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**M&S 2025**

August 15<sup>TH</sup> and 16<sup>TH</sup>, 2025

**NIŠ, SERBIA and ONLINE**

PROCEEDINGS 1

**CLIMATE CHANGE AND SAFETY  
EVENT MANAGEMENT AND SAFETY**

EUROPEAN  
SAFETY  
ENGINEER

THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY  
OF SAFETY ENGINEERS



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## IMPROVING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH THROUGH LEGISLATIVE REFORMS: FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

### Abstract

The aim of conducted research was to identify significant legislative changes in the field of occupational safety and health that went into effect in the Republic of Serbia in 2023, with the goal of improving employee protection and reducing workplace risks. Employers' additional responsibilities are analyzed, including the need to organize safety procedures, train employees, install protective measures, and prepare risk assessment documents. The new regulatory framework includes necessary work permits for high-risk occupations, additional training requirements for different levels of employees, and a licensing system for occupational safety professionals. It also governs the requirement to keep standardized records and describes the implementation of an electronic register of workplace injuries. The report includes a practical component that compares the situation of occupational safety and health before and after the law revisions, focusing on how records were previously kept, training and risk assessments undertaken, and what changes were required to comply with the new regulations. These involved creating new internal acts, organizing additional training, getting permits, and digitizing procedures. The effects of these improvements are also examined, including fewer workplace injuries, improved communication between employees and employers, and a better awareness of high-risk work situations. The paper has two main goals: first, to provide a concise overview of the key legal changes in the field of occupational safety and health; and second, to present concrete examples of how these changes have been implemented in practice, with a focus on organizational, procedural, and outcome improvements.

**Key words:** Occupational Safety and Health; Legal Reform; Risk Assessment; Employer Obligations; Employee Training

### INTRODUCTION

Regulating occupational safety and health (OSH) is essential for protecting the lives and well-being of employees, preventing workplace hazards, and fostering a safe, healthy, and productive work environment. A robust OSH system contributes not only to the physical and mental health of workers but also to the overall efficiency and sustainability of the organization. Globally, the regulatory framework for occupational safety continues to evolve in response to new challenges, emerging risks, and changes in work environments brought on by technological development, demographic shifts, and climate change.

In 2023, Serbia introduced significant legislative changes in the area of occupational safety and health with the aim of enhancing worker protection, reducing the risk of injuries and illnesses at work, and improving overall working conditions [1,2]. These reforms, reflected in the updated Law on Occupational Safety and Health ("Official Gazette of RS," No. 35/2023), align national practices with international labor standards and reflect a proactive approach toward strengthening the safety culture at the workplace. The legislative amendments are primarily focused on increasing employer accountability, improving the quality and clarity of risk assessment procedures, and reinforcing obligations related to the protection and training of employees [3].

One of the most important updates is the expanded responsibility of employers to ensure safe and healthy working conditions. Employer obligations are now more explicitly defined. According to the law, employers are required to adopt a general act that determines the rights, duties, and responsibilities in the field of occupational safety and health (Article 14); organize and implement OSH-related tasks

(Article 46); assign employees only to positions and work environments where protective measures have been implemented (Article 15); provide mandatory training for safe and healthy work practices (Article 15); ensure the proper use of personal protective equipment in accordance with the risk assessment (Article 15); provide accessible first aid facilities (Article 15); suspend any work that poses a serious, immediate, and unavoidable risk to life or health (Article 15); and develop a written risk assessment for all job positions, specifying the methods, measures, and deadlines for eliminating or minimizing risks (Article 16), among other duties.

Beside employer responsibilities, their role in the OSH system is crucial. They're also expected to play an active role in keeping the workplace safe, by looking after their own health and safety and looking out for their colleagues, while following the training and guidance given by their employer. Employees are required to comply with all prescribed safety measures; use equipment, tools, chemicals, and other materials in the intended and safe manner; correctly handle and return personal protective equipment to its designated location; inspect their work environment and tools before beginning work; and promptly report any identified hazards or irregularities to the employer or other responsible personnel. Before leaving the workplace, they must ensure that their workstations and equipment are left in a safe condition that does not endanger others.

The aim of presented research is to provide in an accessible and practical way the overview of the changes introduced by the 2023 amendments to the Law on Occupational Safety and Health in Serbia. Rather than focusing only on the legal text, the presented research was conducted to show how these new requirements have been applied in practice. The aim is not just to provide a theoretical overview, but to offer a realistic picture of what the adjustment process looks like by explaining what actually changes, what benefits have been observed, and what kinds of challenges arise along the way. In that sense, the paper seeks to highlight not only the content of the legal reforms, but also their actual impact on the workplace and on daily business operations.

## **METHODS**

The presented findings as a result of conducted research show that aligning with the new legal requirements called for a number of practical changes within the company. Among the key steps were updating internal procedures, revising risk assessments, organizing additional training for staff, and introducing a more standardized approach to documentation in accordance with the latest rulebook. Special attention was given to introducing digital tools for recordkeeping and reporting, which required good coordination and cooperation between different parts of the company. Although the transition initially brought some difficulties, especially in terms of increased administrative work and the need for staff to adjust to new processes, the overall outcome was positive. Employees found it easier to follow clearly defined procedures and had better access to safety-related information. From the management's perspective, the documentation process became more structured, and it was easier to track and ensure compliance. These observations suggest that, when implemented thoughtfully, the new legal framework can help foster a stronger and more safety-conscious workplace culture. Data for the case study was obtained through internal documentation, official records, and consultations with staff responsible for occupational safety.

After comprehensive review of the recent regulatory changes, we compiled and compared the key modifications in a Table 1. The goal was to clearly show how these amendments have directly influenced everyday work procedures, staff responsibilities, and how organizations manage compliance. Presenting the information made it easier to identify what has changed, and how those changes affect in practice. A few areas stood out as particularly important during the review: One of the important changes is the requirement for mandatory work permits for high-risk tasks, like working in confined spaces, performing hot work, or working at heights. This kind of permit system introduces an additional control before the start of these jobs, requiring better planning and risk assessment. Training rules have also been tightened. Workers now need to go through regular update courses and topic-specific modules, especially where new types of risk are identified. There is also greater focus on checking whether the training is effective, some form of assessment is usually necessary. Another important area is the licensing process, which now involves stricter criteria, particularly for operating equipment or handling hazardous materials. In many cases, the new rules require certificates from approved institutions, which adds to the administrative burden but is intended to raise safety standards. Organizations are also being

asked to improve how they keep and organize records, with a push toward digital system. That includes documentation related to training, permits, incidents, and risk evaluations. These records need to be accessible and audit-ready, which may require some internal restructuring. Lastly, a notable change is the planned national electronic injury register. Once in place, this system will make it possible to log workplace injuries in real time. The idea is that better data will lead to better prevention, both at site and at the policy level. Overall, these developments mark a clear move toward stricter safety oversight and more structured workflows. While the changes bring new responsibilities, they also offer a chance to improve how safety is handled across organizations. The table included in this section outlines the main changes and can serve as a useful reference for institutions as they adjust to the new requirements.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the key innovations introduced by the new Law on Occupational Safety and Health is the obligation of the employer to issue a work permit before commencing tasks in high-risk environments [1, 4]. This includes work at height, in depth, in confined spaces, in areas with potentially explosive atmospheres, on energy facilities, when using hazardous chemicals, or in any zone where there is a serious, unavoidable, or immediate risk or hazard to employee health. The employer is required to establish a clear procedure for issuing these work permits (Article 27).

Unlike the previous regulatory framework, the amended law now obliges the employer to organize not only regular training for employees but also targeted training for employee representatives and direct supervisors [1]. Additional training must also be provided within the organizational unit where a serious or fatal occupational injury has occurred. All training must be implemented in accordance with the employer's official OSH training program (Articles 33, 34, and 36). Periodic training for safe and healthy work for employees working in high-risk workplaces must be conducted no later than one year after the previous training, while for other workplaces, it must be conducted no later than three years after the previous training, instead of four years as it was previously.

Another significant novelty is the introduction of a licensing system for professionals in the field of occupational safety and health [1,2]. Licenses are issued or renewed by the Ministry of Labor for specific OSH-related roles such as safety advisors, safety associates or coordinators in both the design and execution phases of a project. The application for issuing or renewing a license is submitted to the Labor Inspectorate, which assesses whether the legal conditions have been met. The license is valid for five years and is subject to renewal based on compliance with defined criteria (Articles 72 and 73).

A particularly important area of reform is the regulation of recordkeeping practices. According to the former Rulebook on OSH records, employers were required to keep records on high-risk job positions, employees assigned to those positions, medical examinations, occupational injuries and diseases, employee training for safe work, and hazardous substances used in the workplace. Additionally, employers had to monitor and document inspections of work equipment, testing of working environment conditions, issued personal protective equipment, and reports of dangerous occurrences that could affect employee safety and health.

The new Rulebook from 2025 introduces several changes and provides more detailed guidance on how records should be kept and how long they must be retained [1, 5]. While many of the existing categories have been retained, such as records on high-risk jobs, health checks, injuries at work, equipment inspections, and issued Personal Protective Equipment, the obligations have been expanded. Employers must now keep specific records on employees exposed to biological hazards from groups 3 and/or 4, carcinogens, mutagens, hazardous chemicals, and asbestos. There is also a new requirement to record the implementation of OSH measures and to document inspections of electrical and lightning protection installations. Although many foundational aspects of recordkeeping remain, the new rulebook offers more precise classifications of exposures and more clearly defined responsibilities, especially for protecting employees in high-risk sectors.

Another major advancement is the planned introduction of a centralized electronic register for recording and monitoring workplace injuries [4]. This register will contain accurate and up-to-date information

and will allow authorized users to enter and retrieve data essential for determining eligibility for health insurance claims. Employers, or designated people within the company, will enter detailed information into the system, including data on the injured person, the incident, the supervisor, and any witnesses. Once this information is submitted, the selected physician enters medical findings via the national health information system, followed by an official injury classification by the competent insurance organization. All data exchange is regulated in line with national e-government legislation (Article 69). The changes listed above represent a substantial shift toward more structured, transparent, and preventive occupational safety practices. They impose higher standards and expectations on employers, while also ensuring better protection and clearer procedures for employees.

In the case of the implementation of the above-mentioned provisions in a specific company led to concrete changes in workplace safety procedures and documentation. These include the introduction of formal work permits for specific tasks, updates to internal training programs, and adjustments to the recordkeeping system in accordance with the new rulebook. The training program for safe and healthy work for employees, supervisors, and employee representatives for occupational health and safety defines the method, procedure, and scope of training for employees regarding safe and healthy work in the workplace and the work environment where they perform their tasks. The training includes familiarization with the general and specific parts of the program, assessment of readiness for safe and healthy work, as well as records of the training conducted for employees, supervisors, and employee representatives. Through this training, employees acquire theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of occupational safety and health, get acquainted with working conditions, hazards, and risks in the workplace, safety and health measures, personal protective equipment, as well as their rights and obligations concerning the implementation of safety and health regulations and measures. The training program also defines the method and procedure for issuing work permits, which is crucial for activities that pose a risk to health and safety. The permits include information such as: work location, job description, equipment and tools, prescribed risk control measures, preventive measures, personal protective equipment, the issuer of the permit, etc. A summary of the changes is presented in Table 1.

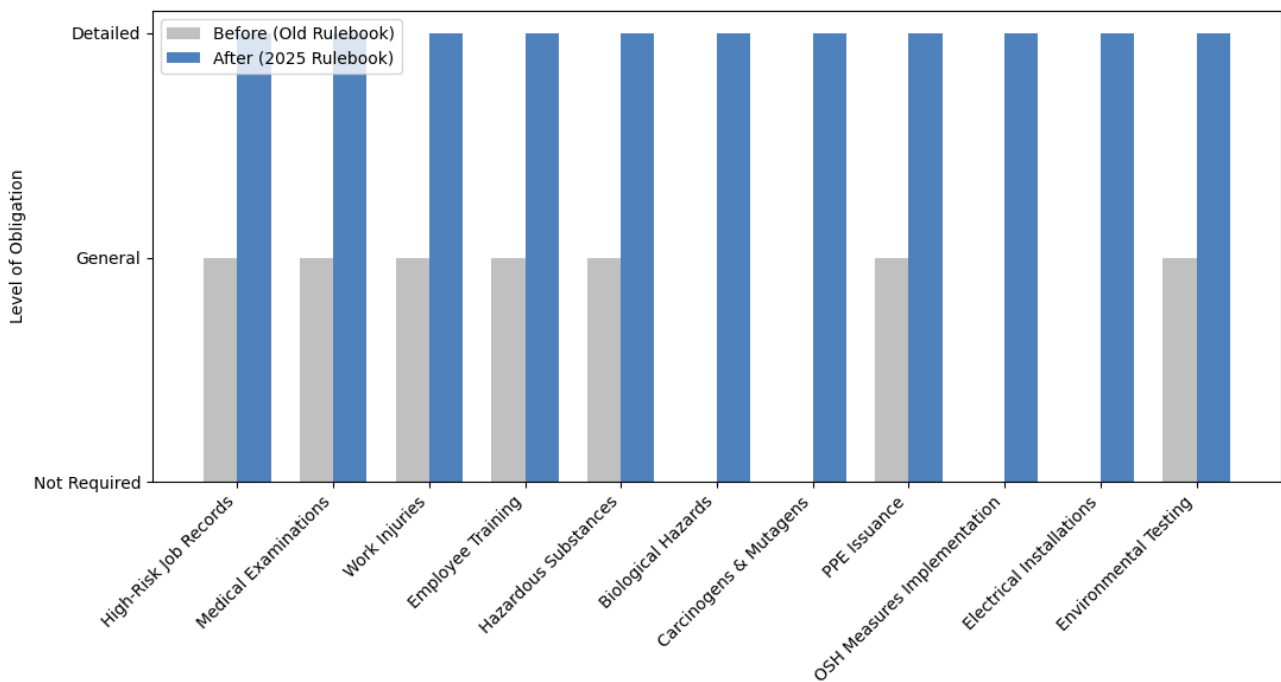
Table 1. Overview of Key Legislative Changes and Their Practical Implementation in OSH

Area of Change	Previous Practice	New Practice (Post-2023 Amendments)
Work Permit for High-Risk Activities	No formal work permit required for specific tasks	Mandatory issuance of a work permit before work at height, in confined spaces, etc. (Art. 27)
Training Requirements	Standard training for employees only	Additional training for employee representatives and direct supervisors; targeted training post-incident
Licensing of OSH Professionals	Not required	Introduction of official licensing for OSH advisors and coordinators, valid for 5 years (Art. 72, 73)
Recordkeeping Forms	14 separate OSH forms	Reduced to 11 standardized forms as per new Rulebook (OG RS, No. 5/2025)
Retention Period for Records	Varied	Clearly defined: majority kept for 40 years some for 6 years
Electronic Injury Register	Manual documentation and reporting of injuries	Planned introduction of national e-register for real-time data sharing and tracking (Art. 69)
Internal Documentation and Procedures	Partial coverage of risk-based activities	Updated internal rules and general act in line with Article 14 and new risk assessment protocols

The already introduced changes have led to more transparent and better structured internal procedures, raised employee awareness, and improved the organization’s overall readiness to manage occupational safety and health (OSH) risks. Their long-term impact will continue to be assessed through internal audits and future reporting cycles, which will help determine how effectively the new legal framework is working in practice.

Figure 1 offers a side-by-side comparison of the employer’s obligations related to OSH recordkeeping before and after the adoption of the new Rulebook on the Method of Keeping and Retention Periods of Records in the Field of Occupational Safety and Health (Official Gazette of RS, No. 5/2025). This rulebook lays out detailed requirements for how employers should document and retain OSH-related information. The chart illustrates which types of records were already regulated under the previous rules, which ones have been newly introduced, and how the overall scope of responsibility has shifted. While some categories, such as records related to high-risk positions, medical check-ups, and the issuance of personal protective equipment were already required, they are now more clearly defined and structured. Other areas, like documentation on biological hazards, carcinogens and mutagens, and electrical installations, which were previously unregulated, are now explicitly included in the list of required records [4, 5]. Overall, the figure underscores a broader move toward more standardized and detailed documentation, reflecting a stronger focus on risk prevention and ensuring full compliance with regulations (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Enhanced OSH Recordkeeping Obligations: Before vs After 2025 Rulebook



## CONCLUSION

The overview of newly introduced changes in Serbia's Law on Occupational Safety and Health presents a significant advancement in enhancing a safety based on prevention and proactive measures. Clearly defining of expected and required obligation fulfillment for employers and emphasized focus on managing risk before they evolve into incidents, the updated law supports moving from reactive problem-solving toward actively involvement in providing safer workplaces by focusing on planning and recognizing future threats. Prioritization of people safety at work every day depends on something simple but powerful: making sure everyone is properly trained, supervisors are truly engaged, and communication is clear, consistent and understandable. The one of the main changes is placing the main responsibility on employers. Beside the previously demanded and expected enforcement of safety measures, regularly review, assessment, and their improvement are necessary. By requiring thorough risk assessments and clear internal procedures that define roles and responsibilities, the law makes safety at work regular part of everyday work and not just subject to consider after an incident happens.

The law also brings a stronger focus on monitoring compliance and enforcing safety practices in real time. Instead of waiting for something to go wrong, the system now encourages ongoing evaluation to prevent incidents before they happen. Provisions such as mandatory permits for hazardous tasks, licensing for OSH professionals, structured training, and standardized recordkeeping point to a more organized and prevention-oriented strategy for managing workplace risks.

Although the changes are recent and have only just been incorporated it can already be assumed, that initial experiences from companies that have started applying the new rules have been positive. In many cases, internal procedures are improved and updated, communication between employees and management has improved, and the awareness of safety obligations and responsibilities are significantly increased. The new law encourages people to take joint responsibility and work together to make the workplace safer and more supportive for everyone

The newly introduced changes and legal improvements are expected to lead to fewer workplace accidents and illnesses, greater clarity in understanding legal obligations, and significantly improved resilience within operational challenges. The other important side of aligning Serbia's OSH practices with international standards, beside improvement of working conditions on a country level, is support the country's integration into the broader European labor market. Ongoing monitoring of how the law is applied in practice will be crucial to making sure its full potential is realized: building safer, healthier, and more productive workplaces for everyone involved.

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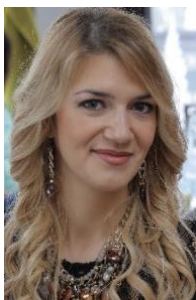
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## Regulations

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