

Nanotechnologies and “Security at Work”: A New Challenge for Industrial Relations and Society

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Nanotechnologies, considered here as a “security at work” theme, raised a new challenge to industrial relations, i.e. relations between employers, state and workers. Nanotechnologies question the social organization of risks control relations, generally based on a single industry-wide approach when the entire cycle of nanoproduct life: from fabrication to disposal, would suppose an inter/multi-industrial approach of risks control.

Historically industrial relations on “security at work” in most industrialized countries fit the shape of general industrial relations, i.e. collective bargaining. The reason for that is not only historical: it relies on the very fact that “security at work” problems (and also working conditions) are linked - and must be referred - to a well identified type of activity, for instance: chemical or nuclear industries.

To that extent and as it has been revealed by previous researches, industrial relations on “security at work” combined “shop-floor” day-to-day negotiations, company-wide talks and more formal agreements, these latter appearing quite infrequent in France. Nevertheless, it can be said that “security at work” is mainly a plant-wide issue, but regularly addressed at a wider level. It does not signify that risks, notably nanotechnologies problems, are not assessed at company level before implementing a nanoactivity in a plant. We only said that controlling “security at work” is eventually a shop-floor topic embedded in a larger framework and we need to know if nanotechnologies fit this model.

In France the main industrial relations institution implied in controlling “security at work” is the CHSCT (*Comité d’Hygiène, Sécurité et Conditions de travail*)¹. Since a couple of years CHSCTs have played an increasing role in industrial relations, and changes have been noticed in the “security at work” topic: this latter is a more and more addressed issue, by employers, unionists and state and by public opinion either². Growing costs of “repairing” industrial accidents (compensations), internal as well as public claims (from state or public opinion) to decrease accidents explain why the “security at work” topic has become that much important in industries and in society as a whole.

¹ Health, Security, and Working Conditions Committee

² Here *public opinion* is defined as the flow of discussions aiming to build an universal point of view. So it is not to be sought as results of polls published by mass medias.