

Employee safety does not seem to be major concern for mass retail market

The 18th edition of Eurosif-*Le Monde* indicators published by “Le Monde Economie” in partnership with *Die Zeit Online* (Hamburg), *El País* (Madrid), *La Stampa* (Turin), and *Le Temps* (Geneva) shows the differences in how work-related accidents are reduced, even within the same activity sector. The frequency rate can increase tenfold, even if the array of published indicators makes comparisons difficult. For example, the frequency rates that are published may or may not include suppliers or sick leaves due to work-related illnesses.

However, it appears that oil and gas and chemical companies, which have the smallest frequency rates, often have set up an anticipation policy - thanks to census reports and analysis of “near misses” (incidents that do not result in a sick leave), - contrary to the construction or mass retail industries.

Social cost

On the other hand, implementing a training policy in order to change dangerous behaviour, even if it is recommended by specialists, does not appear to be widespread. Extending security policies to suppliers is done in a number of companies, even in the construction industry. Profit sharing for managers based on their safety policies is still reserved for the oil and gas sector. Finally, the mass retail sector, that has the worst performance record, does not seem to be active in this area, which creates a social cost for them and affects their reputation – something investors are paying more and more attention to.

The data has been collected by Ernst & Young from documents released by companies in 2006 or 2007. The study covers the largest companies (based on sales figures) in each country in four sectors: the two best performing sectors in terms of work-related accidents and the two worst performing (construction and mass retail).

Antoine Reverchon

	Frequency rate (A)	Anticipation (B)	Employee training (C)	Supplier training (D)	Performance bonus (E)
OIL & GAS					
Exxon Mobil (USA)	0.23 (0.15)**	1	0	1	0
Royal Dutch Shell (Netherlands)	0.7	1	0	1	1
BP (UK)	2.4 (1.75)**	2	0	1	0
Chevron (USA)	0.37 (0.48)**	0	0	0	1
ConocoPhillips (Netherlands)	-	0	0	1	1
Total (France)	2.4	1	0	0	0
ENI (Italy)	1.96	1	0	0	1
Repsol (Spain)	2.4 (1.90)	0	0	0	1
CHEMICALS					
BASF (Germany)	2.2	0	0	0	0
Dow Chemical (USA)	1.45*	2	0	0	0
Bayer (Germany)	(2.4)	2	0	0	0
DuPont (USA)	1.65*/**	2	1	0	0
Sabic (Saudi Arabia)	-	0	1	1	0
Arkema (France)	2.4	0	0	0	0
Rhodia (France)	0.67	2	0	0	0
CONSTRUCTION					
Vinci (France)	11.14	0	1	1	0
Bouygues (France)	14.76	0	0	1	1
ACS (Spain)	39	0	0	0	0
Grupo Ferrovial (Spain)	66.72	0	0	1	0
MASS RETAIL					
Carrefour (France)	(39)	0	0	0	0
Tesco (UK)	-	0	0	0	0
Metro (Germany)	-	0	0	0	0
Casino (France)	(45.61)*	0	0	0	0

A Frequency rate for number of work-related accidents per million of hours worked. * including work-related sick leaves / **rate recalculated by Ernst & young. 0.00: consolidated rate of employees and suppliers / (0.00): only for employees / —: no information
B Consideration of near misses (incidents not resulting in a sick leave). 0: no information / 1: qualitative information / 2: published calculated indicators.

C Prevention policy in place to alter behaviour. 0: no elements / 1: local initiative (concerns only a part of the company's activity or geographical area covered)

D Security training extended to suppliers. 0: no information / 1: qualitative information

E Bonus given to managers based on health and safety performances. 0: no information / 1: qualitative information

Source : Ernst & Young, based on publicly available data from companies.

“Zero work-related accidents, it’s possible” François-Xavier Clédat, CEO of construction group Spie Batignolles, describes his policy to reduce risks on construction sites

Spie Batignolles, the fifth largest construction company in France has committed itself to “zero work-related accidents” on every building site. Isn’t that a presumptuous objective?

Spie Batignolles has been aware of this problem for a long time because the group is immersed in an industrial culture. We work with companies, nuclear or oil & gas for example, who have very few work-related accidents.

Ten years ago we decided to act on this knowing that, at the time, we were not listed among the worst companies. We could have easily aimed to simply reduce the frequency rate of work-related accidents. But with an approach like that, the problem is never resolved since you allow yourself to continue to have accidents. For us, the only acceptable objective was not to have any.

Have you been successful?

We do not live in an ideal world. However, our plan has paid off. At the end of the 1990s the frequency rate for work-related accidents was 30. Today, it is 10 in our branch offices and 18 if we include companies we have acquired recently and who are not yet as efficient as the older parts of our group. We are significantly below the average for the sector (between 50 and 55). For certain building sites, that may go on for months, no accidents have been reported. The same holds true for several of our branch offices for the entire 2008 year, which shows that “zero accidents” is indeed possible.

How did you do it?

We trained 5,000 employees on prevention and safety tactics. All categories of personnel were able to participate, including top management, builders and managerial staff. They were taught certain gestures to do – or avoid -, which materials to use, what are the risk factors, etc. They were also introduced to the legal obligations concerning this topic.

Once a week our teams organised what we called “*the Spie Batignolles minutes*”, which were short meetings on building sites to talk about things that weren’t working right. We encourage all of our employees to flag situations that could pose a security risk. In addition, part of the profits we distribute are in direct correlation with security related figures: the better the security figures are, the higher the profits.

This is copied from a specific programme we have on health related questions. With help from

occupational physicians, we have tried to move forward on several fronts: stress, musculoskeletal problems, addictions, etc. As a group we have also decided to ban alcohol at headquarters as an example, even for retirement parties...

How were these security policies perceived in the company?

At first there was a lot of skepticism and misunderstandings. We had to explain and convince. But it is a topic that brings people together. The steps we have taken have not hurt our economic performance. On the contrary!

Have there been other specific difficulties with part-time workers or suppliers?

We have noticed a few more accidents with temporary workers as they are not as integrated as our own employees with the company. But this gap is reduced in part thanks to training efforts made by temporary work agencies and awareness raising that takes place on building sites.

With subcontractors things are not always easy as the work cultures vary from one company to another. But the practices are improving and we set up meetings and take care of all the general installations on a site.

Do the deadlines you have to meet for each site make you less conscious of safety?

We know how to adapt. In terms of safety, it is not the deadlines which are decisive, it is the level of commitment from all personnel that matters.

Interview conducted by Bertrand Bissuel

CV

1970-1987 Engineer in public works university and business graduate from Paris-Dauphine University, he holds several management positions in major construction companies.

1987 He joins the Spie Batignolles group where he is named CEO of the Ile-de-France branch (SpieSCGPM).

1997 He becomes CEO of Spie Batignolles.