

Need for Occupational Hygienists expected to heighten in Japan Japan Association for Working Environment Measurement (JAWEM)

In Japan, the practice of occupational safety and health has been guided by laws and regulations accompanied by comprehensive administrative directives from the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare.

Since those rules define in great detail, it seems the priority for employers is not to come up with their own way but to only comply with those regulatory requirements. This perhaps partly accounts for rather low need from employers for external health and safety experts including occupational hygienists in Japan.

Recent amendments, however, to the regulation on hazardous chemicals may change the situation and to an extent enhance the need for occupational hygienists.

The Japanese government has regulated hazardous chemicals based on available toxicological data and occupational hygiene surveys in Japan. After about two years of the review process, the government, with the aim of expediting the process of regulating hazardous chemicals based on Global Harmonization System (GHS) hazard classifications, recently announced the fundamental change in the role of government and employers in hazardous chemicals regulation.

Under the new regulatory system, it is a role of government to provide employers with information on about 2,900 hazardous chemicals in the form of Safety Data Sheets (SDS). On the other hand, the new system requires employers to maintain SDSs for the chemicals and implement risk assessment and exposure control measures to reduce potential health risk of their workers at a safe level. Under the present system, the government clearly indicates, by either regulations or administrative directives, the measures employers should take for respective chemicals.

The new policy, however, obligates employers to work out proper measures on their own.

Since OSH management especially in small scale enterprises that account for majority of Japanese firms in number, is far from autonomous one due to scarce

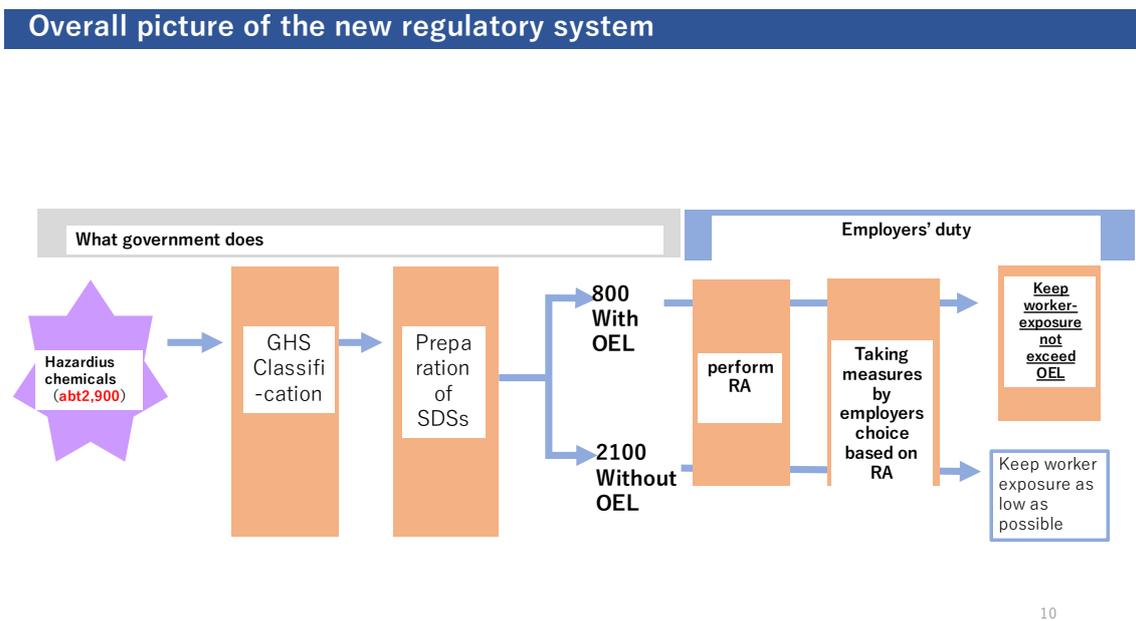
in-house OSH resources, this new regulation must be quite a challenge.

Under these circumstances, outcome of new regulation would depend how the government can successfully lead them into autonomous OSH management.

The new regulation will take effect this year.

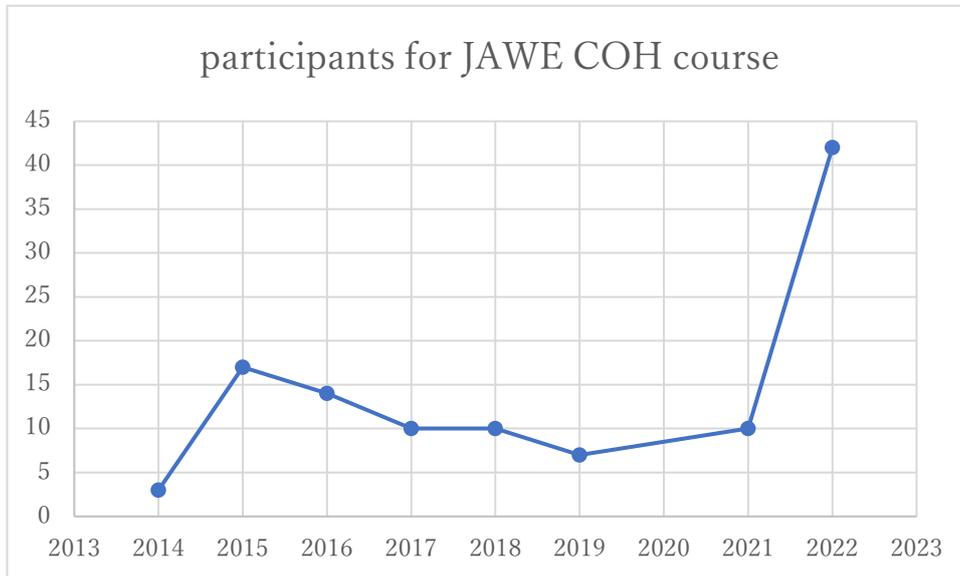
For about 800 hazardous chemicals, the employers are required to ensure the workers' exposure below their respective Occupational Exposure Limits (OELs). For the other group of about 2100 chemicals, employers have to keep workers' exposure as low as reasonably achievable with autonomous exposure control measures. In Japan about 120 high-hazard chemicals are covered by 4 respective regulations. After the enactment of new regulation, the number will increase as many as about 2900 in a few years.

The new regulatory system is summarized in the image below.



To address the need for qualified occupational hygienists, since 2008, JAWE has established a scheme of Certified Occupational Hygienist (COH) which includes completion of 93-hour course curriculum on occupational hygiene in compliance with the IOHA-NAR guidelines. As illustrated in the chart below, the number of COHs has increased significantly in the last two years, probably

reflecting the new regulation.



JAWE expects increased demand for JAWE-COHs from employers who intend to sincerely face the new legal requirement so that they can help employers much in their autonomous management to reduce occupational health risk from workplaces.