

# HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK – PART OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**Martina Kornfeldová, Renáta Myšková**

***Abstract:** Corporate Social Responsibility (further in the text only „CSR“) is a concept which is very used in current time and it has become a tool which helps to differentiate from other companies. It shows that in something „we are better“. It can help to strengthen a company image, competitiveness but also it can lead to reduce costs and increase in competitiveness. The aim of this text is to describe problematic of health and safety which belong among principles of CSR. In general, this topic is so important that each company should pay a great attention to it. This article focuses on companies which are active in the sector of construction.*

***Key words:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Health and safety, Construction, The Green Paper, The Labor Code.*

***JEL Classification:** M14.*

## **Introduction**

*„Corporate Social Responsibility – a concept by which companies integrate environmental and social tasks in to their business activities and to the relationships with stakeholders – subjects who are interested in the company – on a basis of voluntariness.“ [4] This is the definition of CSR which is set in the Green Book. This Book is the first of documentations about the CSR and it was published according to the initiative of the European Union.*

This definition highlights the fact that the companies take into the account social and environmental issues during the planning and implementation of all their activities. But everything is based on a voluntary basis. The basic rules of behavior for companies are set by individual laws and regulations but the essence of social responsibility is the fact that the companies think about these issues more in detail, their behavior is at a higher level that is set to the companies by the legislation. However, as it was mentioned, everything is done on a voluntary basis. How is this reflected in reality? The companies pay more attention to relations with stakeholders and involve them in the dialogue, invest more resources into human capital and the environment. These investments – financial or nonfinancial – will be reflected in better company image, competitiveness, increasing in productivity and then in increasing in profits.

It is possible to summarize what is mentioned above to several basic features by which social responsibility is characterized [14]:

- **Voluntariness** – activities are carried out voluntarily beyond the obligations arising from legislation,
- **Dialogue** – active communication with entities who influence the company,

- **Long-term nature** – the realization of CSR activities takes long time and it is not ended when the company finds itself in a worse economic situation,
- **Credibility** – the realization of CSR activities leads to the strengthening of trust in business; the activities have to be transparent and permanent.

The most common view of the content of CSR is in terms of its pillars. It is possible to come out of the definition of CSR and talk about the social and environmental pillar and the third one is economic pillar. [8]

The economic pillar of the company influences local, national and subsequently global economy. It may be indicated as the fight against a corruption, support and development of employment and reducing unemployment, etc. [14]

The environmental part – activities of the company are focused on the environment. It means reducing the negative impact of company activities on the environment – protection of natural resources, reducing emissions and other pollutants, support the development and using the technologies that are environmentally friendly, etc. [1], [10]

The third pillar is the social pillar whose essence is to focus on education and development of human capital, employment policies, benefits, equal opportunities (non-discrimination in requirement, equal pay) etc. [10], [15], [18]

## **1 Health and Safety as a part of CSR**

### **1.1 Health and Safety at work**

Health and safety at work is one of the points of social responsibility. The Green Paper [4] states that the companies use it in general as a marketing tool in cooperation with their business partners. It has become a tool to promote their goods or services and it carries an increasing demand for measuring and documenting in their marketing materials.

In the context of CSR, health and safety are rather “additional issues” than what is meant in terms of health and safety at work in general. For example, it is possible to mention a support of crime prevention, programs for drivers of vehicles, for children – education in traffic situations, drug prevention etc. It comes from the definition of CSR which states that the companies behave more responsibly that it is set by the legislation.

### **1.2 Health and Safety and the practice**

A separate section – section V. - of the Labour Code (Act no. 262/2006) in the Czech Republic [18] is dedicated to the health and safety at work. The introduction of this section contains information about employer’s obligations to ensure health and safety of the employees with the regards to the possible risks of their threats lives and health which relate to performance of work. If the employees of two or more employers perform the tasks on one workplace, which can happen very often in the case of construction sector, these employers have to inform each other about risks and taken actions to protect against their effects which relate to work and workplace, only in written form. These employers are obliged to cooperate in ensuring the health and safety at work for all employees in the workplace. In the case of costs which arise

from providing safety, these are paid by the employer. It is not possible to transfer them to employees – neither directly, nor indirectly.

Other obligations which the Labour Code sets to the employer are to create safe and healthy working environment and working conditions by suitable organization of health and safety at work and to take measures for preventing the risks. The employer has a duty not to allow that the employee would perform works that are forbidden for him and works whose demands would not follow employee's abilities and medical fitness etc.

The question of security does not exist only in the case when an employee starts the employment relationship at the employer. The obligation remains also when the employee is transferred to another job position, to another working place, if there is a change in working conditions or environment, a change in technologies, workflows or working tools. The employer has a duty to keep records about these instructions and information.

However, the Labour Code puts both rights and obligations for the employees. One of them is the fact that the employee is obliged to care for his own safety according to their abilities, their health and also for health and safety of individuals who are directly affected by his behavior, eventually omission at work. Employee's duties are, which is not too popular, to participate in training that is provided by the employer which are aimed at health and safety at work including verification of their knowledge. How this knowledge should be verified the Code does not set. Other duties that may be mentioned are:

- Participation in regular medical check,
- keep and follow set working procedures,
- using set working tools, vehicles, personal protective equipment etc.

### ***1.2.1 OHSAS 18001***

From the international point of view, the standards OHSAS 18001 are used for the certification in the system of the health and safety at work. The base of this document is to help to the companies with managing of health and risks at work. It is composed to be applicable to the companies of all types and size.

The essence is to guide the companies to the fact to propose and implement measures to ensure that wherever it is possible they eliminate the employee from hazards, reduce or isolate him from it. If it is not possible, it is necessary that the working activity is planned and managed through organizational measures so that its performance would be safe and endanger health. [2], [3]

Advantages of the safety management certification by OHSAS 18001[2], [3]:

- Establish system of the health and safety to eliminate and reduce working risks of all people who are influenced by activities, goods or services of the company,
- demonstrate our the relation to the safety of work to our customers, suppliers and to the public,
- keep and make still better the system of the health and safety,

- reduce number of occupational diseases and work accidents,
- minimize costs connected with accidents at work,
- be without problems to the control bodies – demonstrating commitment to meet legislative requirements, regulatory requirements relating to occupational safety and health,
- build self-regulating system that responds flexibly to changes in legislative requirements, regulations, safety requirements and changes within the organization (organizational changes, new technology etc.).

### ***1.2.2 The Safety Company***

The program called “Safety Company” was established in the Czech Republic 15 years ago. To this program are involved such companies for which the topic of the health and safety at work is at the first place. In current time, 65 companies are the holders of this award which includes 61 thousands of employees.

The validity of the certificate is 3 years and it is possible to strive for it repeatedly. The essence of getting this award is to focus and have the best working conditions and working environment. It does not matter on the fact in which field the company realizes its activities. In the year 2011 the award won the companies whose activities are focused on construction, engineering, energy, but also food. The regional inspectorates are delegated to the checks and evaluation of the specified conditions of the program. [6]

The employers have confessed that the important role in the case of working accidents has a human factor. The working comfort at the employees’ workplace is the most influenced by psychosocial risks. Although the requirement for involvement of employees into Health and Safety at work is set by legislation, the employee who has sufficient information and qualification and works on such a work place where the working comfort is one of the important indicators, this employee is the greatest benefit for the employer. According to the checks in the companies involved in the “Safety company” program it was found that the vast majority of these companies realize the importance and the role of employee’s cooperation in production process, especially in involving of the employees in issues connected with Health and Safety at work and in the prevention of working accidents and occupational disease. [16]

The issues of Health and Safety at work is one the main priorities in the EU countries. The aim of EU is to reduce the number of working accidents by 25 % by 2012 as the working accidents and illnesses related to work burden significantly the economy of EU member states. Health and Safety at work and achieving the economic results are very close. In the case of reduction in the level of safety at work, it would influence the economic results negatively. [6]

## **2 Compliance Monitoring of the obligations**

State Labour Inspection Office and its organizational components - the regional inspectorates - oversee the obligations that are imposed on the employer by the Labour Code [7], [17] so it includes also health and safety. The State Labour Inspection Office was established by a separate Act – No. 251/2005 Coll., Labour Inspection.

If the companies do not follow the duties set by the Labour Code, they can commit an administrative offence. This concept represents such breaking of legal obligations that is not a crime. [7] If the company commits an administrative offense in the area of safety, it can be considered as a breaking of duties relating to:

- Ensuring a safe working place,
- providing of personal protective working equipment and their servicing,
- examination of the causes and circumstances of accidents at work, making of required documentation, etc.

For the above mentioned administrative offenses, the company can get a fine. Its upper limit can be 300.000 CZK, 400.000 CZK, 1.000.000 CZK and 2.000.000 CZK. [7]

The labour inspectorate report shows that in 2010 there was a slight increase in the number of fatal accidents in comparison with the year 2009. The increase occurred in the sector of construction, transport and storage, agriculture and forestry and fisheries. [12]

In 2010, the regional inspectorates made some checks in the field of health and safety in the construction industry. The most common violations that were found:

- Ensuring of personal protective working equipment according to the own list based on evaluation of risks,
- content and frequency of training focused on legal and other regulations to ensure the health and safety,
- ensuring the training focused on health and safety for employees,
- ensuring the information and instructions about health and safety for employees,
- taking measures to prevent risks,
- obligation to constantly search for dangerous factors, processes of working environment and working conditions, to determine their causes and sources,
- technical equipment – regular and proper maintenance, inspection and revisions,
- protection of employees against fall and collapse.

According to the controls, the inspection offices gave 122 fines in total amount 2.584.000 CZK for administrative offenses. [13]

### **3 Safety at work at construction companies**

Empirical research in enterprises was focused also on safety work. A full set of 84 construction companies with over 50 full-time employees formed basic statistic set. These companies operate in civil engineering production in the Hradec Kralove Region (38 companies) and Pardubice Region (46 companies). Companies asked for participate in the empirical research have been selected from a basic statistic set by means of a random selection without repetition. Forty companies were addressed in a random selection. The research was carried out in the period from August to September 2011 and the second run of the research was carried out in December 2011. The questionnaire return was adequate; management of thirteen companies filled out

and returned the questionnaire, personally or via e-mail. Returnability of questionnaires reached approximately 33% and the performed selection from the basic set was sufficiently representative, because:

- All elements are in the same basic set,
- individual elements of the basic set were selected independently of each other and
- each element can be chosen to file under the same conditions.

According to the research among construction companies it was found that the companies pay the attention to the issues of health and safety at work. The research was focused on CSR in general, but a part of it was dedicated to the health and safety of the employees. 83 % of involved construction companies confirmed that the appropriate measures for ensuring health, safety and social care exist in the company. 17 % of the companies set that these measures exist in the company partially. No one from respondents replied that such measures do not exist. Even though these findings, the result of 83 % companies of a hundred positive attitude to the safety is at the great level.

Empirical research also had a qualitative character, which contained various forms of qualitative interviews and observations. The aim was to obtain a description of the peculiarities of cases in the area of safety at work. The research was conducted under natural conditions of the social environment (in selected companies) during the year 2011. Personal contacts with members of management were used to ensure conditions allowing for qualitative research.

We focused on information about the company policy on health and safety at work. The obtained data were inductively analyzed and interpreted. Politics of examined company is unique; it may not be generally applicable to other conditions and environment. However, it is possible to find common elements in the various companies operating in the same industry.

Below are mentioned the conclusions of qualitative research in area of company policies of selected construction companies which include the issue of health and safety at work.

Construction companies were selected according to their location and at the same time according to their prestige among employees, customers and suppliers. We can say that it is the companies with the best practices in the study area.

### **3.1 Quality Policy at PRIMA, Ltd.**

The company PRIMA, Ltd. (based in Hradec Kralove) is the general contractor for construction, which provides its own or external resources [9]. The company's management has worked very well integrated quality management system, which also includes a health and safety.

The conclusion from the investigation of the company confirms that conditions are created to meet all the safety and health of construction activities.

System for providing professional search, assess and minimize risks on construction sites is still improved. Management requires a proactive approach to protecting the health and safety of our employees and business partners. Minor

imperfections are to inform employees, which is due to seasonal work. Task to future are:

- Improve the conditions for full implementation all principles of the health and safety.
- Improve the information system which ensure not only professional search, considering and minimizing risks at sites; but also transfer of information to all interested employees, suppliers and persons.
- Intensify active approach from all both our employees and business partners to the health and safety.

### **3.2 EUROVIA CS, Inc.**

EUROVIA CS, Inc. is the largest construction group in the Czech Republic and the number one in the area of road construction and engineering. One of its plants is located in Hradec Kralove.

The vast portfolio includes not only construction and reconstruction of roads and railways, but also bridge construction, the regeneration of memorial centres and urban roads, and the building of sports grounds and wastewater treatment plants.

EUROVIA CS, Inc., the construction company, has certified the system – quality management system by ČSN EN ISO 9001, environmental management system by ČSN EN ISO 14001 and health and safety management system by ČSN EN OHSAS 18001 which all are a part of integrated management system. It enables “...effective managing of the processes and activities focused on achieving continuous high quality of the constructions and construction products, on economic prosperity and overall development of the company while the minimization of impacts of the construction activities to the environment and while the ensuring of safety working environment at all working places.” [5]

### **3.3 SKANSKA**

The declared aim of the company SKANSKA is: We want to develop, build and maintain an environment for living, work and travel [11]. The company policy focuses on a work at the highest possible level of quality whilst adhering to high standards for safety at work. The strategy place great emphasis on the environmental consideration of our projects to the environment and energy saving. One of its plants is located in Hradec Kralove.

SKANSKA, the construction company, in its politics focused on health and safety at work states that the its aim is „to reach the first place in the area of ensuring the safety at work on sites and the implementation of measurable improvements in creating a safe workplace without accidents.” They believe that it is possible to prevent accidents and that is why one of the set tasks is the implementation of organizational processes that enable them to meet this commitment.

## **Conclusion**

The issue of health and safety is a top priority in the EU. Occupational safety and health are necessary not only related to obligations arising from legislation, but also related to corporate responsibility. The essence is to lead businesses to propose and implement measures that, wherever possible, eliminate hazards, reduce or isolate it

from the employees. If this is not possible, it must be working activities are planned and managed by organizational measures so that its performance was safe and healthy.

In the Czech Republic, the issue of safety at work comes from the Labour code which however indicates only the basic framework for these issues. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to the related regulations and legislation. If the company wants to inform that it pays attention to the safety issues it can be certified by OHSAS which is an international standard. OHSAS 18001 provides assistance to businesses in management of health risks at work. It is designed so that it is applicable to organizations of all types and sizes. It is also to join and seek to win the award of “The Safety Company” which is representative and it is a guarantee that the employer is well aware of the issue of safety.

The issue of the safety at work is relevant not only for employers but also for the employees. Mutual cooperation of them is very important and it is necessary to ensure smooth communication, good working conditions and working environment.

In the article were described legislative requirements in the area of safety and health at work and also theoretical knowledge related to these issues and to the social responsibility of companies.

The conditions for the protection of health and safety at work have been the subject of qualitative research in selected companies. These companies devote considerable attention to safety, and it can be said that they are using the best practices. Occupational safety is included in the quality management systems and also in strategic documents.

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## Contact Address

**Ing. Martina Kornfeldová**

University of Pardubice

Faculty of Economics and Administration

Institute of Business Economics and Management

Studentská 84

532 10 Pardubice, Czech Republic

E-mail: [m.kornfeldova@centrum.cz](mailto:m.kornfeldova@centrum.cz)

**doc. Ing. Renáta Myšková, Ph.D.**  
University of Pardubice  
Faculty of Economics and Administration  
Institute of Business Economics and Management  
Studentská 84  
532 10 Pardubice, Czech Republic  
E-mail: renata.myskova@upce.cz

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