

Clothing Companies Efforts after Factory Collapse-Too Little Too Late?



In April, an eight-storey building in Bangladesh that housed garment factories collapsed. As of May 6, the death toll has risen to more than 650 people, mostly female workers. Many more were injured. And with more than 100 people still missing, the odds of finding anyone else alive in the rubble are very small.

Just a few months ago, at least 110 garment factory workers died and about 200 others were injured in a fire near Dhaka, Bangladesh. The building lacked fire exits and some of the victims died after jumping from the burning structure.

Bangladesh's \$20 billion garment industry supplies retailers around the world and is popular mainly because of its cheap labour. In fact, it's the world's second-largest garment exporter after China. The collapse has raised serious doubts about retailers' claims that they could ensure worker safety through self-regulation.

Some of those retailers, including Canada's Loblaw Companies Ltd. which sells the Joe Fresh clothing line, have promised to compensate the families of the victims. But are these promises too little, too late?

If retailers had been more proactive in ensuring that the conditions in their suppliers' workplaces were safe for workers, perhaps these tragedies could've been avoided.

In the wake of these events, the general public, safety advocacy organizations and governments are calling for companies to take more responsibility for the safety of workers who are employed by their suppliers. Such scrutiny goes beyond clothing companies to tech companies, such as Apple.

In a poll last year, 72% of safety professionals agreed that companies should set safety standards for their suppliers and conduct audits/inspections to ensure compliance. Download these Model Supplier OHS Standards and adapt and incorporate them into your agreements with suppliers.