

Are Companies Truly “Sustainable” if Their Workers Are Dying?



Sustainability is a big buzzword these days. Many companies pride themselves on having environmentally friendly practices that conserve resources and protect the environment. In fact, they're often happy to report all of the sustainability initiatives they've implemented.

But is a company truly sustainable if its workers' arguably its most valuable resource'are getting killed on the job' And does the OHS information it reports and the way it reports that information inaccurately colour its sustainability profile'

According to a study by the [Center for Safety and Health Sustainability](#), a not'for'profit organization committed to advancing the safety and health sustainability of the global workplace, five organizations listed on the Corporate Knights' 2011 *Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World* reported more than 10 work-related fatalities in a year'one organization reported 49 in a year, while another reported 81 worker deaths in a three-year period.

The study's goal was to provide a 'snapshot' of actual OHS sustainability reporting by analyzing reports from organizations currently considered 'sustainable.' It analyzes the extent to which organizations report OHS sustainability

information, the degree to which information reported provides insight into actual OHS performance and the extent to which information reported lends itself to comparisons across organizations.

The study looked at the collection of corporate social responsibility, sustainability and annual reports from the companies included in the 2011 *Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World*. These reports reflect:

- High variability in terms, definitions and formulas used to determine injury, occupational illness and other rates used to report OHS, making it difficult to use reports to compare OHS performance across organizations.
- Less than 10 corporations reported certain information, such as occupational disease rate/number of cases, contractor lost day rate and percentage of workers covered by collective bargaining agreements.
- The highest relative level of reporting for commonly prescribed metrics on worker injury rates. But very few used the formula for calculating injury rates recommended by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).
- Compared to reporting for workers/employees, very low reporting as to temporary workers' lost day rate and injury rate.
- A high number of fatalities (10 or more) reported by five organizations. One organization reported 49 fatalities in a year; another reported 81 fatalities from 2010-12.
- No organization reported on fatal occupational diseases.

Based on these findings, the Center recommends that GRI and other sustainability reporting frameworks better promote the importance of OHS as a major indicator of an organization's overall sustainability and adopt OHS performance indicators meeting the following criteria:

- Well-defined and standardized terms and definitions that

allow for accurate evaluation of an organization's performance across different sectors and geographies.

- Standardized data collection methodology that lets stakeholders easily compare safety performance across and among organizations.
- The reporting of leading indicators, giving stakeholders insight into whether corporations are taking meaningful actions to improve OHS performance.
- Information reported over multiple years (such as five), enabling stakeholders to use the information to gauge improvement and compare performance to other organizations over time.
- An extended scope of coverage that includes OHS reporting for contingent workers (including temporary contract and subcontractor workers) as well as workers in the supply chain's growing and highly vulnerable segments of the global workforce frequently left out of OHS reports.

Bottom line: Although evidence suggests that organizations that internalize proactive OHS programs tend to be more highly sustainable overall compared to those that don't, those organizations identified by the *Global 100* overwhelmingly *don't* use OHS indicators compliant with GRI recommendations and OHS reporting as a whole.

The information disclosed frequently lacks meaning with regard to providing a realistic perspective on the organization's OHS performance. And corporate transparency isn't achieved simply by disclosing information; the information disclosed must also be meaningful and provided in a format that's readily understood, analyzed and utilized.