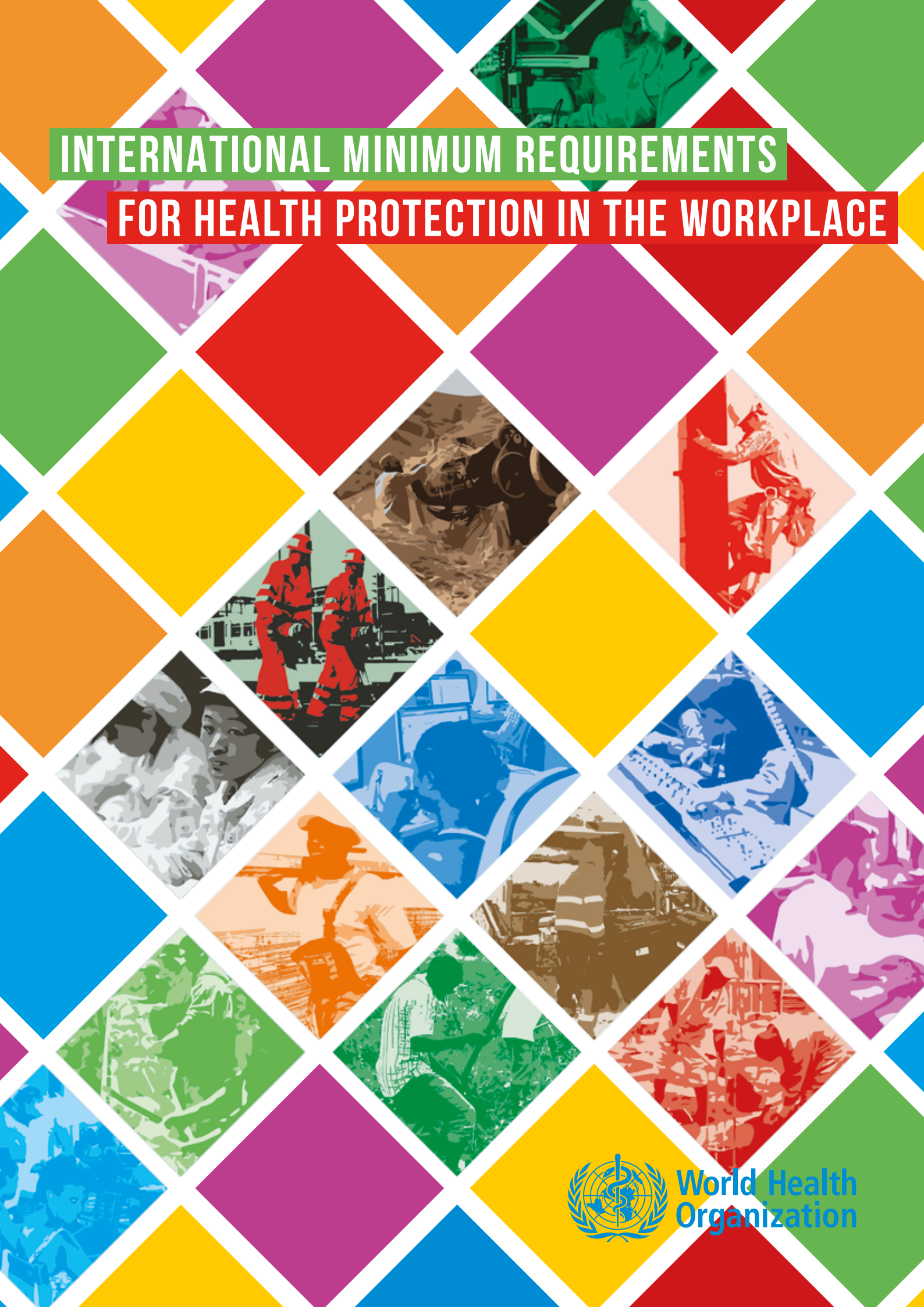
INTERNATIONAL MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR HEALTH PROTECTION IN THE WORKPLACE



World Health Organization

INTERNATIONAL MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR HEALTH PROTECTION IN THE WORKPLACE

World Health Organization

International minimum requirements for health protection at the workplace / Ute Papkalla and Jane Collison
ISBN 978-92-4-151260-2

Suggested citation. Papkalla U, Collison J; International minimum requirements for health protection at the workplace. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP) data. CIP data are available at http://apps.who.int/iris.

Design and layout: designiisgood.info

CONTENTS

List of tables

List of figures

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ute Papkalla, MPH, MA, Consultant, Advisor for Public and Occupational Health, German Institute for Medical Mission (DIFAEM)

Jane Collison, PhD, H&S Consultant & Training Provider at ATM Safety and Environment

This publication was prepared with financial support from WHO cooperative agreement with Centres for Disease Control and Prevention National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the United States of America RFA-OH14-002: "Implementing World Health Assembly Resolution 60.26 "Global Plan of Action for Workers' Health 2008-2017"

1. INTRODUCTION

A core function of the World Health Organization (WHO) is to set health-based norms and standards and to promote their implementation. WHO has adopted internationally recognized methods for guideline development to ensure a clear, transparent and unbiased process for comprehensive and objective assessment of the available evidence and international consensus on recommendations to meet global public health needs.[1]

The 60th World Health Assembly in 2007 requested that WHO should develop a set of minimum requirements for health protection, applicable to all workplaces in big and small enterprises whether in formal or informal work settings. Such standards are voluntary and are there to guide governments in developing their own national regulations and norms.

WHO regularly receives requests from its Member States to provide information and to advise on setting up national health standards for workplaces. Compliance with a basic set of internationally agreed standards for health protection can support workers' health, particularly in small enterprises and informal settings that are outside the scope of official occupational safety and health inspection and administration.

WHO has already developed several public health standards and guidelines applicable to work settings, such as indoor air quality guidelines,[2] radiation protection standards,[3] international chemical safety cards,[4] and a guide for water safety in public buildings.[5] Other guidance documents are currently being developed including on occupational exposure to nanoparticles, electromagnetic fields, UV and optical radiation and occupational risks in housing.

This report provides an analysis of the current spectrum of global, regional and national norms including conventions, standards, directives, regulations, guides, and codes directly relating to protecting health in the workplace. It identifies gaps in what is currently available and makes recommendations for improvements. Consideration has been given to exposure to hazardous substances, noise and vibration, radiation, musculoskeletal and psychosocial risks, as well as general workplace and welfare issues such as lighting, thermal comfort, drinking water and sanitation, first aid and health surveillance.

The work was carried out under the supervision and guidance of the WHO Global Occupational Health Programme.

---

[1] WHO Handbook for guideline development. Second edition 2015. Geneva: World Health Organization, accessed 24 October 2017).

[2] WHO guidelines for indoor air quality: selected pollutants. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2010, accessed 24 October 2017).

[3] Radiation protection and safety of radiation sources: International Basic Safety Standards. In: WHO Executive Board, 131th Session, 22 May 2012, report by the Secretariat, Document EB131/11. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2012, accessed 24 October 2017).

[4] ICSC Database, International chemical safety cards. Geneva: International Labour Organization, accessed 24 October 2017).

[5] Water safety in buildings. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2011, accessed 24 October 2017).

2. METHODOLOGY

This report includes standards, conventions, recommendations, directives, regulations, codes and guides (collectively known as 'norms'). They were developed and established by consensus-building processes involving experts from various countries and issued by an international body. They include requirements for identifying health hazards and controlling risks in the workplace, or they provide guidance and instruction on related topics. Some may be binding, such as ratified conventions and European directives, while others such as recommendations, codes or guides encourage voluntary compliance. In exceptional cases, national regulations, standards or guides have been listed. These were included when considered to be internationally important because they provided an example of a standard type that might be needed globally.

Norms were found by typing relevant English keywords into general search engines and the online search engines of specific standard-setting organizations such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and WHO. Using English keywords may have limited the number of results from non-Anglophone regions, although it can be assumed that most globally-applied standardization documents will also be available in English.

A complete list of the organizations searched is given in **Table 1** and the role of the leading institutions and their approach to standard setting is summarized in **Table 2**.

The title of each norm found was entered into a database[6] and categorized according to:

- the hazard or risk factor that it covered;
- its type, e.g. convention, standard, directive, etc.;
- whether it applied at a global, regional or national level;
- whether it targeted health protection of workers or technical support.

For each norm, a record was made of the source (the publisher), the website where it could be downloaded or purchased and its date of publication.

The research focused on hazards impacting on workers' health and were grouped into the following categories:

- chemical substances