Safety and Health Standards

In all spheres of work life, workers face potential risks and hazards as they carry out their daily duties. For the most part, many proceed to execute their duties without focusing on the threats they face. Those who work in high risks and /or hazardous conditions, hardly have the luxury of ignoring or taking their work environment for granted. Workers who are known to be exposed to specific work related risks and hazards, are generally highly trained in the area of expertise.

It is expected that in any event, workers irrespective of the type of the job, would undertake to act responsibly, so as to negate any injury to themselves, co-workers, customers and clients, and the property of the employer. Where complacency sets in, this can prove to be a significant challenge for both management and employees. Management must be mindful that complacency can lead to employee placing themselves and others at risk. The remedy to this problem lies in enforcement of the observance of policies, practices and procedures. Shortcomings in the workplace that are ignored, not addressed or remedied, virtually become institutionalized, and invariably are hard to get tackled.

Every workplace should ensure that it has a safety and health policy. It is not enough to have such a policy without recognizing the risks and hazards of the work environment. As a matter of fact, the safety and health policy should address these matters. From experience, a discussion entered into on safety and health at work, primarily addresses the issues of fire safety. Such a narrow view is limited to the fact that the workplace is mainly seen as a building which houses workers, being it a traditional business place or a manufacturing plant.

The irony of all this is that many workplace injuries, accidents and illnesses could be avoided or reduced If workers were to follow the policies, rules and regulatory procedures at work. Given that a safety and health policy may be merely a guide to be followed, it means that the individual worker should be made to comply, except that there are extraneous circumstances that render special latitude is given. In every such circumstances, management has to carefully weigh the

degree to which the extending of such latitude can compromise the safety of others.

With the coming into law of the Safety and Health Act at Work in Barbados, it is reasonable to assume that this would have been a driving force in changing the thinking of employers and management, and the attitudes of workers to the issues of safety and health. One way of measuring this would be to acquire information on the number of companies with over twenty-five employees, which have established a Safety and Health Committee.

A change in culture of the workplace is likely to come about if there is a policing of the workplace to ensure compliance with the law. A piece meal approach ought not to be adapted to this, but rather the engagement of a regimented monitoring system by the authorities. A good starting point should be that of monitoring to ensure that all workplaces have appropriate signage, starting with 'exit' and 'no smoking' signage. This is a basic standard that should be observed in all workplaces.

The promotion of a safety and health culture will mean that the employer might have to incur some expenditure. That shouldn't be a deterrent to doing what is in the best interest of the employer and enterprise. Such investment may reduce down time, absenteeism and loss of productivity, where employees are on sick leave or are unable to work because of issues related to the work environment.