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I thank the Ministry’s Team for arranging this activity for it marks our determined efforts to dialogue with the public on matters of safety and wellness in the workplace.  It is fitting that this activity is taking place during Workers Week when tributes are paid to the Jamaican workers for their contribution to nation-building and economic development.  And it is appropriate when one considers the National Labour Day theme: “*Labour of Love, Nurturing Our Children*” which seeks to combine workers interests with development of the nation’s children.  We often repeat the saying “*children are our future*” – and they are, indeed, our potential parents, workers, employers, leaders, celebrities or satisfied Jamaican citizens. **But, ladies and gentlemen, we have to address their present needs in order to secure or guarantee them a future.**    **FOCUS ON OSH**  An important part of that action agenda is the need to establish a safe and healthy environment in which children and their parents and, indeed, all Jamaicans, live and work. Safety and wellness at work, in particular, is a right for all Jamaicans and a legacy for future generations.  Therefore, the country must make the multi-faceted components of safety, health and welfare top priorities in planning. After all, “Jamaica the place of choice to work” is the objective of Vision 2030, as well as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to which the country is a signatory.  Ladies and gentlemen, the statistics from the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicate that 250 million people die annually from workplace accidents and occupational illnesses, so occupational safety and health is now a global priority.  **For this reason, the Ministry is focusing on occupational safety and health this Workers Week. This will put Jamaica in line with the global agenda and match our economic goal   to make the Jamaican workforce more competitive and attractive to investors.  There is a distinct connection between economic growth and high standards of occupational safety and health.**  Some of the significant benefits from good occupational practices include:   * A more competent and healthier workforce, * Motivated and committed workers and a reduction in industrial unrest * Lower accidents, occupational illnesses and lower insurance costs * Improved productivity and reduction in business costs * Investor confidence which, ultimately, leads to job creation and economic growth.     The bottom line is that managing safety is good for business and for the country, as a whole.    **OSH ACT**  For its part, the Ministry - through legislation - is seeking to implement a comprehensive occupational management system in Jamaica. The Occupational Safety and Health Bill (which has been on the Ministry’s legislative agenda for some time) is expected to be tabled in Parliament during the current Parliamentary Year.  Ladies and gentlemen, this law will have far reaching effect on the employment landscape as it is proposed that all workplaces will be subject to the Ministry’s inspection for safety and health requirements. This will include non-traditional operations such as agriculture, fisheries, the Service Sector such as hotels and places of entertainment and even households where domestic workers are employed.  **Ladies gentlemen, attention will also be given to small businesses, such as the stores and shops. There is strong anecdotal evidence that much of the accidents and injuries in these establishments go unreported. Hence, worker injuries and illnesses rise. We must change this**.  The Act will, among other things:   * Set out the rights and responsibilities of both workers and employers * Provide for compensation for on-the-job injuries * Provide for more comprehensive monitoring of work sites for occupational hazards. * Stipulate sanctions and fines for breaches     Thus, in preparation for the enactment and implementation of the law, the Ministry will be increasing public awareness concerning hazards and risks and improving knowledge on prevention and control. This Sensitization Session is the first in a series planned islandwide  **Today, the Ministry Team will be interacting with the public - talking with them about pertinent safety matters and disseminating educational material. I urge you all to take the opportunity to be informed**.    **VCP & HIV/AIDS & CHILD LABOUR**  We will be sharing information about the **Voluntary Compliance Programme** for employers to guide their development and implementation of an OSH and HIV response.  We will also converse about **HIV & AIDS** as workplace issues. The Ministry, in collaboration with other key Ministries and Agencies, has made significant progress in stemming the spread of HIV and AIDS in Jamaica.  The messages on display today - such as “NO TO DISCRIMINATION”; “CONFIDENTIALITY” and “CARE & SUPPORT” – relate to workers infected and affected by HIV & AIDS. They remind us that the workplace must continue to play a vital role in reducing stigma and discrimination associated with ALL life-threatening illnesses.  We will also talk about **child labour** which falls squarely into the scope of occupational safety and health, and is the central point in international Conventions.  In recent times, the country has been grappling with the brutal assault and abuse of our children. Child labour is one of those abuses we must eradicate as we strive to provide a path for our children to grow and gain Decent Work as adults.    **OSH TRAINING**  Decent Work, according to the ILO, is the availability of employment in conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity. Decent work involves job creation, personal development and workplace safety and health.  I am encouraged by recent advances in training which is placing emphasis on occupational competencies. The Ministry’ Worker Safety Passport is one such initiative, as well as the highly commendable Occupational and Environmental Safety and Health programme at the University of the West Indies which offers professional development in safety and health management.    **CONCLUSION**  Ladies and gentlemen, this is the future to which we must strive as we celebrate and pay tribute this Workers Week.  Making work *safer, healthier and more productive* is the legacy we must ensure for our workers and children - our future workforce.  On Labour Day next Monday (May 25), I hope that we will “*labour with love*” to create an environment in which our children – and, ultimately, all of us - will feel safe and secure and confident and be able to live with a sense of pride, as we make Jamaica “*the place to live, work, do business and raise families*”.  I thank you. |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | | |  |  | |  | | |  | | | |
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