negotiation, given their connection with salaries and wages.

The introduction of a development agreement signed by LO, PTK and SAF in the early 1980s was an expression of this hope. The agreement supplemented the MBL and specified the trade unions and employer' right to come to agreement on the form of local co-determination, that is, in every workplace.

The development agreement was oriented towards three areas where cooperation between the parties might possibly be developed: work organisation, technological development and finance. The agreement included stipulations concerning contact officials, trade union information during paid working hours, the employees' right to engage a workers' consultant when re-organization was at the planning stage, and

many other matters. In 1985, the development agreement was extended to include a workers' suggestions stipulation.

While the parties involved focused mainly on co-determination issues, the National Board for Occupational Health and Safety was in the process of formulating regulations based on the new work environment law, with the result that employers began to denounce the existence of a certain "contradiction" between co-determination legislation and work environment legislation. The employers maintained that further regulation of organisational and psycho-social work environment issues would restrict the possibility of negotiating work organisation conditions covered by the law on co-determination (MBL).

As to work organisation, existing legislation included a stipulation regarding solitary work, which was the principal organisational aspect of the work environment law. With this exception, the legislative demands upon the psycho-social work environment took the form of a general recommendation, not a stipulation. The 1980s saw few other stipulations in connection with psycho-social issues: bullying, for example, and violence or threats in the workplace.

The decade of strain injuries

The work environment problem which increased most during the 1980s were injuries to the back and joints, that is, the locomotive structure. It was beginning to be noticed that these types of strain injuries particularly affected women. Increasing



An exercise break in 1980. The composing room staff of a daily newspaper (DN) limber up neck and shoulders, aching from monotonous work sitting in front of screens.

numbers of women had started to go out to work and many argued that there was no reason why women should not be employed in traditionally male industrial work.

Work environment problems focused on during the 1970s had been chemical health risks, asbestos, solvents, etc., which were generally typical of male dominated work environments. Research mainly concentrated on these areas, while strain injuries did not attract the same interest. LO investigation during the early 1970s, however, had demonstrated that ergonomic risks were rampant amongst their members. The elaborations LO began to carry out at the beginning of the 1980s of official statistics of reported occupational injuries came up with similar findings.

Surveys of why workers took early retirement or notified illness also highlighted the

fact that injuries to the locomotive apparatus were the most frequent and that the figures for early retirement and notified illnesses were quite high amongst women.

Women exposed to risk and neglected

Women's exposure to strain injuries was the result of several factors; the gender segregated labour market was of course one important explanation. The work women performed in health care often involved heavy lifting, with the consequent risk of strain injuries. Women are obviously in the majority in this type of profession, which implies that many working women in our society are daily exposed to the risk of strain.

During the industrial expansion of the 1970s and 1980s, women were taken on in

traditionally male-dominated industrial jobs where physically “easy” work on the assembly-line, for example, was considered eminently suitable for women. Neither the pertinent authorities nor researchers paid the least attention to the fact that these tasks were repetitive, monotonous and responsible for physical strain and psychological stress.

Many women worked in the growing private services sector in jobs generally classified as physically “easy”, as cashiers or waitresses, for example. Health risks identified in these jobs, which are extremely monotonous, involve a lot of standing and inappropriate movements, all of which were ignored, in spite of increased awareness of

The continuing deficit of women health and safety reps

Women make up 48 per cent of LO union members, but only 36 per cent of health and safety reps are women. This may be because more women than men have tasks they cannot take time off from to attend other activities; they often work part time, with precarious job security, while they generally assume greater responsibility for children than men. The trend now, however, indicates an increase in the number of female health and safety reps, something which was very much needed, when we consider that LO research revealed that standards in LO-women’s work environment have significantly deteriorated in recent years.

work environment problems in the 1960s and 1970s.

One explanation of this attitude could be that the risks involved in women’s work are not as obvious and immediate as the risk inherent in many types of masculine work. The risk of occupational accidents is more obvious during the manipulation of cutting machinery and tools or during work on high buildings. The consequences of accidents in these jobs are also more evident and more serious: death, disability or bodily injuries.

The Work Environment Commission and the 400 000 most dangerous jobs in Sweden

During the 1980s, the press reported one serious strain injury after another. On the positive side, however, this led to political initiatives. For example, the 400 000 most dangerous jobs in Sweden were to be identified, and a Work Environment Commission was appointed in 1988, headed by the labour minister. Its mission was to come up with more effective preventive measures, with strong support from the LO. Work environment issues had rarely received so much political attention as they did towards the end of the 1980s – and perhaps never so much trade union interest, either.

The Commission’s investigations and its findings had a great effect on activities in the work environment during the 1990s and 2000s. The Commission put forward ideas which might be termed the starting point of a more systematic approach to preventive action in the work environment.

The Commission, however, had its doubts about including in its proposals the trade unions' demands for an extension of health and safety reps' right to stop dangerous work, when they considered urgent action was required. LO and LO-affiliated unions demanded that health and safety reps be authorised to stop work also in case of permanent strain injury risk.

The Work Environment Commission also proposed that stricter demands on work organisation should be included in the law on conditions at the workplace. The Commission's survey of health risks in women's jobs also contributed to greater equality in the treatment of men and women in the workplace.

The Occupational Safety and Health Fund, a unique investment

The Work Environment Commission's activities contributed to the creation of the Occupational Safety and Health Fund in 1990. The Fund specifically targeted women's work environment and related strain injuries. The Fund, which was abolished in 1995, was the most substantial financial investment in the work environment ever made in Sweden.

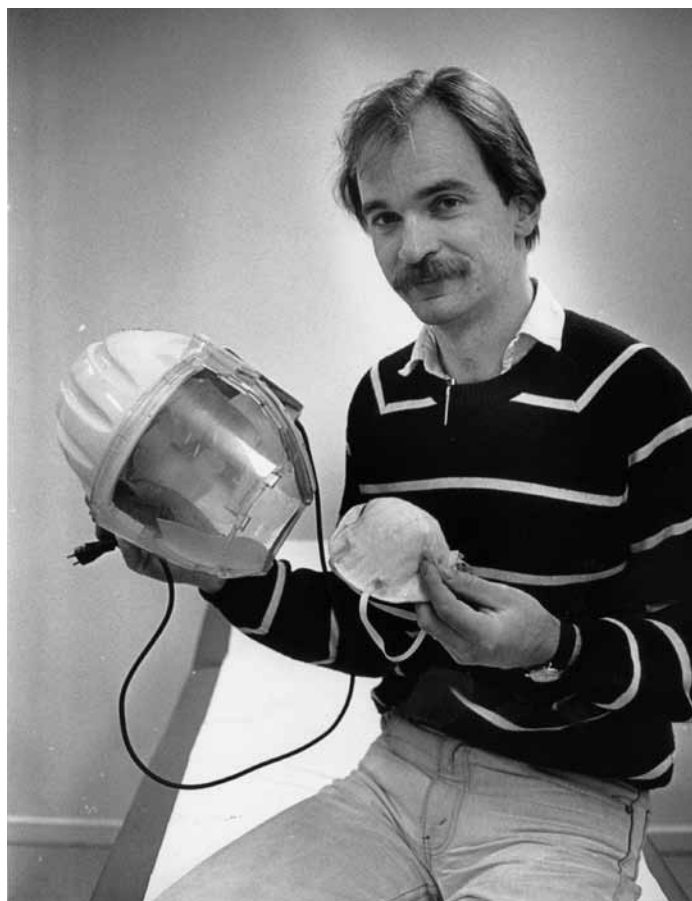
Internal control of systematic work environment management at workplaces

Once the government appointed the Work Environment Commission, the LO set in

motion special investigation to provide the basis of future activities within the Commission's field of action.

LO asked affiliated unions to suggest measures they considered necessary in the workplace. One of the Commission's tasks was to map the 400 000 most dangerous jobs in Sweden and suggest corrective measures. The unions' proposals focused to a large extent on measures for dealing with

Protective equipment at Lantbrukshälsan in Örebro, 1985. Health risks for agricultural workers include exposure to mouldy cereals, which can cause allergic alveolitis (farmer's lung).



work organisation problems, monotonous tasks, inadequate planning, work pace and stress. These proposals were intended to reinforce demands for work organisation and to ensure improvements in job content and teamwork.

The unions' proposals included:

- ✎ Stricter regulations and sanctions.
- ✎ More effective follow up of occupational injuries in the workplace.
- ✎ Extension of health and safety reps' right to stop work which could, in the long term, result in injuries.
- ✎ Increased influence on planning and pace of work.

The Work Environment Commission proposed changes in work environment legislation, which led to a number of amendments in the early 1990s. The most important of these was the introduction of a request for internal control which all employers would be obliged to comply with.

The fact that the Labour Inspectorate focused on "systemic supervision" may have been the source of this interest in more specific demands for systematic activities in the workplace. This demanded greater con-

trol on the employer's part and basic data in the form of action plans.

Demands for action plans

Increasing employers' responsibility was considered one of the most important measures adopted at this early stage of LO's investigation. Employers' responsibility must from then on be more precisely defined, and more concrete, while internal control of the work environment must be improved.

One way of achieving this was to insist on work environment action plans. One of the Work Environment Commission's most important proposals for the work environment was thus a tightening up of requirements for internal control and work environment planning on the part of the employer.

This proposal meant, amongst other things, that the employer would be obliged to investigate occupational injuries and risks in the work environment and adopt the measures necessary to eliminate them. A time plan should be elaborated for meas-

Internal control – one of the results of the Work Environment Commission's activities

The Commission's proposals led to an amendment of existing legislation and the first regulation of what was then called internal control (now "Systematic work environment management at workplaces" (SAM)) which comprised four preventive action phases:

- Investigation in the work environment.
- Elaboration of policy objectives.
- Immediate measures – action plans.
- Follow up and review.

Health and safety reps and trade union representatives must participate in each of the four phases.

ures which could not immediately be introduced. In addition, the employer should document the work environment and related activities and, and develop action plans. All of the above became obligatory.

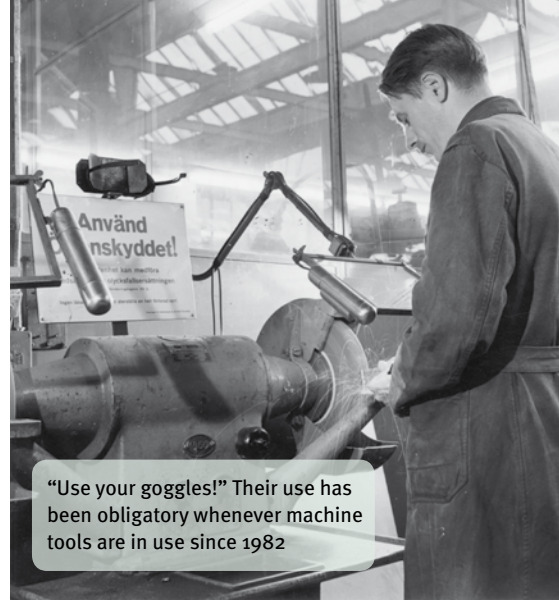
The LO insisted that these action plans should be developed with the cooperation of all parties involved, and this was set down in the Work Environment Act. Health and safety representatives and safety committees should contribute to the outlining of action plans and these action plans should cover all aspects of the work environment: the physical work environment, work organisation related measures, adjustments and rehabilitation.

Vague employer responsibility makes for vague ideas

Although the employers' legal responsibility for the work environment had been clearly stated by law, it had obviously not been stated clearly enough. Many employers seemed to be under the impression that work environment activities were some sort of sideline, while some of those involved even believed that health and safety reps were in fact responsible for the work environment!

Work organisation – a job for health and safety reps

Documentation presented to the Work Environment Commission by LO unions particularly emphasised the urgent need



to come up with measures which would reduce strain injuries in the workplace. According to the Commission's terms of reference, it should suggest how work could be more efficiently organised so as to reduce strain injuries and ill health caused by existing work organisation deficiencies.

On the initiative of the LO, the Commission appointed a special group to elaborate proposals for improvements in work organisation.

The LO believed that work environment regulation, as expressed in legislation, was too general, not to say somewhat vague. The law should specify that the pace of work should not be dictated by machines; the workers themselves should be responsible for decisions of this nature. Repetitive, restricted and monotonous movements by the worker should be avoided. Employees must be allowed to exercise their legal right to intervene in work organisation planning which directly affects their jobs. This would empower them to determine levels and distribution of work in different types

of work and, as far as possible, eliminate strain and stress.

The LO also wanted development work to continue, stating the need for greater efforts by local unions, occupational health services, the Labour Inspectorate and other interested parties, if the negative trend in industrial accidents and illnesses was to be halted. In addition, the LO affirmed that legislation and collective agreements were at that point insufficient to prevent the type of work organisation which was responsible in many cases for strain injuries, accidents, stress and psychological distress.

Since the 1970s, the need for development in the workplace had been one of the demands most strongly defended by the trade unions, whose aim was to create “det goda arbetet” (the good work). The Work Environment Commission suggested a more straightforward wording of the law in an amendment to the first paragraph of the second chapter, a suggestion which was later accepted.

New working conditions (still in force)

Work conditions shall be adapted to people’s differing physical and mental capabilities.

The employee shall be given the opportunity to participate in the design of his own work situation and in processes of change and development affecting his work.

Technologies, work organisation and job content shall be designed in such a way that the employee is not subjected to physical strain or

mental stress that may lead to illness or accidents. Forms of remuneration and the distribution of working hours shall also be taken into account in this connection. Closely controlled or restricted conditions of work shall be avoided or limited.

Efforts shall be made to ensure that work provides opportunities of variety, social contact and co-operation, as well as coherence between different tasks.

Furthermore, efforts shall be made to ensure that work conditions provide opportunities for personal and vocational development, as well as for independence and professional responsibility.

Demands for greater variety, group work and greater skills in jobs carried out by employees affiliated to LO-unions were successful, after the amendment was introduced, though to a varying and insufficient degree. Unfortunately, the intention of the amendment has been thwarted by obstacles such as globalisation, public procurement in competition and precarious job security.

One important consequence of the Commission’s proposals was that legislation now specifies that safety committees and health and safety reps should also collaborate in work organisation in the workplace. In this respect, the amendment did, to some extent, concur with the Commission’s proposals.

The LO received these proposals positively but stressed that if the proposed amendments did not produce the intended effects, more precise demands on work organisation would have to be introduced through regu-

lation, additions or specifications. The LO were of the opinion that collective agreements between the parties involved might also be necessary.

The Labour Inspectorate continued its regulatory activities; ergonomic regulation, for example was clearly related to work organisation. Work on the regulation of the psycho-social aspects mentioned in the law was, however, questioned by employers and thus never completed. According to health and safety reps and employees, stress and psycho-social related illnesses have continued to increase. There are various reasons for this increase, while the lack of effective regulation does nothing to facilitate work environment activities in this respect.

Other obligations: adaptation and rehabilitation

A basic prerequisite for LO's collaboration with the Work Environment Commission was that the employer assume responsibility for adaptation and rehabilitation in the workplace, in keeping with legislation and collective agreements. The LO insisted that in this case all parties should be involved.

These activities included elaborating measures to counteract the increase in work related injuries and illness and prevent exclusion if appropriate measures were not adopted. The safety committee, if such existed, should therefore discuss these matters, because of their connection with preventive action. Rehabilitation issues should also be taken into account during negotiation of general business, resources, organisa-

tion and individual cases. An important issue to be included was protection for workers with reduced work capacity, as stated in the law on employment protection (LAS).

Work environment legislation specifically mentioned the employer's obligation to elaborate an appropriate programme for adaptation of work and rehabilitation in the workplace, in keeping with requirements for internal control (now systematic work environment management at workplaces, SAM). The employer's obligation to adapt work conditions to the individual worker's specific qualifications and job skills was also extended, and once again emphasised in special regulation of adaptation and rehabilitation in the workplace. The Labour Inspectorate was charged with supervision of employers, and authorised to issue injunctions and impose fines when necessary.

In addition, safety committees were authorised to participate in planning of adaptation and rehabilitation in the workplace and to follow-up the implementation of the plans.

One of the health and safety reps' jobs is to ensure that employers comply with the requirements of Chapter 3 of Work Environment legislation, that is, there must exist, in each workplace, an organised system, including routines and resources for adaptation and rehabilitation. Investigation must be carried out when necessary. Health and safety reps can also be of great help to individual employees, in their dealings with employers and the Social Insurance Agency.

1990–1999

Creation of the Swedish Working Life Fund.

The central work environment agreement between LO and SAF expired when SAF decided not to renew it.

During the first half of the decade, employers successively resigned from the boards of all agencies within the work environment field.

Government funding of occupational health services was discontinued.

Government funding for study circles during paid working hours (the so-called MBL allocations), was withdrawn.

Review of the law on work environment after proposals by the Commission on the Working Environment.

The National Board for Occupational Safety and Health issues the first regulation of internal control (now regulation on systematic work environment management at workplaces, SAM).

The Working Life Fund is abolished.

The Centre for Working Life is abolished although parts of its activities are transferred to the National Institute for Working Life.

Sweden joins the EU.

The LO carries out research, in questionnaire form, directed at union members and health and safety reps. Their findings are summarised in the report “Färre och hårdare jobb” (Fewer and harder jobs).

The LO publishes “Skyddsombudsboken” (A Handbook for Health and Safety Reps) and “Skyddsombudets rätt” (The Power of Health and Safety Reps).

THE 1990S



According to a 1995 LO membership survey, lifting heavy weights was standard practice at work for 80 per cent of women and 75 per cent of men.

THE 1990S

The 1990s was a dramatic decade. The financial crisis during the first years of the decade led to record-breaking unemployment figures and precarious job security. In 1995, Sweden became a member of the EU. Financial recovery combined with the technological revolution of information and communication led to financial expansion towards the end of the decade.

The influence of economism on politics and the social debate to a great extent strengthened the employers' opposition to demands for better work conditions. This may have had a restraining influence on posterior work environment legislation, but, most importantly, had negative effects on the implementation of reforms, the foundations of which had been laid by the Work Environment Commission, that were now included in legislation. These reforms centered on internal control and activities aimed at preventing strain injuries and other stress related illnesses by means of changes in work organisation.

The employers back out

The changes introduced by legislation in the early part of the 1990s might well have made a positive impact on the work environment. In the wake of the financial crisis, however, preventive work environment activities were substantially cut back at central level. A consequence of the deteriorated financial climate was that employers began to back out from their commitment to work environment activities.

SAF gave notice that they did not intend to renew the central collective work environment agreement which expired in 1993. It also became difficult for the unions to come to terms in sector agreements and those that were signed were as a rule of a fairly general nature.

During the first years of the 1990s, many employers resigned from the boards of a number of work environment agencies: the National Board for Occupational Safety and Health, the Work Environment Institute, the Council for Research on the Work Environment and others. This made cooperation between the parties even more difficult. The only joint bodies where both parties were represented were oriented towards training and information: The Association for Workers' Protection and the Joint Occupational Safety Council. Both of these bodies are still in existence, although they are now called Forum for the Work Environment and Prevent.

The employers also terminated the central collective agreement on training, which made it more difficult for the Joint Occupational Safety Council to promote workers' skills and knowledge in the workplace through massive training programmes with the collaboration of adult education associations. Training now became more of an internal company matter, which was very much in line with SAF's wishes and strategies.

The local or sectoral agreements on training during paid working hours that began to replace central collective agreement did not as a rule include the same generous condi-

tions for employees. Limited personnel in many workplaces and the employers' increased responsibility for production made it difficult – as it still does – for health and safety reps to absent themselves from work for training.

1990s – several setbacks for the work environment

In addition to the employers' increasing lack of interest in cooperation between the parties, the government also discontinued, or reduced its commitments. Several examples:

- State grants for occupational health services abolished.
- State grants for training (the so-called MBL funds) in study circles during paid working hours abolished.
- The Work Environment Fund was created, only to be abolished a few years later.

The Swedish Work Environment Fund – support for local projects

Just as employers were withdrawing more and more from many of the cooperation agreements at central level, the Work Environment Fund was created; a direct result of the Work Environment Commission's activities and major financial investment in improvements in the work environment. The Fund was abolished in 1995, but during its existence it was directed by the social



Regional health and safety representative on an assignment.

partners at central and regional level in every county and had approximately 600 million crowns at its disposal. A total of 20 000 companies and activities made use of these funds – a significant number, considering its short lifespan.

Small companies, however, were amongst those who did not make sufficient use of the funds available. One reason for this was that neither the unions nor other stakeholders did promote enough outreach work. The Funds' shortened duration and the limitation of its resources did nothing to help matters. The age of saving had dawned!

Regional health and safety reps took part in some of the projects financed by the Fund, but might well have contributed more systematically to initiating projects. Trade union participation was restricted by insufficient financial and personnel resources. The projects that were initiated, however, came up with numerous solutions to work environment problems.

Things get more difficult for occupational health services

Yet another change for the worse was the fact that the government grant of approximately 1 000 million crowns for occupational health services was withdrawn in 1993 and no new legislation prescribing obligatory occupational health services was passed, in spite of the fact that legislation of this type had been expected to replace the government grant. Not long after that, the LO-PTK-SAF central agreement on occupational health services expired and was not renewed.

Access to occupational health services was very seriously needed, not only to implement internal control in the workplace, but also to implement new legislation of rehabilitation. The withdrawal of the government grant for occupational health services paved the way for totally new market-adjusted occupational health services, which inevitably reduced employees' access to occupational health services.

In the end, doing away with the government grant turned out to be a costly way of saving, which probably contributed to a great extent to the increase of reported sickness towards the end of the 1990s. Later research revealed that the actual number of cases reported did not in fact increase; the fact was that existing cases of sick leave were now more prolonged. This reduced and irregular distri-

bution of access to occupational health services led to deterioration of preventive and rehabilitation activities in the workplace.

Internal control – a success with a catch

The first regulation of internal control (AFS 1992:6) came into force on January 1st 1993. The main idea behind it was that work environment activities should be integrated into everyday activity in the workplace.

This regulation was welcomed, of course, but there was a catch to it. A majority of employers simply refused to apply the new regulation and trade unions were not sure of how to tackle the employers. Repeated inspections of the observance of the new regulation during the 1990s showed that fewer than 30 percent of private companies in fact complied with the ruling on internal control. Regulation was complied with to a greater degree in the public sector, but was still far from satisfactory.

All companies were obliged to have some type of action plan which, naturally, should be combined with work environment planning according to the intention of the law, and should be integrated into everyday activity. As the government grant for occupational health services was no longer available more or less at the same time as regulation of internal control came into force, a significant factor, absolutely vital to any effective application of internal control in the workplace was missing. The original regulation of internal control did not in-



clude any provision for occupational health services.

Many smaller companies were themselves not in a position to carry out internal control; the investigation involved and risk analyses might require outside help from experts. The absence of work environment agreements and reduced access to occupational health services probably meant that fewer workshop supervisors and other employees had had sufficient training in work environment related activities.

In 1996, the most neo-liberal, anti-union period in recent years, a revised version of internal control regulation was passed. One of the most controversial issues during its revision was whether employers should only be obliged to cooperate with employees, but not with health and safety reps or other union representatives. It was, to put it mildly, a rather strange argument, since cooperation was and is a basic prerequisite of successful work environment activities. This was pointed out during revision that resulted in the present regulation, now termed “systematic working environment management at workplaces” (SAM).

Fewer and harder jobs, according to health and safety reps

How did changes in the work environment during the early 1990s affect the everyday work of employees and health and safety reps? How did the Work Environment Commission and the working environment fund affect work environment related action?

In order to form an overall picture of the situation, LO carried out research in the form of a questionnaire distributed to union members and health and safety reps in 1995. They returned a collective impression of developments during that period. This was summarized in LO’s report, “Färre och hårdare jobb” (Fewer and harder jobs).

Silence in the wake of the 1990s crisis

The financial crisis of the 1990s probably contributed to the fact that improvements in the work environment and related action were less frequently initiated or carried out at that point in time. As the risk of unemployment increases, workers in employment become less willing to demand improvements in their workplace or even to discuss the subject. At such times, health and safety reps and other trade union representatives must be in a position to counteract the risk of unwilling acceptance of unsatisfactory work environments.

Ergonomic work environment problems were the most common, according to health and safety reps, as compared with 1980 findings, where climate problems (poor ventilation, unsuitable temperatures, etc.) were reported to be the most common deficiencies in the work environment. A noticeable downward trend was that nearly 50 per cent of health and safety reps cited psychosocial conditions in the work



From the LO survey of members in 1995

- Work incurring heavy lifting : 80 per cent women, 75 per cent men.
- Strain and psychological stress at work: 65 per cent – and women felt most affected.
- 30 per cent were convinced they had developed a chronic occupational injury; 40 per cent of which had not been reported.

environment as a serious problem in 1995, compared to approximately 35 per cent in 1980.

The main improvement union members and health and safety reps wished to see in the work environment was a reduction of workload and stress. Major staff reductions were taking place in both private and public sectors, which should have sounded the alarm, but unfortunately did not. Since then, personnel downsizing has continued in many sectors, a consequence of competition for and privatisation of public services.

Urgent improvements took second place in demands on the physical work environment: noise levels, chemical risks, etc. LO investigation in 1995, however, reported a general improvement in conditions in the work environment when compared with the investigation in 1980. A majority of health and safety reps reported that a much greater number of inspections of work environment conditions and actions for improvements at the workplace were being carried out than in 1980.

Action that focused on dealing with psycho-social and ergonomic work environ-

ment problems also increased as according to health and safety reps, these problems had become much more common since 1980. It was reasonable to assume that this was a result of the work carried out by the Work Environment Commission and internal control, the Occupational Safety and Health Fund and trade union activities.

This LO investigation revealed that action in the work environment had increased, indicating a greater awareness of the importance of the work environment and of investment in improvements in the latter. In certain sectors, however, corrective measures were still insufficient in comparison with the extent of existing problems.

LO investigation also pointed out the need to improve supervisory personnel's familiarity with and knowledge of the work environment and its problems. According to health and safety reps, their supervisors' understanding of the work environment and its problems was less satisfactory than it was reported to be in 1980. This was extremely worrying, considering their responsibility for the health and safety of the employees they supervised.

According to health and safety reps, the reasons for improvements of the work environment were the many changes that had taken place in work methods and production since then. Structural and technological changes apparently seemed to have made for changes for the better in the work environment, at least as far as physical and chemical and technical problems were concerned. Insufficient financial investments, on the other hand, were the principal reason for

the deterioration reported, that seemed to be related to increased workload due to staff reductions. Hiring more workers was probably the most urgent measure to be adopted. It would undoubtedly benefit the work environment, while it suggested that it might be best that work environment efforts concentrate much more on planning and organising work and production.

Health and safety reps become more cautious

One of the most successful achievements of the Work Environment Commission was the reinforcement of the health and safety reps' right to request that the employer adopt necessary corrective measures, and the intervention of the Labour Inspectorate. A more easily understood version of section 7 of the work environment regulation was introduced and inserted in work environment legislation, chapter 6, section 6.a.

In 1995, the LO asked health and safety reps whether the Labour Inspectorate did in fact assist local trade unions more than in the past, when employers would refuse to consider adopting corrective measures in the case of a particular work environment problem.

Their response was that unfortunately development had moved in the wrong direction, which might well be a direct result of the increasingly unfavourable labour situation, which meant that employees were less liable to push for improvements in the work environment. Another possible explanation



could be that the focus on the important role of enterprise might also, indirectly, contribute to dissuading the unions from making their work environment demands felt as energetically as in the past. The authorities perhaps also felt less inclined to intervene.

However, the most likely explanation is that the absence of central agreements and occupational health services in several sectors probably had a negative effect on work environment related action, which did nothing to improve things for any potential local trade union action in the work environment. Unfortunately, every one of these stumbling-blocks is still with us.

EU membership affects work environment legislation

Sweden became a member of the European Union in 1995, which meant that Sweden was now obliged to include EU work environment directives in its legislation. The general directive is a framework directive dealing with work environment issues from a holistic viewpoint with demands for measures to improve health and safety in the workplace. The framework directive

includes regulation covering the obligations of both employers and employees and organisation of work environment activities. The framework directive is supplemented by specific directives on more concrete aspects of the work environment such as the design of the workplace and control of jobs involving heavy lifting.

The EU framework directive on the work environment

The directive is officially referred to as Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989, and covers the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in safety and health in the workplace.

The framework and its specific directives consist of minimum regulation common to all EU countries. There are other EU directives of a protective nature, aimed mainly at facilitating the free movement of goods. Such directives deal, for example, with machinery or products such as chemical substances.

An EU country may have its own regulation, even if these hinder free movement

of goods. This is regulated in a safeguard clause, according to which a member country may establish stricter safety regulation and prohibit the sale of a product if it is thought to endanger health and safety in the workplace, consumers' health and safety or the environment.

European standards are not decided by work parties representing the three parties involved. Different methods are employed and the most important work environment and general safety regulations are established in directives which must be included in national regulation and legislation. The technical details are developed by European standardisation authorities on behalf of the EU Commission.

Work environment issues are not the basic purpose of standardisation, that is, standardisation in a given area does not pretend to benefit the work environment. The standardisation process is nevertheless of decisive importance to the design of goods, products, substances, machines, tools, etc., and this in the long run affects the work environment. This means that harmonised standards are in fact an integral part of regulation governing the work environment.



In 1999, the LO initiated a campaign against isocyanate, a substance which is released when lacquer, foam plastic or glue containing polyurethane is heated. Inhaling isocyanate can produce symptoms in the respiratory tract such as reduced lung function or asthma. Car-repair shops, the construction and electronic industries are branches with high exposure risk. In the photo a labour inspector visits a car-repair workshop in Stockholm.



THE 21ST CENTURY

THE 21ST CENTURY

Auxiliary nurse Gullvor Kastberg of home care service in Husby, outside Stockholm, helps Sonja Löfving to get up in the morning.

2000–2012

The LO Congress discusses the work environment programme proposed by LO and the unions, together with the report entitled “Slit utan slut” (Never-ending drudgery), in which union members’ own experience of the work environment were detailed.

The National Board for Occupational Safety and Health changes its name to the Swedish Work Environment Authority and is now a single agency; former Labour Inspectorate districts and committees are done away with.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority revises internal control regulation, which is now called “systematic work environment management at workplaces” (SAM).

Electricians strike against increased stress in working life.

The LO and SCB (Statistics Sweden) health and safety reps survey.

The Institute of Working Life is closed down.

Government funds for training of local and regional health and safety reps are withdrawn.

Reduced funding for the Swedish Work Environment Authority and work environment training.

Employers’ rehabilitation responsibility reduced.

LO and the unions’ work environment strategy for 2010.

The 100th anniversary of health and safety reps.

Many of the changes brought about by the financial crisis of the 1990s made their appearance during the first decade of the new century. Working life was now more “streamlined”, more “flexible”, with tougher demands on employees, more precarious job security and a much faster pace of work expected of fewer employees. The most common industrial injuries were still mainly associated with the locomotive apparatus, although psychological ailments such as stress induced depression and injuries resulting from threats and violence in the workplace were on the increase year after year.

The fact that Sweden was now an EU member and globalisation of enterprise were two important factors which seriously affected the work environment. A number of EU directives made changes in subcontracted labour, regulation of working hours, etc. The EU’s internal market and globalisation, together with rapidly increasing privatisation of public services, made a serious impact on the labour market and thus on the work environment.

Never-ending drudgery

The 1990s were summarised in “Slit utan slut” (Never-ending Drudgery), a report based on LO investigation in collaboration with Statistics Sweden (SCB) for the LO congress in 2000. Their findings pinpointed permanent problems in the work environment, problems which principally affected women. Negative trends reported were, above all, an increase in back and joint pains, increased workload and psychological

stress. Both sexes were affected, but women more than men.

Opportunities for women, in particular, to campaign for changes in the pace of work were now more limited, as was the possibility of sitting down and relaxing from work during their free time. The physical environment had improved to a certain extent, but noise and chemical risks were still common complaints. Both men and women reported that they were physically exhausted by the end of the workday (53 per cent and 60 per cent respectively).

This investigation did, nevertheless, point out certain positive developments. There had been, for example, no obvious increase in the monotony of certain tasks in LO’s area of organisation. Lifting heavy weights had become less common and the employees’ influence in work organisation had increased, even though not for all.

To summarise, it was found that developments in working life still left a lot to

Health and the working life 2000

For the LO Congress in 2000, LO and affiliated unions designed a new work environment programme which included demands for central agreements for the work environment and occupational health services, reintroduction of the unions’ intervention in a number of working life related authorities and increased financial support for regional health and safety reps.

This new programme also requested clarification of the work environment legislation in relation to organisational conditions, in consideration of psychological/social health related issues.

desire, especially in the case of LO-affiliated women. In the past, more women than men worked in the public sector, and still do, and it is precisely in this sector where substantial cutbacks and major structural changes have been made. Downsizing personnel has apparently increased the risk of physical and psychological strain.

Agreements and cooperation become more difficult

The central agreements which expired in 1993 were not replaced by updated versions. Employers preferred an individual agreement for each sector although efforts to achieve this in all sectors would take considerable time.

Problems involving occupational injuries and long-term sick leave, however, helped to promote general interest in national agreements. The electricians' strike in 2003 was a protest against the increased pace of work in the building sector and was the signal that launched the campaign against stress in the workplace.

What has happened to the sector agreements?

The first decade of the new century was characterised by positive developments, as agreements on the work environment began to be coordinated with negotiations on salaries and wages and between several of sectors. In the latest collective negotiations, working hours and the work environment were given a prominent place as coordinated main issues.

In the workplace itself, the atmosphere could be described as cooperative, although there were still certain stumbling-blocks. In 2006, an LO questionnaire was distributed to health and safety reps, who reported more or less the same deficiencies as those identified in previous surveys in 1980 and 1996.

Two of three ordinary and chief health and safety reps, but only 40 per cent of reps working on their own confirmed that there was in fact a work environment and cooperation agreement for their workplace.

The most common features of these agreements were work environment policies and routines, followed by occupational health services and rehabilitation. Unfortunately, one in four health and safety reps had no idea what their agreements covered while an equal number of reps were totally unaware of their existence. It is obvious that there is an urgent need for informative measures to be taken in this respect.

Electricians went on strike in 2003 in support of municipal workers and in protest against the high pace of work demanded in the building sector. Mikael Pettersson, representative of the Electricians' Union in Uppsala, sticks a strike notice on Uppsala Town Hall, where work was being carried out by workers employed by the local government.



In 2006, there were more safety committees or similar bodies than in 1996 and 1980 (70 per cent compared to 57 per cent and 47 per cent respectively). One in three health and safety reps in the construction sector and one in four in other sectors reported that they had no regular meetings with management on work environment issues.

Occupational health services – still not for all

Demands for access to occupational health services for all are a permanent feature of LO Congresses. In 2000, work environment legislation was altered and now stipulated the obligatory nature of appropriate occupational health services, depending on the category of each workplace. This change of the law, however, has had little effect.

In order to reduce the number of workers on sick leave at any given time, rather than promote preventive action, the present conservative government has made funds available to each county for the purpose of facilitating access to occupational health services. So far, however, the results are not promising.

LO now maintains that implementation of obligatory occupational health services in all workplaces would require legislation as well as agreements. These obligatory services must be neutral and quality assured. They would bolster preventive action and corrective and rehabilitation efforts in the workplace. Since the government grant for occupational health services was done away with in 1993, LO and affiliated unions have

seen access to occupational health services for all workers as a decisive ingredient of preventive work environment action, while they pave the way to effective improvements in the workplace and rehabilitation.

The most common problems in the work environment

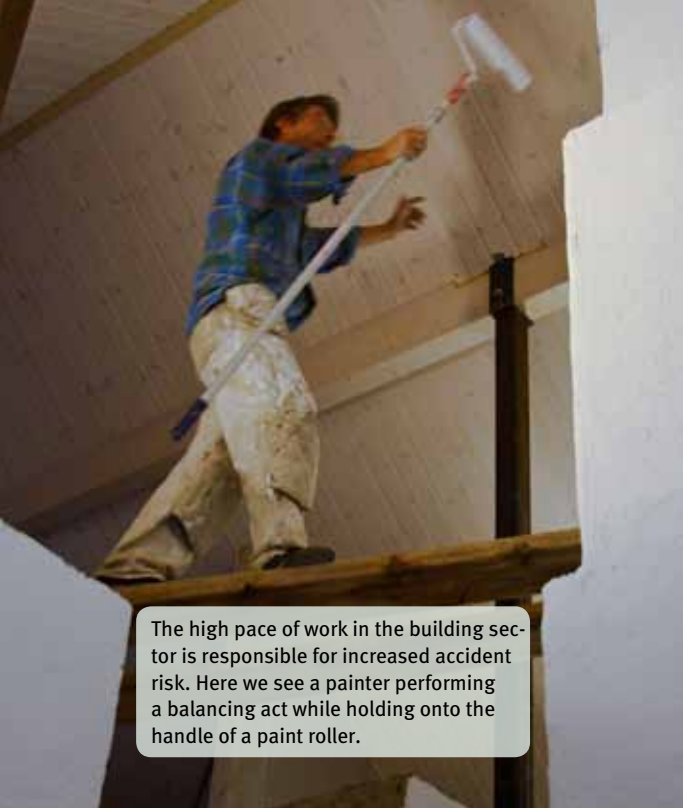
LO investigation of health and safety reps in 2006

LO regularly asks health and safety reps to express their opinion of their own activities. The 2006 survey had the cooperation of Statistics Sweden (SCB) and a random selection of health and safety representatives also participated: “ordinary” reps, chief regional reps and reps working on their own.

The LO and SCB investigation was extensive and thus an important indicator of the reps’ personal opinions of work environment issues and action in their own workplace. The findings of the 2006 survey are presented in this chapter.

Answers were received from 717 chief health and safety reps, 1 640 ordinary reps and 535 regional reps.

Surprisingly, health and safety reps reported lifting heavy weights and physically taxing work as the most important problems in the work environment. The too fast pace of work, too great a workload and being understaffed were a few of the most frequent comments.



The high pace of work in the building sector is responsible for increased accident risk. Here we see a painter performing a balancing act while holding onto the handle of a paint roller.

In actual fact, these were the biggest problems reported in most companies, but particularly in the small companies visited by regional reps. In the course of the survey these reps reported that most small companies had no provision whatsoever for systematic action to counteract these problems. It is common knowledge just how difficult it is for unions to keep in regular touch with small companies as to work environment related issues and regional health, so health and safety reps are in many cases their only source of information.

Apart from standard work environment problems, there are also sector specific risks. In the construction sector, for example, most health problems involve heavy physical work and accident risks. In the service sector, health and safety reps commented

on deficient work organisation and precarious job security, while in industry the most serious problems included welding, smoke, gases and chemicals.

In every sector visited there was a notable dearth of systematic action to remedy existing problems and eliminate risks in the work environment.

Systematic work environment management at workplaces (SAM)

Earlier regulation of internal control was reviewed once again at the turn of the century and its name changed to Systematiskt arbetsmiljöarbete (AFS 2001:1, systematic work environment management at workplaces).

The review was basically an adjustment in order to conform to EU demands as stated in the framework directive (“The EU legislation of the work environment”). An important step forward was that the demands of occupational health services were now clearly stated. Even though the law did not include a clear-cut obligation and the regulation was not very clear as to the demand, it was a vast improvement on the previous version, dating from 1996.

The extension of SAM regulations according to the EU directive included externally-contracted staff, which was an important change. The LO, however, believed that all personnel, self-employed workers, contractors, in fact, anyone who worked in a workplace should be covered by the SAM regulations.

Results of the SAM request for impact assessment

One consequence of the demand for impact assessment was that the government requested a certain municipality which was planning to cut down on staff in a residence for the elderly to document the impact of this measure and assess what the effects would be on the work environment. This would have to be done before the proposed downsizing was carried out. This decision was the first of its kind and served as guidance as to how employers, in collaboration with their employees and health and safety reps, should apply work environment legislation and SAM regulation.

The revised regulation of 2001 also included regulation of impact assessment of changes in the workplace which affected the work environment.

Health and safety reps have an important role to play in preventive action. Potential risks must be identified and measures taken before accidents actually occur. The reps' task is to ensure that employers comply with the requirements of work environment legislation and his or her obligation to investigate and document risks. Since working life moves forward and changes with time, previously unidentified risks and their possible consequences occasionally surface, so the work of health and safety reps must be continuous – thus the connection between “systematic” and “work environment management”.

LO's survey of health and safety reps in 2006 demonstrated that there were now

more structured ways to address work environment problems than before, which was probably a result of legal demands for systematic work environment management. A negative aspect was the fact that when changes in the workplace were considered, health and safety reps usually made their appearance on the scene rather late in the process.

Two of three health and safety reps reported that systematic work environment management went on where they worked, and nearly as many confirmed the existence of an action plan. This was certainly an improvement compared to 1996, when 11 per cent fewer reported the existence of planning. Two of three said that the plans had been designed with the help of health and safety reps and included necessary corrective measures. Before major changes were made, only 56 per cent of ordinary and chief reps and 24 per cent of reps who worked unaccompanied had ever participated in impact assessment.

Difficulties in health and safety rep recruitment

Why is it so difficult to recruit health and safety reps?

At times it can be hard to find somebody who is willing to be a health and safety representative, especially in workplaces where many of the workers work part time or are temporarily employed. Workers in these categories may often feel they do not really belong to that particular workplace or do

not have enough time for the job. Temporary workers often take greater care to avoid getting on the wrong side of their employer.

In 2006, there were 22 LO members for every health and safety representative, which is a fairly high ratio. In spite of this, many new reps are needed, especially in small workplaces.

The tendency, unfortunately, is towards fewer health and safety reps. If there are several reps in a given workplace, it is easier to recruit new reps when one of them leaves. Health and safety reps are hardest to come across in temporary workplaces, where the employer works on commission. The same applies to small workplaces.

The most common way to recruit health and safety representatives when required is to visit that particular workplace frequently and talk to employees on the shop floor or during staff meetings, for example. It is not unusual to enlist the help of management when attempting to recruit health and safety reps.

A positive attitude to health and safety reps

One encouraging outcome of LO research was that attitudes towards health and safety reps of employers, employees and the Work Environment Authority seemed to have become more positive since previous research was carried out.

As few as approximately 5 per cent of health and safety reps felt that their em-

ployer opposed them, while 83 per cent felt they had the support of union members. Approximately half of them were of the opinion that that their employer actively supported them.

Only one in three health and safety representative can take the time off necessary to carry out his or her work and one in five only have time to attend to the most important problems. In workplaces with part-time and temporary or externally contracted personnel, one in five reps reported greater difficulty in carrying out their work.

Regional health and safety reps (RSR) reported that employers who showed little interest or were actively on the offensive during the first RSR visit, in most cases were more positive during subsequent visits.

This positive attitude towards regional representatives confirms the findings of several earlier studies. The explanation of the positive attitude of many employers might be that RSRs put great stress on the importance of proactive local efforts in the work environment, including training.

Regional reps also reported that most people in small companies received their suggestions positively. This positive attitude was shared by more than 95 per cent of local health and safety reps and other trade union representatives as well as by over 80 per cent of employees and just under 60 per cent of employers. Other studies reported that 50 per cent of regional reps interviewed stated that their employers usually put the RSR's suggestions in practice.

Regional health and safety reps (RSR) facts

Regional health and safety representatives (RSRs) are appointed by local trade unions to work in a number of workplaces in a given, normally geographically limited area. The right to appoint RSRs is regulated in work environment legislation, chapter 6, § 2.3.

RSRs represent employees in small companies. These employees often do not want to risk conflict with their employer. This is where the RSR's knowledge and experience comes into play and may be vital to a small company's whose capacity to manage workers' health and economy is limited.

RSRs cover approximately 90 per cent of small companies where there are employees and visit them much more frequently than the Swedish Work Environment Authority does. However, RSRs do not have time to attend to everything that requires attention, no matter how urgent; the building and service sectors in particular desperately need more resources.

LO investigation showed a substantial increase in the need for RSRs but government grants have not followed the general trend of salaries and wages. It is also increasingly difficult for RSRs to get time off for their work.

In 2005, RSRs affiliated to LO, TCO (The Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees) and SACO (The Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations) visited just over 60 000 small companies, although

their number of man-years fell by 18 per cent, in comparison with figures in 1995. During the same period, the number of small companies to be supervised by RSRs rose from 180 000 to 270 000.

What an RSR really needs to do is to help set up implementation of SAM, but this would mean a lot more time and repeated visits, the financing of which they are unable to cover. RSRs now have, in fact, less time to visit all the companies allocated to them. In 2005, for example, RSRs visited just over 60 000 companies, compared to 65 000 ten years earlier; an 8 per cent reduction. During those ten years, the number of RSR man-years was actually reduced by 18 per cent. This implied that the duration of RSR visits in 2005 was on average shorter than in 1995. During the same period, the number of workplaces to be supervised by RSRs increased by more than 50 per cent.

More training is needed

It was becoming more and more difficult for health and safety reps to get time off for training in 2006 than it was in 1980. The staffing situation in many workplaces does not allow for absences.

Just over 40 per cent of health and safety reps stated that their nearest supervisor had had training in work environment action, while another 40 per cent said they did not know about that. Just fewer than 40 per cent of reps had not received any work environment training during the previous 12

months. There was thus an urgent need for training together with supervisors.

In the LO survey and the 1997 study, a vast majority of RSRs stated that it was particularly important to encourage health and safety reps and supervisors to get training, and to make their companies aware of existing work environment problems and solve them. The RSRs saw themselves as those who activate through training, advice, problems solving and information.

As many as three out of every four reps wanted to be trained in work related social and psychological problems. This might be explained by the fact that today's intensive work pace requires much more professional knowledge of these particular areas. RSRs mostly wanted training in work related social and psychological problems such as work organisation and conflict management.

Local employee safety in the EU – an international comparison

A recent EU study, "ESENER", was carried out to find how workers' safety is dealt with in the EU and a number of closely related countries. The study distinguishes between informal participation (worker participation) and formal participation through, for example, work councils and trade unions. Informal or "direct" participation may take place in all categories of workplace, regardless of size or sector. In 2009, the study conducted a series of telephone interviews in workplaces with ten or more employees. Private and public organisations in all sectors of the economy were included in these interviews, with the exception of agriculture, forestry and fishing, private households and international organisations.

The bigger the workplace, the more formal worker participation seems to be the norm. In Scandinavian countries there is usually some

kind of formal employee representation in the workplace, whereas figures are lowest in Portugal, Greece and the Czech Republic. As regards work councils, the highest figures are reported in Denmark.

Formal representation is notably higher in workplaces in Denmark, Norway, Bulgaria and Ireland. Health and safety reps are most common in certain other European countries: Italy (98 per cent), Norway (92 per cent) and Denmark (89 per cent), while Greece, Turkey and Portugal foot the list. Health and safety committees are the general rule in Denmark (71 per cent), Bulgaria (68 per cent) and Estonia (48 per cent) and least common in Lithuania, Greece and Hungary.

The study indicated that trade union representation in health and safety work is a particular characteristic of Scandinavian countries such as Sweden.

Health and safety reps and the Swedish Work Environment Authority

According to health and safety reps, cooperation between regional reps and the Work Environment Authority is still unsatisfactory, in spite of the fact that one third of RSRs reported a certain degree of progress in the last two years. The 30 per cent cuts in the Work Environment Authority's budgets for 2007 and 2008 will probably make it even more difficult for authorised inspectors, whose numbers have been reduced, to keep in touch with RSRs. The dismantling of committees with representation of the parties probably helped to create this less satisfactory cooperation, plus the fact that most new inspectors come straight from university studies. Many of them know little or almost nothing about the various work sectors and about the roles of the social partners at the workplace.

The referral procedure in chapter 6 section 6.a of the work environment law was seldom used by health and safety reps, but they believed that it served its purpose. When reference was made to this section, three of four employers rapidly informed about measures that would be taken. In half of the cases where the employer had not answered, health and safety representative turned to the Work Environment Authority which, in most cases, was supportive. The number of solitary health and safety reps who turned to the Work Environment Authority was considerably lower.

The EU – an increasingly important sphere of activity

The Commission's consultations with the social partners on socio-political proposals have become an important sphere of activity. These consultations may, for example, focus on the work environment, employees' social security or labour market equality. This consultation is an integral feature of EU organisation and is called the "social dialogue".

Social dialogue allows the parties involved to express their opinions of the EU Commission's proposals at an early stage. Intervention in the early stages is crucial in the EU, since at that point the parties still have a chance to influence future decisions. The parties may also recommend measures and agree to cooperate in agreements on a variety of matters.

Agreements exist on discrimination of part-time and temporary workers, conditions for flexible location and work related stress. Trade unions and employer associations may request that their agreements be adopted as directives by the Council of Ministers. If their decision is positive, the directive then becomes part of each member countries' legislation. This occurred in the case of an agreement on discrimination of part-time and temporary workers. The Commission maintains this social dialogue with their EU partners, just as they do at national level. The main purpose is to take advantage of, and make good use of, workers' and employers' interests and opinions when EU socio-political legislation and regulation are prepared.



HEALTH AND SAFETY REPS
FOR THE WORK ENVIRONMENT
— NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

HEALTH AND SAFETY REPS FOR THE WORK ENVIRONMENT — NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

Regional safety representatives (RSR) checking a building site at KTH (the Royal Institute of Technology) in Stockholm in 2010. Inspection by Thomas Kullberg of the Building Workers' Union, Tina Nordling of the Electricians' Union and Johan Redén from Section One of the Paint Workers' Union.

It is now 2012, one hundred years since workers were legally authorised to appoint their own health and safety reps. These reps are now commonplace in the private and public sectors, including public services. The 20th Century saw enormous progress in the work environment, with Sweden leading the rest of Europe in efforts to prevent accidents in the workplace and work related illnesses and injuries.

Much has changed, mostly for the better, but the campaign for employees' health and safety still goes on more or less as it did a hundred years ago. Some of the original problems are still with us; others which were supposed extinct have cropped up once more in a slightly different guise. New health and safety risks are constantly surfacing, as working life and society itself change. Trade union health and safety reps have over the years played a decisive role in the work environment and will undoubtedly continue to do so in the future.

The same old work environment problems

Health and safety reps' activities in the workplace over the years have been extremely important. They have done much to prevent work related illnesses and the suffering that goes with them, and permanent work incapacitation, in many cases. In spite of their endeavours, however, approximately 100 000 occupational injuries are reported every year.

Compared to a hundred years ago, the number of fatal accidents in the workplace

has fallen dramatically. Sweden has come a long way to reach the point where workers can hope to look forward to a healthy, active retirement when the time comes. Nevertheless, this does not mean that occupational injuries and illness, including work associated fatalities, are things of the past.

Class and gender – there are still obvious differences

Results of research into work related illnesses presented recently by the National Institute of Public Health highlight notable differences between men and women, different professional categories and companies of different size.

Women indicate a greater number of work related health risks, higher workload and less influence in the workplace than their male colleagues. Women also mention negative conditions in several areas: they are much less involved in development in the workplace than men; they have less job security and report extreme tiredness at the end of the workday. To make matters worse, they are less liable to report work accidents than men.

Other differences stem from the fact that employees with higher education and senior officials are seemingly happier in their work than those with only basic education and blue-collar jobs.

Workers who are not natives of a Nordic country are generally less satisfied with their work and more worried about losing their job than those born in one of the Nordic countries.

The Work Environment Authority recently carried out a study of work related deaths. Approximately 50-60 deaths occur in the workplace every year, to which we should add at least 1 000 deaths from other causes. According to the study, cardiovascular diseases are the most common causes of work related deaths in the 25-74 age group, with just over 400 cases a year. In about half of these cases, work associated stress can be identified as the most common cause of death. Approximately two hundred deaths from heart attacks are generally attributed to shift work and exposure to gasoline exhaust fumes and other toxic gases.

Research into deaths from work related pulmonary diseases identifies chronic obstructive lung disease (COLD) as the major cause of death, with just fewer than 100 cases a year. Different types of cancer are believed to be responsible for 270 deaths a year in the 25-74 age group.

In all, approximately 800 deaths caused by work related diseases are reported yearly, although the study included just over 200 more deaths from cancer amongst workers over 75 years of age. As the study was limited to three illnesses and did not include work related deaths in people over 75 years of age (with the exception of cancer), the true number of deaths may be considerably higher.

The role of trade union health and safety reps must be reinforced

Health and safety reps and trade unions play a key role in reducing annual statistics of occupational injuries. The task of health and safety reps includes representing the employees and at the same time pressuring the employers to comply with existing legislation, regulation and agreements. Their task is overwhelming in its dimensions, so health and safety reps must be endowed with greater authority to carry out their work unhindered. The trade unions have an obligation to see to it that this happens.

A multilateral trade union strategy also for work environment action is vital, and the health and safety reps must have unlimited access to the so-called "trade union toolbox". The trade union organisation must also keep itself up to date with work environment issues and promote them actively. All levels of the organisation must be trained in work environment issues.

Another important task which must involve the trade unions is ensuring that health and safety reps' terms of employment and work conditions are not negatively affected on account of their special mandate. It means, too, that reps must have the time off they need to carry out their work environment activities – including necessary training – during working hours.

In some companies, work environment issues are now more often a feature of line organisation and production, so it is important that these issues come to be more gen-

erally associated with trade union activities at all levels.

Work environment agreements in support of health and safety reps

The work environment strategy adopted by LO and the unions in 2010 includes efforts to ensure that all LO unions put their signature to central work environment agreements which will lead to local work environment agreements or cooperation in each agreement area. This must happen, since the work environment is now less regulated in collective agreements than other areas of trade union interest, perhaps because of strict legislation and government supervision of compliance with regulations.

Work environment legislation provides only the framework of the cooperation and organisation which must exist in order to ensure satisfactory work environment conditions. However, cutbacks in the Work Environment Authority's resources for supervision affect the authority's possibilities to be in contact with health and safety reps.

The advantage of collective agreements is that they include everything the parties have agreed on, which creates positive conditions for constructive cooperation.

Work environment agreements also make it easier for work environment issues to be integrated with the unions' negotiating organisation and conflict management. If a collective agreement which includes regulation of health and safety committees is later

ignored, this will constitute a breach of the agreement.

When the negotiation and conflict solution procedure is laid down in a collective agreement, this creates a balance which forms the basis of successful cooperation. Where collective work environment agreements exist, the role of health and safety reps as union representatives in the workplace is more visible to those who work there.

What should a collective agreement on the work environment include?

LO recommends that the following should be included in collective work environment agreements:

- ✎ Organisation, resources and routines for daily work on environment issues, including forms of cooperation between the local parties.
- ✎ Systematic work environment efforts, such as the application of 8 § AFS 2001:1, to facilitate trade union intervention in preventive action carried out in workplaces.

Agreements should also include:

- ✎ Cooperation in staffing, competencies, etc., in the line organisation between the employer and health and safety reps or other trade union representatives to ensure that certain conditions are met with before new or readjusted activity commences.
- ✎ Planning of the content of and a timetable for work environment training, com-

petency levels of health and safety reps, supervisors and staff with responsibility for supervising personnel.

- ☞ All workers must have access to quality assured occupational health services which include preventive measures and adaptation/rehabilitation and health.

Chapter 2, section 1 of the work environment law also covers social issues and psychological stress, although the Work Environment Authority has formulated no regulation of these problems, for which reason collective agreements should include appropriate stipulations.



Collective agreements at EU level – let's not forget them!

Social partners on the EU level have reached consensus on framework agreements on work related stress and harassment and violence in the workplace. These agreements are not as yet included in Swedish collective agreements. Existing and future EU agreements should therefore be included in any Swedish collective work environment agreements. The alternative is for LO and the unions to campaign to have EU agreements included in Swedish legislation.

Training is the key

The work environment law stipulates that health and safety reps are entitled to “appropriate training”. LO and the unions agree that all new health and safety reps should

within three months of their appointment undergo at least 40 hours of basic training, while all reps must have access to further training when necessary. Every chief health and safety representative (HSO) and all regional reps (RSRs) must receive training in their specific tasks. Every year, local parties must estimate the need for an action plan and accordingly make provision for appropriate training of health and safety reps, supervisors and employees in order to ensure that they are in fact aware of what is required of them in their respective tasks in the work environment.

Responsibility for work environment training is shared by the social partners and, in accordance with stipulations prior to more recent legislation and the EU health and safety framework directive, costs should be covered from production.

The employers have no right to decide, unilaterally, the content and scope of training, nor may they impede a health and

New statutory rights for health and safety reps to act on behalf of outsourced workers

A number of legislative changes came into force in 2010, giving health and safety reps more extended tasks and rights.

One of the health and safety reps' most important tools is the right to point out deficiencies in the workplace to the employer, to demand necessary action and to request that the Work Environment Authority issue an injunction or a prohibition in appropriate cases. In the past, health and safety reps were only permitted to act in response to problems that affected their own employer's outsourced staff. Since 2010, however, and according to chapter 6, § 6.a, they may also act on behalf of workers employed by a third party, for example, an outside contractor, whose services are made use of by the reps' employer. Reps may also take protective action when necessary to ensure that employers comply with their obligations regarding external labour according to chapter 3 of the law.

In the case of staff employed by contractors who carry out work for the employer who hires their services (that is, the customer), reps have the right to intervene and initiate action when installations – fixed or mobile – are considered defective and may put the safety of the contractor's staff at risk. In the case of personnel hired from employment agencies, the reps' mandate is more general. They may intervene on behalf of the agency's staff when necessary. Risk in this case does not refer to fixed or other types of installations but to the job itself.

The health and safety reps' right to "stop the job" when there is a potential risk of immediate and serious danger to the life and health of the worker or workers is an important feature of work environment action. Since January 1st 2010, health and safety representatives may also stop work carried out by agency hired personnel.

safety representative from participating in training when he or she is requested to do so. Nevertheless, the employer may determine the date of any training, which makes it doubly important that the trade unions uphold the health and safety reps' right to time off for training, as stipulated in legislation on the work environment, on elected representatives and, perhaps, in collective agreements.

LO believes that health and safety training must be included in the collective agree-

ments recommended for all branches and be followed up in local collective agreements. The most recent central training agreement involved LO and SAF in 1982. In this instance, both parties were in agreement on the need for basic training for all reps, believing that health and safety reps and workshop supervisors must have at least a basic level of competence in work environment issues.

In other words, the time has come for new agreements. If no local agreement exists, sector agreements apply.

Union representatives and negotiators at all levels must also be trained to participate in negotiation concerning the work environment, equality and discrimination in the workplace. Members of all categories of trade union boards must also have been trained in work environment issues in order to integrate them more effectively in regular trade union work.

Competition and globalisation

All procurements involving work environment issues (for example, occupational health services, adjustment of work and rehabilitation services) must have the cooperation of health and safety representatives or committees, which also applies when the customer/employer has contracted work in the absence of a procurement procedure. It is the opinion of LO that Sweden should ratify the ILO Convention 94 on labour clauses in public contracts in order to prevent “dumping for social reasons” in public procurements.

There is no legal stipulation making it obligatory for those who hire workers from agencies to provide information. It is the opinion of LO that legislation should include regulation providing that the customer/employer must inform the agency of risks the latter cannot at the time of hiring be expected to be aware of. This can be done by introducing general responsibil-

ity for the customer/employer in a special stipulation.

The number of workers and companies now arriving from recently integrated EU countries is on the increase. Work accidents and occupational diseases are more common in those countries, and employers and workers know little or nothing about Swedish work environment legislation. This makes the work of regional health and safety reps now more important than ever, while the Work Environment Authority should develop effective tools and statistics to ensure that accidents and illnesses suffered by foreign workers are being reported.

The work environment and insurance

Although preventive action in the workplace is of the utmost importance, workers involved in accidents or who have suffered some type of injury must also have economic security. Because of the permanent risk of accidents and ill health in many workplaces, insurance coverage is very important to members of LO unions. This includes the social security system and insurance coverage provided by collective agreements.

If health and safety reps are permanently aware of what is happening in the workplace, they can then report a suspected work related injury or accident and provide support for the person affected in the form of adaptation and rehabilitation in his or her work. All of this depends on the rep’s personal knowledge of health and safety and work environment regulation, whether

the injury in question is work related or not.

A formal denunciation of an occupational injury must be signed by a health and safety representative stating that he or she has taken part in, or read the official report of the incident that must be made. Health and safety reps' work is essential; they are in fact responsible for ensuring that occupational injuries are reported and they provide the basis of measures to be taken in the systematic work environment management.

Health and safety reps must have more support

LO and the unions design strategies for increasing union activities whose aim is to guarantee a satisfactory, risk free work environment. Hiring outside staff and making use of the services of contractors must never be an excuse for less employer responsibility. The unions in particular must make more serious efforts to counter these phenomena and give health and safety reps more support, not forgetting the urgency of recruiting more health and safety reps with a more balanced distribution of men and women.

There is, of course, the risk that too much responsibility may be expected of health and safety reps. The employer is, and always will be, responsible for the work environment. The task of the health and safety reps is to represent the workers, come up with positive suggestions and ensure that the employer complies with his or her statutory

obligations. The trade unions must make their members and other workers much more aware of the social partners' roles in the workplace and emphasise the importance of having access to health and safety reps.

The risk of work related ill health and accidents is unfortunately still highest amongst LO's members, for which reason it is vital that workers have access to independent occupational health services. These services must be there for the workers, but can also support the employer and trade union reps when preventive action is considered.

The Work Environment Authority must have greater resources not only to ensure that health and safety reps can exercise their right to turn to the Authority, but also to enable them to solicit the help and advice of the Authority.

Health and safety reps are now more important than ever

The experience of health and safety reps and various studies of the numerous risks in today's working life demonstrate that there are still substantial problems to be solved.

According to LO's survey of health and safety reps, the situation appears to have improved in recent years, although much remains to be done. Systematic work environment management is not functioning to capacity in many workplaces and too many people are still being injured in too many workplaces.

It is easy to be impatient when we see so many things that still need to be improved in the work environment. At the same time, however, a quick look back in history shows that a lot of good things have been achieved over the last hundred years. Sweden is no longer the poor, agricultural country it was; it is now a welfare state, and improvements in work conditions, including the work environment, have no doubt brought increased prosperity to the majority of households, companies and the country as a whole.

Health and safety reps have collaborated very positively supporting the unions' defence of the workers' right to safer work conditions. The work environment in Swedish workplaces would without doubt have been much worse in the past and would be today without the presence of health and safety reps with statutory support of work environment legislation. Even though it is hard to assess accurately, it seems clear that positive action in the work environment would not have happened to the same extent, if health and safety reps had never existed.

The importance of health and safety reps will probably increase in the future and this is one of many reasons to fight for strong trade unions and forceful health and safety reps in Swedish workplaces.

At everybody's service. You're on your own. Officially you have legal support. In reality, quite different rules apply.

Four health and safety reps from four different sectors got together to discuss their job.

What's it like being a health and safety representative in 2010?

Natasa: We're doing an important job, but any status we had has long since gone.

Ulla-Britt: It's tough. Where I work, health and safety representative who stuck his neck out got the sack and took what they offered him. It would be awful if people allowed themselves to be silenced. It scares me.

Theo: I know some health and safety representatives who didn't get the same rise as their work-mates.

Natasa: There's more than one way to get rid of a health and safety representative you don't like. If nothing else works, offer them a higher post. That's what usually happens in small workplaces, which is exactly where we need strong reps.

Do you participate in planning changes?

Theo: We're supposed to, but we're not always asked to.

Ulla-Britt: We're the last when it comes to decision making. For example, we had a risk and consequence analysis that none of our health and safety reps had anything to do with.

Bo: We shouldn't have to get down on our knees and beg to be allowed to participate. After all, it's the boss who pays for health and safety reps' time off. Health and safety reps get a good training, so it's a waste of money not to take advantage of what they've learned.

Natasa: If you're involved right from the start, your opinions can imply measures that'll cost a lot of money. It easily gets to be a power struggle. Short-term solutions always get priority.

Bo: We'll have to get better at arguing, then, won't we?

Natasa: But do I really have to learn how to speak in public and study at a business school to be able to talk to my boss? Why can't I just tell him straight out there's something's wrong with a machine?

Which cases are most difficult?

Bo: For me it's when a restaurant needs a lot of structural changes

– that always means a financial loss.

Ulla-Britt: Rehab responsibility, adjustment of tasks.

Natasa: The psycho-social work environment and rehabilitation. Everything's being downsized nowadays; we've got the exact number of staff we need. You can't have someone on our team who's not performing one hundred per cent.

Theo: The job's got to be done, and that's that. You can't be off sick or have a headache.

Why is it so difficult?

Natasa: You can explain and talk about something you can see. When I'm checking on the psycho-social environment, I've got to ask people how they feel, and that's something they don't usually want to talk about.

Ulla-Britt: Where I work many permanent employments have been changed into temporary employments and employment by the hour. Therefore there are many who do not report incidents or protest. People are afraid to lose the job.

Bo: I believe in questionnaires, maybe anonymous ones, if you really want to find out how people feel. That way nobody feels

singled out. The problem might be one of your mates who's behaving badly, not just the boss. And that's where the regional health and safety reps come in. Because we're not as close to what's going on at work as the local reps.

Natasa: That's super-important. We really have to have properly trained regional health and safety reps to back us up. If there are going to be fewer of them and they mostly work in small places that don't have their own health and safety reps, we'll be losing out quite a lot. Then the same will happen to us as happened at Ulla-Britt's place, elected union reps will be sacked.

Is it difficult to recruit new reps?

Everybody: YES! Very, very difficult.

Theo: In my sector we've got lots of workers from other countries. They nearly always say: "I don't speak Swedish well enough." They're convinced they have to speak perfect Swedish but that's bullshit. I'm an immigrant myself and in our union we have a lot of elected reps who maybe don't speak good Swedish, even though they can speak five other languages.

Bo: But you have to understand what they're saying and you have to be understood fairly well yourself.

Theo: Yes, but you must know when to say, "I don't know. I'll have to check that". There's nothing to be ashamed of. Being able to speak a lot of languages is an advantage in my sector. The most important question is, "Do you want to do this job?" I'd like to see more immigrants getting to be reps.

The health and safety reps:

Ulla-Britt Salomonsson, 45. Seko (the union of service and communications workers). She cleans toilets in trains and is employed by Trafficare.

Natasa Stojkovic: 38. Livs (the food workers' union), on leave from stockroom work as she's studying to be a union representative.

Theo F. Verheggen, 43. HRF (the union of hotel and restaurant workers), machinist with Scandic.

Bo Ahlbertz, 58. Musikerförbundet (the union of professional musicians and artist), musician/artist.

Society puts more and more responsibility on health and safety reps, although they have less time to do their work and less money to do so. The government

has really put its foot in it, says the expert Maria Steinberg, since health and safety reps are often the first to uncover new risks in the workplace.

If it was up to Maria Steinberg, the unions would initiate a comprehensive dialogue: What can we do when health and safety reps are prevented from carrying out their work or are harassed? She believes this is a major problem.

If the employer refuses to negotiate with the union, voices of protest are immediately raised: it's a breach of MBL (legislation of co-determination)! But when health and safety reps are ignored or harassed, the union is not so quick off the mark, according to Steinberg.

The union must stick up for health and safety reps; that's one of her really fixed ideas.

Maria Steinberg has a PhD in law and lectures at university on work environment legislation. She calls the health and safety reps "the government's unpaid public health workers" and believes that the government should invest more money in regional health and safety reps' activities.

Society now makes ever greater demands on health and safety reps. The most recent is that they participate in the employers' sys-

tematic work environment management and in addition represent workers hired from agencies and, in some cases, staff employed by companies to whom work has been outsourced.

A certain inspector who wrote a paper during one of Maria Steinberg's courses on the work environment legislation concluded that health and safety reps are the ones who identify unsuspected risks in the work environment.

- It shows how important they are.

- I use to say that if health and safety reps shut down dangerous work in a given workplace, but are not supported by the Work Environment Authority, that does not necessarily imply that they were in the wrong. It could mean that there may be no applicable legislation or, on the other hand, that they may be on the track of something important.

SANDRA LUND and
CHARLOTTA KÅKS RÖSHAMMAR

Longer versions of the texts were published in the LO review in November 2010.

The task of trade union health and safety reps in a nutshell

The first legislation giving workers the right to appoint health and safety reps was passed in 1912. The reps' present rights were introduced by law in 1974.

According to the Work Environment Act, health and safety reps represent the workers in all issues related to the work environment with a view to creating a safe work environment. The rights of the health and safety representatives are set down in chapter 6 of the work environment law and in the work environment decree. In many cases there are collective agreements on how cooperation between the parties should be carried out.

Health and safety representative have a trade union mandate. A representative is appointed by a local trade union whose relationship with the employer is, or usually is, regulated in a collective agreement. The local union then informs the employer in writing of the appointment of a health and safety representative, whose mandate is usually for three years if the workplace has more than five regular workers (or fewer, if it is considered necessary).

The Work Environment Authority recommends that a health and safety representative be appointed for each section and shift. In larger workplaces with more than one health and safety representative, one of them must be appointed chief representa-

tive. The chief health and safety representative coordinates all representatives' activities.

Regional health and safety reps are appointed by the local trade union to represent members and other workers in small and medium sized enterprises which have no health and safety reps of their own.

According to chapter 3 of the Work Environment Act, it is the employer who is responsible for conditions at the work place. The role of the health and safety representative is to supervise workers' protection, prevent possible ill health and accidents and at the same time ensure that the employer complies with his or her statutory obligations and the regulations of the Work Environment Authority.

One of the most important tasks, according to chapter 6 §4 of the law, is participation in planning for new or refurbished installations, work processes, methods and organisation, and in planning for the use of substances which may be responsible for ill health or accidents. The health and safety representative should participate in the development of action plans.

If the health and safety reps are to fulfil their tasks, they must be kept informed of what is happening in the workplace and they are legally entitled to be so informed. Chapter 3, section 2.a of the Work Environment Act states: "The employer must

inform the health and safety representative of important changes in work environment conditions within the area of his/her responsibility”.

This comprehends information which may be secret, as, for example, in relation to adaptation and rehabilitation activities in the workplace. The nature of sensitive information the health and safety reps are entitled to receive is stated in the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act.

The health and safety representative must not only supervise the design of the physical environment, but also the psychosocial environment. This includes work organisation and stress related injuries, threats, violence and harassment as well as adaptation and rehabilitation.

Chapter 6, section 6.a refers to the right of health and safety reps to take action, which means that when they consider that certain measures must be taken, they may request the employer to initiate them. The health and safety representative may also request that certain investigation should be carried out in the area of protection. The employer must immediately confirm receipt of the representative’s request, in writing, and without delay inform him or her of what he intends to do.

If the employer does not do so, or does not respond to the request within a reasonable period of time, the health and safety representative can have recourse to the Work Environment Authority and request an injunction or a prohibition according to chapter 7, section 7 of the Work Environment Act.

A request by a health and safety representative which refers to the first paragraph may also include any protective measures necessary to ensure that the employer in the workplace where the health and safety representative carries out his or her mandate is actively complying with his or her responsibility for external manpower, in compliance with chapter 3, section 12, of the Work Environment Act.

Chapter 6, section 7, of the same law states that if a certain task entails immediate and serious danger to the life or health of the employee, and corrective measures are not taken when the health and safety representative informs the employer of the need for such, the representative may decide to stop work, pending a decision by the Work Environment Authority. If the necessary protective measures cannot be carried out with the employer’s consent, the health and safety representative may stop the activity carried out by a solitary worker, pending a decision by the Work Environment Authority

Another situation to which the representative’s right to stop work applies is when a supervisory body has issued an injunction which has legal force or which enters into force immediately according to chapter 9, section 5 of the Work Environment Act. If the prohibition is violated, the health and safety representative may interrupt work to which the prohibition applies.

The right to stop work according to chapter 6, section 7 applies even if the work is performed by personnel hired from external sources. Finally, the section states that a

health and safety representative cannot be held liable for damages that may occur as a consequence of any measures referred to in this section.

According to chapter 6, section 10 of the Work Environment Act, a health and safety representative must not be stopped from carrying out his or her duty. An employer who in any way impedes the health and safety representative's work is in violation of work environment law and is liable to damages, as stipulated in section 11. Legislation of union representatives stipulates that these reps must not be prevented from carrying out their work (this includes health and safety reps). If they are stopped, the employer is liable to damages according to law.

Chapter 6, section 10, stipulates that a health and safety representative acting on

behalf of an employee who carries out work in a workplace for which the representative employer is not responsible, must be permitted access to the employee in question by the employer responsible for the workplace. This means that health and safety representatives' authority includes the right to represent temporary agency-contracted workers.

Finally, the section mentioned states that health and safety representatives' working and employment conditions must not be degraded because of their activities. When their mandate terminates, the former health and safety representatives are entitled to the same conditions they would have enjoyed if they had not accepted the health and safety mandate.



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In 2012 a hundred years have passed since workers for the first time got a legal right to appoint their own health and safety representatives. Today there are health and safety reps in all parts of the Swedish labour market. A lot has changed and been improved since 1912, but the fight for the health and safety of workers is basically the same today as a hundred years ago.

To be a health and safety representative is to hold a trade union mandate. The reps represent the employees and ensure that the employers fulfil their statutory obligations, regulations and collective agreements. Their task is important and responsible and requires a large measure of commitment and knowledge.

With this booklet, LO and the LO unions want to say a heartfelt thank you to all those who over the last hundred years have assumed the task of health and safety representative. The booklet presents the development of the task of health and safety reps since 1912 and the effects that new and changed legislation, agreements and other changes in society have had on the health and safety work.



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