

ISPESL: ITS ROLE IN PUBLIC HEALTH

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The Act concerning the reform of public health, and the institution of the National Health Service in Italy, which has been issued by the Parliament in 1978, has represented an important step for the protection of public health in our country.

We can say, moreover, that a peculiar characteristic of the Act has consisted in stressing the importance of prevention of diseases. A special attention has been paid to the questions related with work safety and in this context the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety was founded by the Presidential Decree No. 619, July 30, 1980, as a technical-scientific structure of the National Health Service, thus subordinated to the Minister of Health.

The Institute performs, in particular, the following activities:

a) research, studying, experimentations tasks in the field of prevention of professional diseases and of safety of work;

b) advice and consulting work for the governmental authorities and preparation of technical standards;

c) technical-scientific activities within the competence of the government in the field of health and safety of work and of industrial production, according to articles No. 6 and No. 24 of the Act 833/78, in particular those activities not committed to regional, provincial and municipal authorities or to the National Institute of Health.

By law, to the ISPESL are committed, in particular, the tasks related with the finding out of the criteria for surveying the risks and damages of work as well as the research, studying, experimentation activities for issuing specifications of health and safety of work, which are strictly depending on the today's technological evolution of plants, materials, equipments and manufacturing systems. The ISPESL has also to determine the safety criteria and their pertinent surveying methods in order to qualify products such as machines, plants, instruments, devices for individual protection, and prototypes.

To the ISPESL are also committed the advice and consulting tasks for the matters which are within the

competence of government and mentioned in article 6 of the Act 833, as well as for every other matter under competence of the government. It has also to co-operate with local health centers through the regional authorities, and with a regional authority itself, in order to supply information and advice.

Moreover, the ISPESL performs activities chiefly aimed at achieving the knowledge and pursuing the removal of risk factors related to machines and plants, to physical, chemical, biological, and psychological agents, to work organization and work conditions, to social or economic life and environmental conditions.

The following Act, No. 597/82, committed to the ISPESL also the task of qualifying industrial products and of controlling that standard products conform to the qualified prototypes. By the same Act the ISPESL has been set under the vigilance of the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour. This Act states that the qualifications of an industrial product consists of "the technical-administrative procedure by which the conformity with given technical requirements of a standard type or prototype is verified and certified; this procedure takes place also in case of first or new plants".

Then by the governmental ordinance, dated December 23, 1982, the tasks and activities in this field formerly carried out by ANCC (Associazione Nazionale per il Controllo della Combustione) and ENPI (Ente Nazionale per la Prevenzione degli Infortuni) have been committed to the ISPESL. These activities concern, among some others, technical examination of hoisting machines and lifts (e.g. elevators, aerial stairs, expandible and hanging-up bridges), machines and plants for hoisting of materials (e.g. tower cranes, gantry cranes, transporter cranes, crane trucks, hoists, derricks), equipments and devices against thunderbolt, electricity safety systems, steam and gas pressure safety systems.

The ISPESL structural organization, approved by a governmental ordinance dated February 1, 1984, consists of a central direction with 5 central technical departments, a documentation service, technical and

administrative offices, and of 33 local technical departments with homologation tasks, so that the ISPESL takes not only the character of a centralized Institute but also that of an organization acting in every part of the country as indicated in Fig. 1.

The multidisciplinary activities of the ISPESL are correlated both when a line of action is drafted and when the results are checked. A most important role is played by the scientific research in the field of health and safety of work; research activity is closely linked together with production of rules, technical specifications, working regulations.

The activity of the Institute began only one year ago, and the most of its activities are still in progress; therefore it is more of interest to present here the research program which has been prepared by the Institute and approved by the National Health Council.

The ISPESL research program general outline can be summarized as follows:

- 1) problems related to environmental pollution;
- 2) surveying methods and criteria for detection of the hazard factors in working areas;
- 3) methods for safety improving in working areas;
- 4) threshold limit values of physical and chemical factors in working areas;

5) methods for health surveillance of the exposed workers;

6) technical criteria of safety for design, construction and maintenance of tools, machines and equipments;

7) ergonomic aspects related to the tasks performed by ISPESL.

For each research section there are one or more projects to be realized within the ISPESL and some in co-operation with other organizations.

The first ISPESL research program shows only some of the activities of the Institute, which mainly aimed at improving health and safety in working areas, in accordance with the National Health Service law.

Furthermore the ISPESL carries out programs concerning rules and technical regulations for safety of work in the most common technical fields; advice to governmental authorities; information and documentation; training of the National Health Service personnel; and last, but not least, homologation activities.

We hope that ISPESL programs and activities, which are been summarized in this paper, could give in the future an important contribution to the best development of the National Health Service and thus contribute to improve health and safety in the working environment.

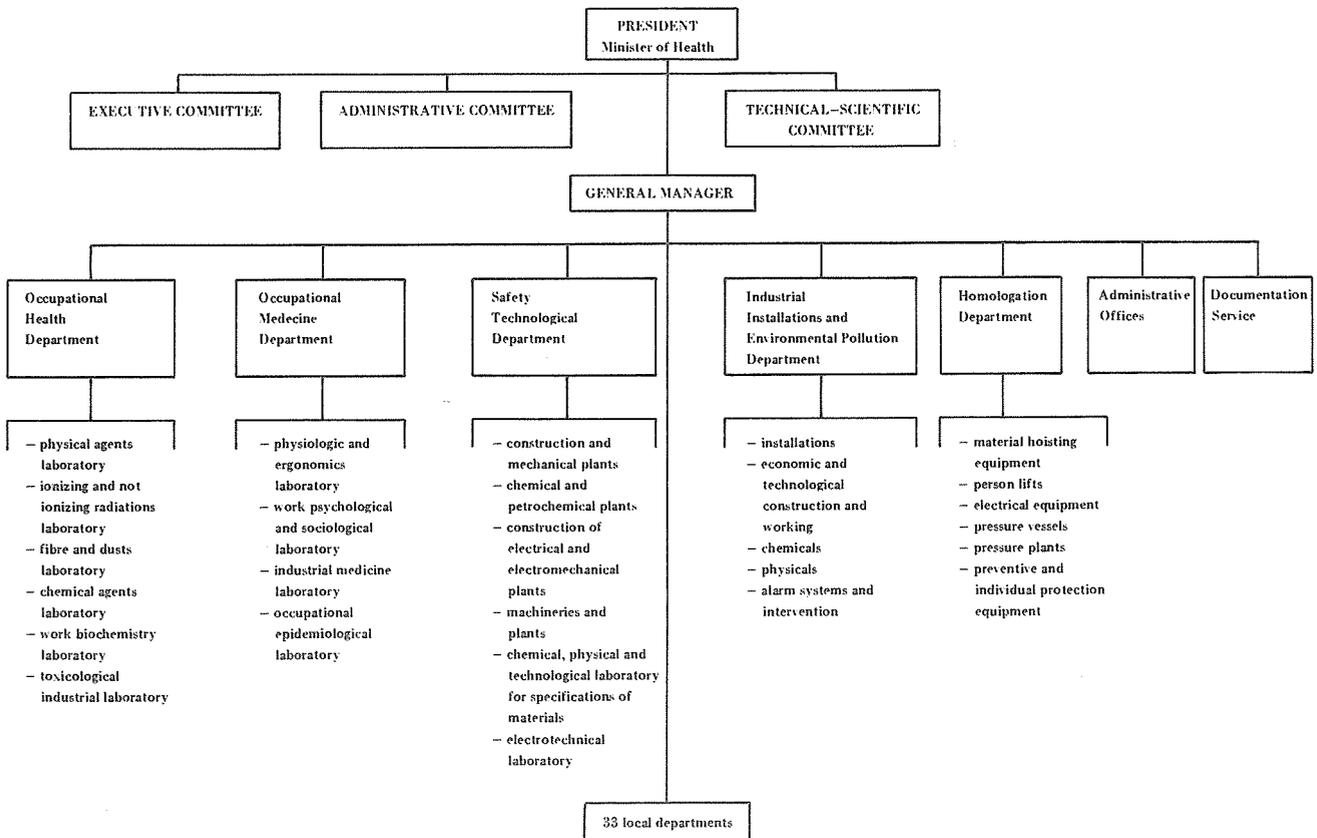


Fig. 1. - Organization of ISPESL (Ministerial Decree February 1, 1984)