Serious work accidents and their causes - An analysis of data from Eurostat

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In the two years 2009-2010 EU countries reported a total of 4.5 million occupational accidents with more than three days absence from work to Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat 2013,1). The European database offers comparable statistics on accidents at work by economic activity and severity for the EU27 countries from this period and Norway. (Eurostat request DK533) The individual countries estimated their underreporting to be between 33% and 40% which means that, if this underreporting is accounted for, around 3.5 million of work accidents are taking place in Europe each year. Despite the uncertainty of the data collected by Eurostat over two years stil provide a picture of the seriousness of the accidents, the sources of risk and the events taking place when the accidents occur. Data from Eurostat were analysed to find out which hazards and accidental events led to serious consequences. The aim was to determine which accidental events should be prioritised for prevention and to make recommendations regarding suitable risk reduction methods. There are many different hazards and accidental events each of which requires a different form of prevention. Accidents associated with more complex event sequences related to Major hazards (electrical problems, explosion, fire) cause only a small proportion of the accidents(11%) whereas related to Minor hazards realised through simpler accidental event sequences dominate with 42% attributable to body movements, 23% to slips, trips and falls and 21.5% to loss of control of machines and tools. Only 12 % of the fatalities and 2 % of long term sick leave were caused by the more serious hazards while the rest by the more minor hazards. The Minor hazards and simple accidental events need more awareness if the goal to reduce the number of severe consequences is to be obtained.

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