

## PROMOTING SAFE AND HYGIENIC WORKING CONDITIONS

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### ABSTRACT

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Accidents at work and occupational diseases have a negative impact not only on the psychophysical condition of employees and the image of the company, but also, above all, on productivity, and thus on social and economic development. Ensuring safe and hygienic working conditions is the responsibility of every employer but without additional forms of support it does not suffice to prevent and stop accidents at work. The employer should constantly implement measures to improve safety so as to prevent accidents at work. One of such activities may be to promote safe and healthy working conditions. It is a program that allows raising employees' awareness and knowledge about occupational hazards and risks related to their work, as well as about methods of protection against effects of these hazards and risks. The purpose of the article is to present the concept of promotion and its tools in popularizing safe and hygienic working conditions. The article is also an attempt to answer, on the basis of the results of surveys conducted in the form of individual reviews, the question whether the promotion of

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safe and hygienic working conditions improves the safety of employees, reduces or eliminates accidents at work, and broadens employees' knowledge.

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### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

For many years, work safety was defined only as a technique for adapting working conditions to human capabilities. No one took into account the fact that the level of safety may also be affected by social conditions of conduct, as well as by appropriate motivation to maintain safe working conditions. Accidents at work most often occur because of stress, fatigue, intoxication or lack of prudence, but also because of the inability to recognize threats and respond appropriately. It is also very common for employees to take a conscious risk of endangering their own health and life, which is a sign of poor knowledge of health and safety regulations resulting from the low level of training or the lack of any measures to promote safe and hygienic working conditions by the entrepreneur. In turn, according to the Labour Code, the employer is responsible for the state of health and safety in the workplace. The employer is obliged to protect the health and life of employees by ensuring safe and hygienic working conditions with appropriate use of scientific and technical achievements.<sup>2</sup>

An occupational safety and health management system is not effective unless it is accompanied by a positive safety culture in the workplace.<sup>3</sup> Many organizations that have introduced new occupational health and

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<sup>1</sup>The paper has been submitted to the conference LIV CICA – XV Security Forum Krakow 2020, that took place on 7–8 October 2020 at University of Public and Individual Security “Apeiron” in Krakow.

<sup>2</sup>*Act of 26 June 1974 – The Labor Code*, consolidated text: Journal of Laws of 2020 item 1320, art. 207 § 1,2.

<sup>3</sup>A.R. Hale, J. Hovden, *Management and culture: the third age of safety*, [in:] *Occupational injury: risk, prevention and intervention*, A.-M. Feyer, A. Williamson (eds), London (UK) 1998, p. 129e66.

safety management strategies have failed to show improved effectiveness because these strategies did not consider the impact of the organizational culture.<sup>4</sup> The conditions for effective shaping of an occupational safety culture include, above all, management commitment, open and honest communication, employee participation, health and safety education, accident analysis, motivating and strengthening of safe behaviour, and cooperation between employees.<sup>5</sup> Enterprises, due to the important role of work safety in the entire organization, focus more and more on ensuring that the tasks performed at the workplace are not only optimized in terms of performance, but also in terms of the safety of their execution.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, more and more entrepreneurs decide to implement an occupational health and safety management system. The system can be implemented on the basis of three standards: the Polish PN-N 18001:2004, the international OHSAS 18001:2007 and the international ISO 45001:2018, which will soon replace the OHSAS 18001 standard. The latest ISO 45001 standard draws attention to the impact of the organisation on its business environment, which forced the analysis of the changing context of the organisation in order to better identify risks and opportunities relating to occupational health and safety that arise in the organisation's activities. Also noteworthy are the actions which require the employer to ensure the participation of employees in shaping safe and healthy working conditions, communication and taking into account the opinions of interested parties. The introduction of the above solutions as well as broader education and intensive promotion of safe and healthy working conditions has a significant impact on the smooth running of the business thanks to which the company becomes more competitive, which translates into a positive image among customers and employees.

The benefits of new technical and technological solutions, as well as increasingly broad education and promotion in the field of health and safety, are a good reason to raise the level of safe conditions.

Promotion is defined as various types of treatments and means by which information and assessments regarding ideas (concepts, sciences, etc.) are communicated to people's consciousness.<sup>7</sup> The main task of promotion is

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<sup>4</sup> Y. Kim, J. Park, M. Park, *Creating a Culture of Prevention in Occupational Safety and Health Practice*, "Safety and Health at Work", 2016, vol. 7, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> M. Mielczarek, *Kultura bezpieczeństwa pracy*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 63–69.

<sup>6</sup> B. Rączkowski, *BHP w praktyce*, Gdańsk 2009, pp. 120.

<sup>7</sup> M. Gajlewicz, *Reklama a public relations*, "Studia Medioznawcze", 2002, no. 3(8), pp. 97.

to provide information and stimulate specific action desired by the sender.<sup>8</sup> In the field of health and safety at work, promotion is important because informing, persuading and inducing employees to behave properly and, above all, the creation of appropriate awareness and stimulation to a specific action can greatly contribute to the improvement of safe and hygienic working conditions, and thus minimize or completely eliminate accidents at work.

### PROMOTION TOOLS USED TO PROPAGATE SAFE AND HEALTHY WORKING CONDITIONS

The word promotion (from Latin *promotio*) means, inter alia, stimulation and support, and therefore is defined as influencing buyers in order to encourage them to act in accordance with the intentions of the sender.<sup>9</sup> In the case of the promotion of safe and healthy working conditions, the communication process is done on the principle of exchange of information in order to better reach the employee. It works on the principle of feedback, consisting in the fact that one obtains external messages about needs and in return offers a number of awareness-raising and educational activities to increase the level of awareness of hazards at the workplace and improve safety. This gives a good picture of the market on which one sends information related to promotion.

The process of communicating with the market uses a set of measures with various functions and different internal structure. They form a complex promotion mix. Promotion mix is the specific blend of promotion tools that the company uses to persuasively communicate customer value and build customer relationships. A total promotion mix consists of the specific blend of personal selling, sales promotion, advertising, public relations and sponsoring.<sup>10</sup> As regards promotional instruments, one must consider their characteristics and costs.

Personal sale involves the direct exchange of information between the seller and the customer about a specific product or service and about the purchase rules, which can sometimes be negotiated. Of course, the basic purpose of personal sales is, as the name suggests, to carry out such activities that will

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<sup>8</sup> J. Musiałkiewicz, *Marketing*, Warszawa 2014, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> K. Bielecki, *Instrumenty marketingu*, Bydgoszcz 2006, p. 215.

<sup>10</sup> P. Kotler, G. Armstrong, M.O. Opresnik, *Principles of Marketing 17th edition*, Harlow 2010, pp. 424–425.

lead to the sale of the product. The seller plays the main role in the purchase and thus becomes the company's face to the customer.

Sales promotion in the field of health and safety is mainly associated with meetings, direct talks, rallies and conventions. As part of the above activities, goals such as raising public awareness and knowledge of work safety and quality of life, as well as promoting a culture of safety at work, are primarily implemented. Personal sales in this case is intended to make employees aware that in the event of improper behaviour they can put at risk not only their own lives, but also the lives of their colleagues. The most important thing is to follow the company policy and the principles that have been established in the workplace security policy.

The sales process in this case consists of three main stages. The first stage is the preparatory stage consisting in determining the needs and the possibilities of satisfying them. The next stage is to present the topic using a variety of media. The more varied the meeting, the greater the likelihood of being convinced of the need to comply with and promote safe and hygienic working conditions. Creating the right atmosphere can allow participants to arouse interest in the topic, as well as to develop belief in the benefits that the employee/employer will receive when he or she complies with the regulations. It is also important to clarify any objections and doubts noted by participants, which can add value. The last stage is feedback confirming the legitimacy of the meeting. The success of these treatments will depend on several factors such as the way the topic is presented, the encouragement for discussion, the way of addressing security issues, and even the appearance and personality of the presenter.

Advertising is an impersonal, paid form of presenting and promoting products and services of a given company.<sup>11</sup> Advertising is an indirect form of communication which aims to convey persuasive content that induces a customer to use the offer, increases recognition on the market and increases sales. The most known forms of advertising are:

- printed advertising: catalogues, leaflets, company bulletins and promotional brochures; in case of work safety, they are intended to show visually the effects of violating work health and safety regulations. With the help of these media, one can e.g. present photos of accidents at work and the consequences arising from them. The materials can also include

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<sup>11</sup> I. Penc-Pietrzak, *Strategiczne zarządzanie marketingiem*, Warszawa 1999, p. 152.

- instructions on how to properly proceed at the workplace, and the principles of safe operation of machinery and equipment.
- radio advertising: it has a very wide and varied range. It can be adapted to individual needs by broadcasting – by local, regional, national and international stations – information sensitizing to violation of work health and safety regulations as well as advertising slogans related to the topic. Thanks to the wide variety of stations, one can direct one's advertising to the right recipients. The main advantage of this type of advertising is the fact that one can listen to the radio everywhere: at home, at work, while driving, and the cost of broadcasting the advertisement is relatively low.
  - TV spots: a TV spot is a short advertising film that is displayed between TV programmes. It usually lasts 40 seconds, but also shorter and longer ones are created; the time depends on the amount of information and the author's concept. In case of work safety, mainly social advertising is used, which strongly affects the imagination of the recipient.
  - information in trade press: a fairly important element of work safety promotion that is focused on a specific customer. Potential customers often reach for this type of magazines, so it is a long-term medium. Companies involved in the health and safety industry can publish there information about meetings, protection measures, and accident statistics at work. This medium is also a good source for presenting occupational risk assessments.
  - Internet advertising: in terms of promotion, there are, above all, websites that are designed to familiarize customers with the history, products, or services of a given enterprise. An important element of such a website is a description of the company, its experience, references and certificates. Increasingly, companies also include information about upcoming events, changes, news as well as public relations activities on their websites, and then they publish coverage of these events and activities and insert opinions about them. Nowadays, websites are increasingly replacing printed materials, providing downloadable folders, catalogues, and magazines. Advertising banners that promote a company which are published on external websites are becoming more and more popular.<sup>12</sup> The idea of promoting security through this medium is becoming more and more

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<sup>12</sup> E. Więcek-Janka, *Psychologiczne aspekty komunikacji marketingowej*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Gnieźnieńskiej Wyższej Szkoły Humanistyczno-Menedżerskiej »Milenium«", 2007, no. 1, pp. 9–11.

popular because according to a 2019 research, 86.7% of Polish households had access to the Internet and this rate is constantly increasing. People use all available devices to connect to the Internet. Therefore, also people involved in the promotion of occupational safety issues can stay in constant touch with recipients and significantly affect the behaviour of society.

Sales promotion consists of various sets of tools that are designed to increase sales of specific products or services. Regarding occupational health and safety, the most commonly used tool is organizing competitions, exhibitions, e.g. of the latest equipment in the field of occupational health and safety, or workshops which not only contain information on the latest trends in health and safety, but also, above all, play the role of a simulation.

Public relations, also called marketing propaganda, is a collection of specially tailored activities that are to ensure regular communication with the environment. In the context of this paper's topic, the purpose of public relations is to establish a permanent relationship with society, that is, to properly influence people's feelings or views in the field of health and safety, as well as to create a positive image of the company or to respond appropriately to unfavourable news. The most commonly used tools here are press conferences, thematic reports, e.g. on the level of occurrence of a specific threat, publications, or occasional events.

Sponsorship is the fastest growing promotion instrument. It involves using the connection of a given brand (or e.g. a social issue, such as work safety) with an event or public venture. The essence of sponsorship is based on the use of emotions and attitudes towards the sponsored entity (e.g. a football team or a sportsperson), which to some extent can be transferred to the company or brand being the sponsor. When sponsorship is used for the promotion of work safety, the arousal of positive emotions as well as the image of well-known people can improve safety in the work environment and promote it among employees. Sponsorship is also important in building the loyalty of company employees.

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE**

The aim of the study was to learn the knowledge and attitude regarding promotion tools and their impact on safe and hygienic working conditions. At the same time, the study was an attempt to describe the promotion of occupational health and safety (OHS) as a theoretical and practical category. The study was conducted at the turn of April and May 2020 and used a

three-stage research procedure, including reduction and analysis of data and formulation of conclusions.

Quantitative research was conducted online using an electronic questionnaire. Thanks to the Internet-based survey mode, online studies were conducted on a large group of respondents, while ensuring their anonymity. The survey questionnaire consisted of respondent's particulars and questions. The respondent's particulars included questions about gender, age, education and work experience. The basic part of the survey contained seven closed-ended questions. The questions in the questionnaire were supplemented with disjunctive cafeteria by indicating one answer and conjunctive cafeteria by choosing more than one answer. Closed questions referred to the perception of the impact of promotion tools on health and safety at work, including changes in actual behaviour, the tools' effectiveness, and the achievement of intended goals. Due to the editorial requirements regarding the volume of the text and the research problem posed in the thesis, only some research results, which are a summary of the respondents' assessments, may be presented.

**RESPONDENTS' PARTICULARS**

The study, carried out via the Internet, included 250 people, of whom 63% were men and 37% were women (Chart 1). Most respondents were in the age group 26–36 (49%), the second largest group (25%) were people aged 37–47. People aged 18–25 constituted 18%, and people aged 48–58 were 6%. The smallest group (2%) were people over 59 (Chart 2).

CHART 1. RESPONDENTS' GENDER

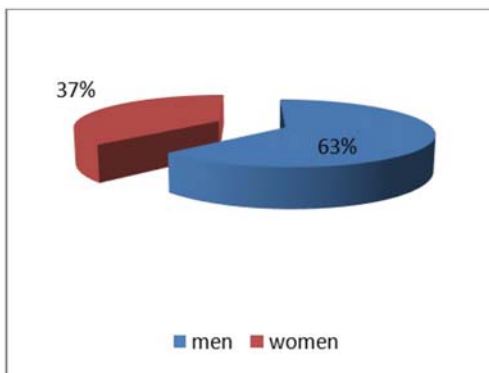
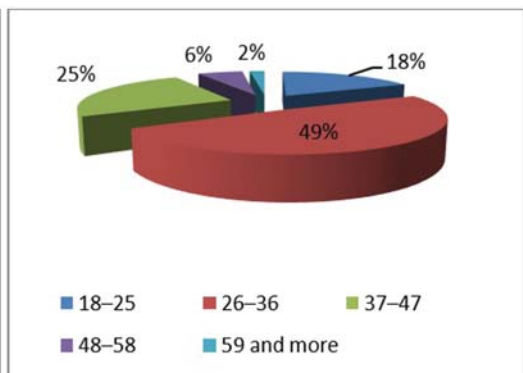


CHART 2. RESPONDENTS' AGE



Source: own compilation based on surveys.



54% of people participating in the study had secondary education, 23% higher education, 13% vocational education, 10% primary education (Chart 3). Most respondents (45%) had work experience between 5 and 10 years (Chart 4).

CHART 3. EDUCATION

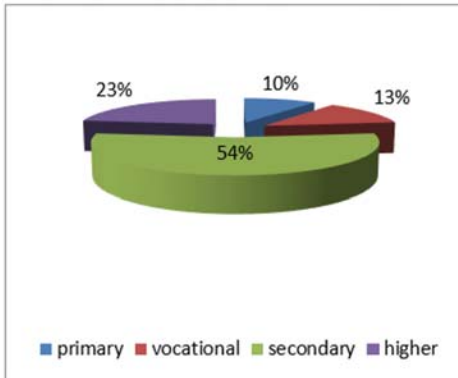
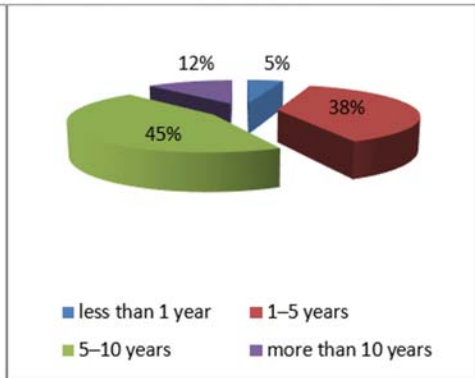


CHART 4. WORK EXPERIENCE

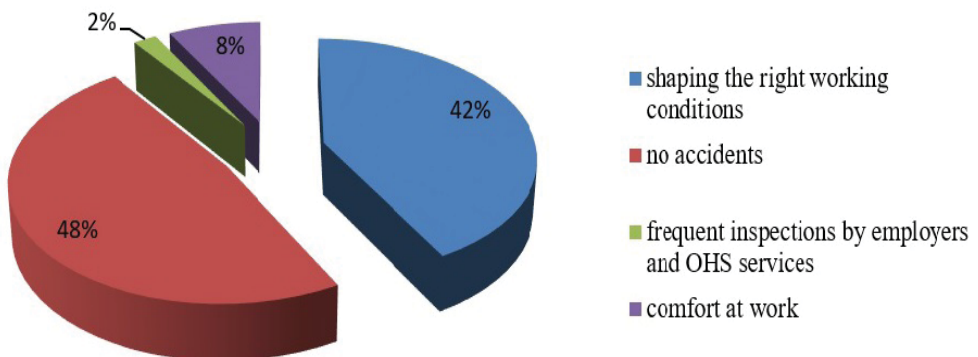


Source: own compilation based on surveys.

**ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH**

The study began with assessing the understanding of the concept ‘work safety’ by the respondents. For most (48%) it was simply no accidents, for 42% it was shaping the right working conditions, and for only 8% it meant comfort at work. Fortunately, a small group (2%) said that these were frequent inspections conducted by employers and OHS services (Chart 5).

CHART 5. THE RESPONDENTS’ UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT ‘WORK SAFETY’

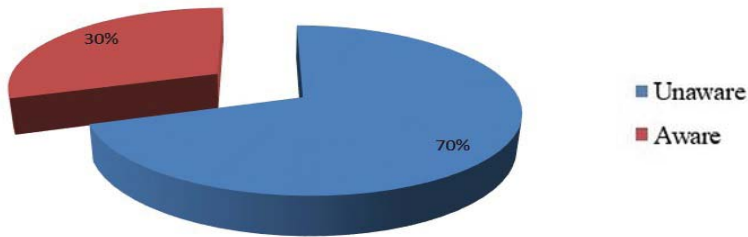


Source: own compilation based on surveys.

From the above data, one can see that the concept is perceived differently but very well interpreted because the variables listed above affect work safety.

A health change resulting from the presence of harmful factors at work is called an *occupational disease*. Unfortunately, according to the survey, most employees – as many as 70% – were unaware of what occupational diseases were associated with their work (Chart 6). This is a very worrying phenomenon because it can be assumed that the majority of respondents do not attach importance either to the use of appropriate protection measures or to comfort of work.

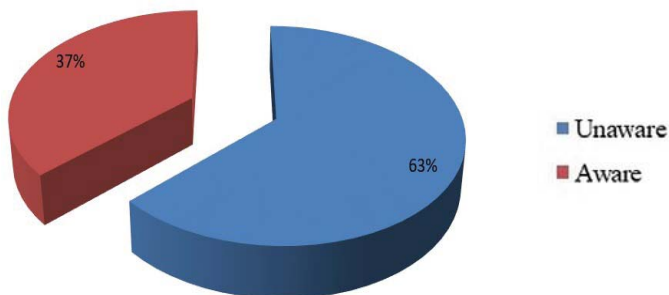
CHART 6. EMPLOYEES' AWARENESS OF OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES ASSOCIATED WITH THEIR WORK



Source: own compilation based on surveys.

Appropriate behaviour during an accident at work is key to minimizing future effects, therefore the next question raises this very issue. In any case, all employees should know the rules of good behaviour during accidents, but the reality turns out to be much worse. Most employees (63%) had no idea what action to take had they found themselves in such a situation (Chart 7).

CHART 7. EMPLOYEES' AWARENESS OF WHAT ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN DURING AN ACCIDENT AT WORK

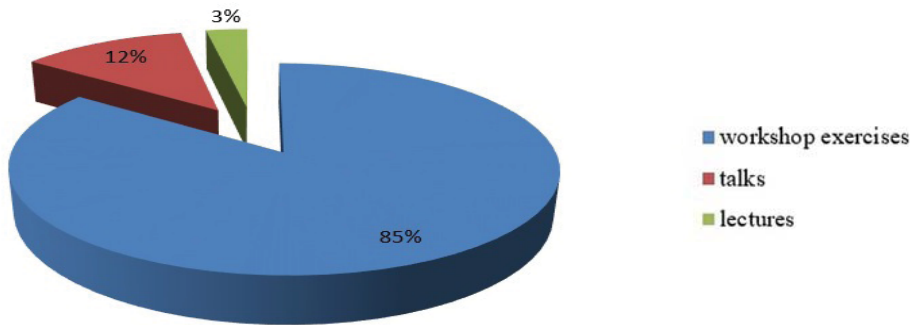


Source: own compilation based on surveys.

In 2019, according to preliminary Statistics Poland data, as many as 83,205 people in Poland were injured in accidents at work.<sup>13</sup> The most common reasons for accidents are: improper behaviour of employees and improper condition of machines and devices. That is why it is so important to promote safe and hygienic working conditions, for example by conducting practical and interesting trainings.

When the next question asked respondents to point to a form of OHS training in their places of work which brought the greatest benefits, as many as 85% indicated workshop exercises conducted using various educational aids. (Chart 8).

CHART 8. MOST BENEFICIAL FORMS OF OHS TRAINING IN RESPONDENTS' PLACES OF WORK, ACCORDING TO THE RESPONDENTS



Source: own compilation based on surveys.

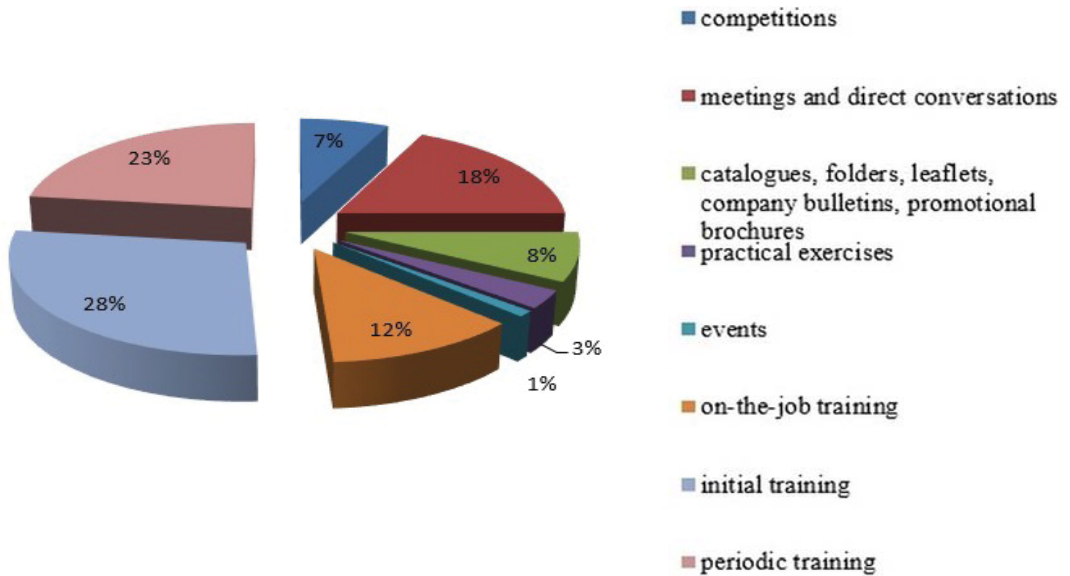
Only in the case of 3% of the respondents did the lectures prove to be the most attractive, which is not surprising because this form of training does not allow to consolidate the material and remember it for a long time. Regardless of the type of training, it is important for employees to understand that health and safety knowledge can benefit everyone in the company, both management and employees.

Improving the state of health and safety at work should be a priority for every employer, therefore the next question concerned the practices that the

<sup>13</sup> *Wypadki przy pracy w 2019 r. – dane wstępne*, “Główny Urząd Statystyczny”, <https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/rynek-pracy/warunki-pracy-wypadki-przy-pracy/wypadki-przy-pracy-w-2019-roku-dane-wstepne,3,38.html> (accessed: 27.04.2020).

management staff in the respondents' places of work use most frequently to increase work comfort and eliminate life-threatening factors. Initial training (28%), periodic training (23%), and meetings and direct conversations (18%) turned out to be the most commonly used practices (Chart 9). These measures may be considered the major tools of every employer in the area of health and safety. However, only a few plants use additional measures to improve safety.

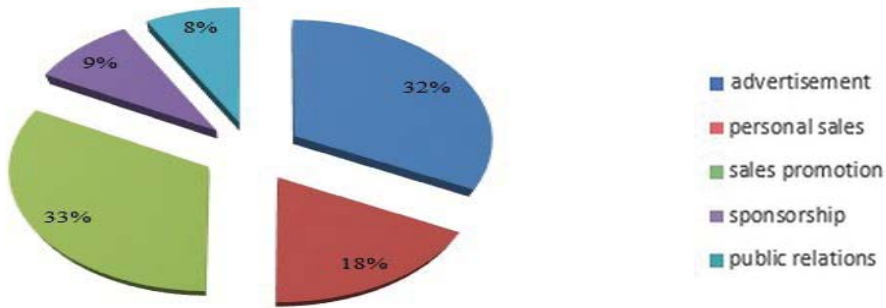
CHART 9. MOST FREQUENT PRACTICES USED BY EMPLOYERS TO IMPROVE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY IN RESPONDENTS' PLACES OF WORK



Source: own compilation based on surveys.

In the question regarding promotion techniques that most influenced respondents, sales promotion was considered to have the highest impact (33%), then there were advertising (32%), personal sales (18%), and sponsorship (9%). Only 8% of people were influenced by public relations (Chart 10). Therefore, business owners should focus most on sales promotion and advertising in popularizing safe and hygienic working conditions.

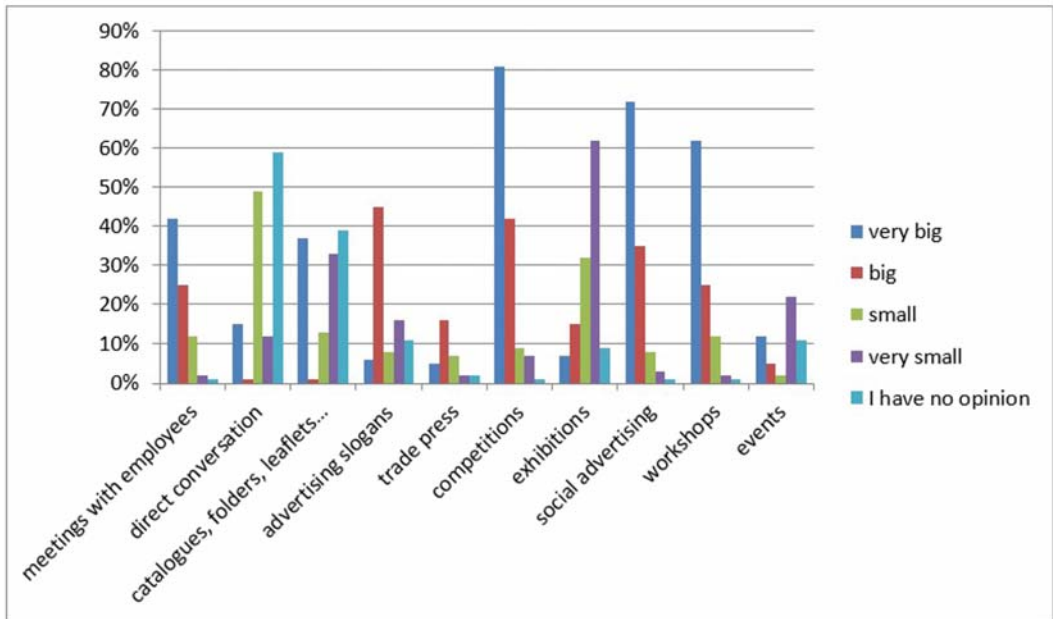
CHART 10. PROMOTION TECHNIQUES POPULARIZING SAFE AND HYGIENIC WORKING CONDITIONS THAT MOST INFLUENCED RESPONDENTS



Source: own compilation based on surveys.

Asked to indicate tools promoting safe and hygienic working conditions that had, according to them, the greatest impact on improving safety, respondents pointed to competitions with prizes (81%), social advertising (72%), workshops (62%) and face-to-face meetings with OSH employers or services (42%) as the most important tools (Chart 11).

CHART 11. IMPACT OF TOOLS PROMOTING HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF SAFETY ACCORDING TO RESPONDENTS

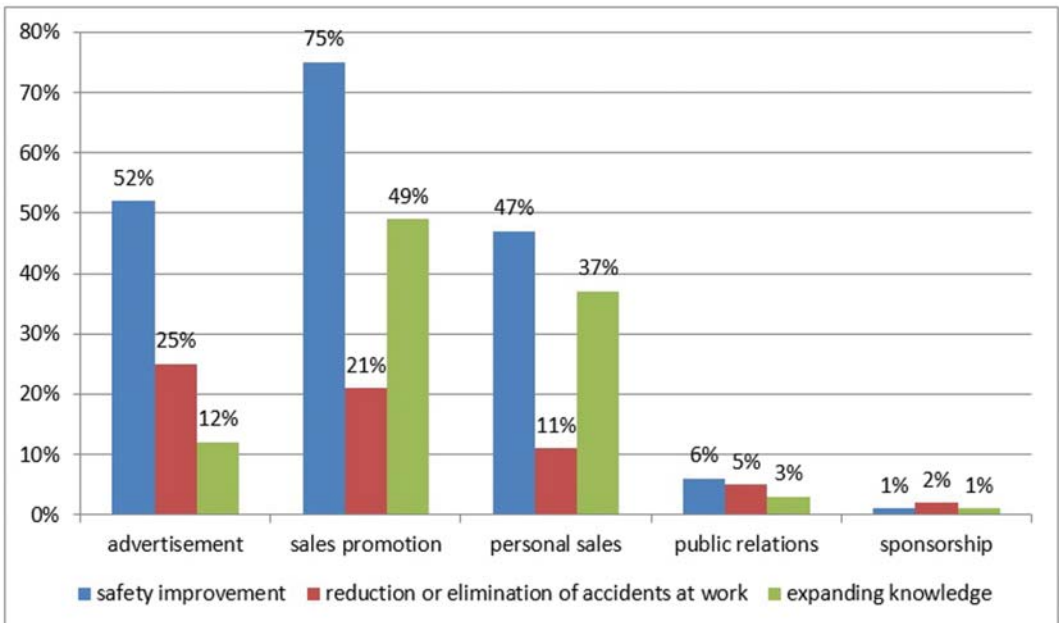


Source: own compilation based on surveys.

The above data indicate that employers should organize competitions with prizes in their organizations as often as possible, e.g. a contest for the cleanest workplace or for a workplace with no accidents, because offering benefits in return “for something” is the best motivator for employees to comply with the rules or to take care of work comfort.

The last question was the quintessence of the study. The respondents were to determine to what extent the promotion tools had an impact on improving the safety of employees, reducing or eliminating accidents at work, and broadening employees’ knowledge on the subject. Sales promotion was perceived to have the greatest impact on improving employees’ safety (75%) and broadening their knowledge in the field of the survey (49%), while advertising was seen as most effective in reducing the number of events (25%). It can be presumed that the respondents meant a social advertisement that used drastic measures to induce socially desirable attitudes or behaviour (Chart 12).

CHART 12. IMPACT OF PARTICULAR OHS PROMOTION TOOLS ON SAFETY IMPROVEMENT, REDUCTION OF ACCIDENTS, AND EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE ACCORDING TO RESPONDENTS



Source: own compilation based on surveys.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the research results, one can see that at least a part of the respondents are well aware of some issues related to the area of occupational safety but most of them do not pay attention e.g. to the risks associated with occupational diseases. When starting work in a given profession or workplace, they do not realize that even slight discomfort in the workplace repeatedly persistent over a long period of time can have a negative effect on their body. They begin to care as late as when the symptoms of such diseases are found. Lack of education in this area causes that the changes may be irreversible. As regards the procedure related to accidents at work, only a small group of respondents knew the rules of proper conduct, which may affect the mortality rate in workplaces.

In this case, it would be worth to offer employees participation in first aid training. During trainings, it would be possible to use rescue simulations, where employees could visually see what injuries look like, how to place the injured person in different positions, try resuscitation on mannequins and learn how to use a defibrillator. It would be equally valuable to organize fire protection training in the field of employee evacuation and firefighting. The practical part of the training allows one to acquire important knowledge in the field of safe and proper demeanour in the event of a fire, and to acquire skills in the use of handheld fire-fighting equipment. Such knowledge is particularly important because it allows the employee to reduce stress during an accident and shapes the appropriate response in an emergency.

As it turns out, practical classes bring the best benefits in shaping safe and hygienic working conditions. Therefore, as said above, business owners should organize OHS workshops as often as possible, as lectures may be too boring and they may not bring measurable benefits. Unfortunately, the majority of employers only conduct initial and periodic trainings as well as meetings with employees by conducting direct interviews.

Promoting OHS knowledge among employees is a very difficult topic; as a practitioner, the author has noticed that employees do not attach any importance to these issues. During the inspection, it can be seen that they seek protection measures in a hurry and panic and use them only at that very moment. Work stations also leave much to be desired. It is only when an unforeseen event occurs (accident at work, workplace failure, injury or other hazard) that they begin to take all safety regulations and rules seriously. To change the way employees think, one should offer them benefits in exchange for shaping a work safety culture.

As regards the summary of the current research, promotion tools on which employers should focus are sales promotion and advertising, while public relations and sponsorship are of little importance when it comes to reducing risks, improving safety in the workplace, and minimizing accident rates.

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