

INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING, LISBON, JUNE 2000

Health and Safety at World Skills Competitions

Introduction

The UK requests that this matter be discussed in Lisbon since the WSO does not have a clear policy on the matter and in some competitions appropriate precautions are not observed. In particular, safe working practices were not complied with in the Joinery competition in Montreal, and all competitors in Stonemasonry are exposed to the risk of hand-arm vibration syndrome (vibration white finger or Raynaud's syndrome). There may be other examples.

Although the present Competition Rules do not contain a policy statement, duties to "ensure compliance with safety standards" are placed on the chief expert (para 2.6.2) on competitors to observe standards "laid down in the technical description or by the experts" (appendix 1 para 3.8), on jury panels and jury presidents to "give information on safety regulations" (appendix 2), on experts "to ensure that moving parts and dangerous areas are properly protected" (appendix 4) and on workshop supervisors in appendix 5.

The Problem

The problem arises because of the disparity of safety requirements between members, although members of the European Union are increasingly adopting common standards. Whilst the host country is clearly entitled to require observance of its national standards, there is no guidance on what policy should be adopted where the host countries standards are different from or lower than those which the competitor is required to observe at home.

Woodworking Machinery

The vertical spindle moulding machine is one of the most dangerous of all woodworking machines and since in certain work it is impossible to guard the cutters, Canada, the UK and doubtless other members legislation require the use of a jig or holder. The fabrication of such a jig or holder can however take an appreciable time, putting the competitor at a disadvantage.

At the Montreal competition, not one competitor used the vertical spindle moulding machine safely on certain work. The Canadian inspector was either unaware or did not wish to intervene, and at least one competitor, who made three attempts to do the job, narrowly avoided a most serious accident (the UK competitor did not use this machine for the process in question). Similarly certain competitors were allowed to use inadequately protected routing machines and circular saws.

The view of the majority of experts was that if the competitors were content to work on unprotected machines, they must be allowed to do so. The UK believes that this is an unacceptable policy and not in line with the best interests of WSO.

Stonemasonry

Whilst hand-arm vibration symptoms may take several years to develop, they can appear after only a few months in susceptible people exposed to high levels of vibration. The chipping hammers used in stonemasonry can produce high levels of vibration and UK guidance recommends a daily exposure limit of 40 minutes (or less where the vibration magnitude is over 10ms^{-2}) before special precautions are taken. Even these are of limited effectiveness.

Whilst exposure over 4 days would not in itself cause symptoms, this intensity of working with hammers will require training at that level and more seriously will suggest that such intensity of working is acceptable in terms of health protection, which it is not. The UK is therefore proposing in its national competitions to limit the use of chipping hammers to 3 hours per day, namely $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours each in the morning and afternoon. The rest of the work is to be done by chisel and hand held mallet.

Conclusion

It hardly needs pointing out that if, quite apart from the suffering of the competitor, a serious accident could have exposed the Montreal organisers, the WSO and members themselves to both criminal prosecution and/or civil claims or would share the blame and the consequences would also include serious adverse publicity for the organisation, which would be seen as uncaring, incompetent and setting a bad example to young people.

Recommendations

The competition rules should be amended to require the jury president and jury panel:

- To carry out and record a formal risk assessment prior to the competition;
- To refer any unresolved disagreements to the international technical committee;
- To enforce strictly the health and safety standards of the host member;
- To draft an appropriate section for the technical description indicating the minimum health and safety standards or referring to the appropriate international standard.

Further, where the standard of the competitors own country is different from or more stringent than those of the host country, the rules should require the competitor to comply with his home standards. Where that is impossible because the requisite guards or equipment are not available, the competitor should be required to set the machine, the cutters and stops, but the machining should be carried out by the shop master. Lastly, the international technical committee should review (and if necessary amend) the health and safety standards proposed by the experts.

Such procedures will not only reduce the risk of accident and ill health, but would also protect the interests and reputation of members and the WSO.

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Although the present competition rules do not contain a policy statement, duties to 'ensure compliance with safety standards' are placed on the chief expert (paragraph 2.6.2) on competitors to observe standards 'laid down in the technical description or by the experts' (appendix 1, paragraph 3.8), on jury panels and jury presidents to 'give information on safety regulations' (appendix 2), on experts 'to ensure that moving parts and dangerous areas are properly protected' (appendix 4) and on workshop supervisors in appendix 5.

The problem

The problem arises because of the disparity of safety requirements between members, although members of the European Union are increasingly adopting common standards under the Use of Work Equipment Directive. Whilst the host country is clearly entitled to require observance of its national standards, there is no guidance on what policy should be adopted where the host country's standards are different from or lower than those which the competitor is required to observe at home.

Woodworking machinery

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Whilst exposure over four days would not in itself cause symptoms, this intensity of working with hammers will require training at that level and more seriously will suggest that such intensity of working is acceptable in terms of health protection. The UK is therefore proposing in its national competitions to limit the use of chipping hammers to three hours per day, namely one and a half hours each in the morning and afternoon. The rest of the work is to be done by chisel and hand held mallet.

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