



## Enhancement of Workers' Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare in Ashghal Projects

**Naji Mohammed Al-Faridi**

Quality & Safety Department (Safety Section), Public Works Authority (Ashghal), Doha, Qatar  
nalfaridi@ashghal.gov.qa

**Yasser Berzan**

Quality & Safety Department (Safety Section), Public Works Authority (Ashghal), Doha, Qatar  
ymberzan@ashghal.gov.qa

**Hamad Saed R Kh Al-Hajri**

Quality & Safety Department (Safety Section), Public Works Authority (Ashghal), Doha, Qatar  
alkhayareen2@ashghal.gov.qa

### Abstract

One of Ashghal's core values and top priority is the occupational health and safety of customers, employees and contractors. Ashghal prioritizes and is concerned about developing the welfare of workers on the site and in the camp. Ashghal develops welfare specifications for the projects to protect workers and be sure the specifications align with international and national requirements. The specification covers the facilities within the site, such as: number of toilets, handwashing basins, rest area/mess hall, shelter, drinking water, first aid room, transportation, clinic, etc. Ashghal develops an implementation and monitoring system to be sure welfare specifications are provided to all workers, referring to welfare specifications as contractual requirements, then linking workers' welfare as one of the monthly KPIs for the project, implementing it by the contractor, and monitoring it by the consultant. Ashghal is also working on developing specifications and requirements for workers' welfare, for example, developing and updating the specifications and requirements for their welfare on Ashghal construction sites, which will be issued soon as the "ACS."

**Keywords:** Ashghal - Public Works Authority of Qatar; OHS - Occupational Health and Safety; KPI - Key performance indicators; QCS - Qatar Construction Specifications; ACS - Ashghal Construction Specifications; SCH - Supreme Council of Health; HACCP - Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point; NCC - National Command Centre; MoPH – Ministry of Public Health; HMC – Hamad Medical Corporation

### 1 Introduction

Welfare facilities are an important requirement of any workplace, and they should be of high quality to make sure your workforce is healthy and productive. These facilities enable workers to work in a safe, hygienic, comfortable environment and help them do their work in an efficient and comfortable manner.

Providing the necessary welfare facilities will positively affect your employees' ability to work to their best capabilities, as there will be no room for time wastage. Having the necessary welfare facilities also gives employees a sense of appreciation and satisfaction, which will, in turn, lead to higher productivity. It is a human right to have access to this facility, and if it is not provided or is in poor condition, this increases worker stress and leads to accidents. Therefore, welfare facilities need

to be close to the workplace or within the worksite.

On the other hand, poor welfare facilities can result in several negative outcomes. Poorly maintained facilities, for example, can increase disease among workers, and limited access to rest areas can have a negative impact on morale, productivity, and individual health.

## **2 Current Status and Initiatives to Update**

In Ashghal, the occupational health and safety of customers, employees, and contractors is one of the top priorities, and because workers are the main element in all Ashghal projects and programs, it is a priority to develop workers' welfare on the site.

Ashghal set out and developed standards to reinforce its commitment to improving the quality of workers' welfare across all projects and programs and be sure the specifications aligned with international and national requirements, for example, the number of toilets, hand washing basins, rest areas/mess halls, shelters, drinking water, first aid rooms, transportations, clinics, etc. It also linked some requirements with the total number of workers in the project, which covers the facilities within the site such as the number of toilets.

Based on these requirements, the Public Works Authority has issued Update No. 3 for the Evaluation Plan for Workers Accommodation and Welfare Standards, which includes important updates in the workers' welfare requirements on the workers' accommodation and site as well as setting out minimum mandatory requirements with respect to workers to ensure that their welfare is always maintained.

This update will also be included in the Ashghal Construction Specification ("ACS"), which will be released and published shortly and will cover all Ashghal requirements, including welfare facilities on the jobsite.

These two documents clearly define the workers' welfare requirements, which must be provided within the worksite area. Examples for this important update are:

### **3 Toilet and Washing Facilities**

In the previous edition of QCS 2014, the requirements were "suitable and which allowed the contractors to provide facilities below the required standards, that affected the health and safety of workers and spread diseases among them. Also, it affects the level of worker productivity at work sites. but in those two new documents, it defines the total number of toilets that must be provided on the worksite according to the total number of workers within the same worksite area (1 WC and 1 urinal per 25 workers) and that they should be located within a 3-minute walk of the worksite area.

### **4 Drinking Water Facilities**

One of the important updates in this part is the monthly third-party test for water quality. This reduces diseases resulting from the poor quality of drinking water tankers, which are strictly checked for cleanliness and condition to ensure the safe transportation of drinking water at the worksite, and forces contractors to provide thermos water flasks (with employee name tags or ID details) for all workers to carry potable water with them while working. This will raise the psychological state of the workers by making them realize that they are among the priorities of the higher management.

### **5 Food Handling and Storage**

Public Works Authority is also concerned about the workers' food; therefore, Ashghal requires the

contractors to comply with SCH guidelines and ISO-22000/HACCP for foods that will be stored, transported to the worksite, and served to workers by licensed staff according to MoPH requirements.

Even in the food storage on the worksite, Ashghal asked that food be stored off the floors, preferably in refrigerators and on proper shelves, and to avoid bringing food in plastic bags.

## **6 Working in Summer Season**

One of the significant updates to the worker's welfare requirements concerns the summer season. Qatar is one of the countries with high summer temperatures. Working in hot conditions may pose special hazards to safety and health.

Temperature, humidity, and radiant heat (such as from the sun) are the most effective factors in determining the amount of heat stress, as are some workers' medical histories, such as high blood pressure or heart conditions. Heat stress can lead to several problems, including heat exhaustion, heat stroke, cramps, fainting, and heat rash.

The previous requirements for working during the summer season required all activity to cease between 11:30 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. from June 15 to August 31, but the new update extends the time and dates to June 1 through September 15 and the time from 10:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

## **7 Worker Rest Area Facilities**

This is one of the welfare requirements, which Ashghal also insists to provide with the highest standards of health and safety requirements, with a specification of "suitable and sufficient" for these facilities. It should be safe and easy to access, as well as well-ventilated and equipped with enough tables and chairs (with backrests).

Also, it should include adequate washing facilities that must be clean and in orderly condition, with a team for periodic cleaning. It must include a suitable hall for practicing religious rites.

## **8 COVID-19 Restrictions**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ashghal required contractors to follow actions and procedures issued by the MoPH and NCC in Qatar that helped prevent the spread of the pandemic, such as wearing a facemask, keeping a safe distance between workers on the jobsite, getting vaccinated, and so on. This is an example of Ashghal's concern for the safety and health of workers at its sites and its commitment to providing a good welfare facility.

## **9 Chronic Diseases Screening & Medical Requirements**

Ashghal has also taken care of the healthcare of workers at worksites by obligating contractors to conduct periodic check-ups for chronic disease screening for all workers to ensure their health and fitness to perform the tasks assigned to them successfully.

As a result, any worker identified with one of these chronic diseases within Ashghal projects must be referred to HMC for further evaluation and additional medical care, and an individualized treatment plan must be provided for each worker identified with one of these chronic diseases.

In addition to providing medical requirements at work sites according to the requirements of the Ministry of Health, ensuring contractors' commitment and implementation, and imposing fines in case of non-compliance is also done.

## **10 Transportation Requirements**

Transportation from and to the worksite is an important welfare measure, and Ashghal requires contractors to use fully air-conditioned buses, especially during the summer when temperatures and humidity levels are high. The buses' windows must be almost completely tinted.

In addition to providing flashlights and reflective stickers at the back of the bus, as well as determining the busload and the number of passengers allowed to be on the bus is also important.

## **11 Conclusion**

Lack of appropriate welfare facilities can pose a significant threat to the health and safety of workers. If welfare facilities are not suitable and sufficient, it can result in physical and psychological illness and it can cause low morale and low productivity if employees feel that the employer is not bothered about their welfare. Therefore, the work environment should be safe and healthy for workers on worksites.

The health and safety of workers and customers is one of Ashghal's top priorities. In Ashghal's strategy, OHS objectives are effectively applied to projects and implemented to departments to ensure on-time delivery without deviation from OHS requirements and to improve OHS performance across projects, departments, and asset affairs.

Improvement in OHS welfare performance is an on-going process, and Ashghal wants to show all its support to customers and contractors, from inspection, feedback, and findings, then update the regulations and requirements for improvements.

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