



## CISDOC, MedlinePlus, CISILO

**A**lthough I am not a specialist on the topic, I needed to find information about some occupational hazards. Three sources that deal with occupational health and safety caught my attention, and I reconnected with CISDOC. Decades before the internet, in the 1970s, I was involved in a project to create a database from the tape version of the records of CISDOC, the indexing/abstracting database of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Since then, CISDOC (along with several other ILO databases) has become available on the International Occupational Safety and Health Information Centre (CIS) website for free and from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) for a fee.

One of my picks is the open access web version of CISDOC from ILO itself. The other pick is the Occupational Safety and Health section of the open access MedlinePlus service. The pan is the fee-based CISILO database, a version of CISDOC from CCOHS that serves the same content with a somewhat less capable software than the CISDOC, and which charges \$600 (CAD) for a single-user, single language version for it and \$900 (CAD) for a bilingual version. This also includes the ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety (which I review in my column hosted by Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, and which is also free from the ILO itself as part of SafeWork, its open access suite of many related databases).

I am not against fee-based databases and have chosen several as picks in this column, notably Ovid's version of MEDLINE for its very smart and elegant implementation and its unique features. However, charging a fee for an implementation that offers *less* than the free version deserves a pan.

In the maddeningly confusing world of acronyms, it's ironic that the fee-based version frequently gets a better position in most search engine result lists than the free version when searching for ILO CIS.

“ Three sources that deal with occupational health and safety caught my attention. ... ”



## the picks

### ILO CISDOC

The ILO has an impressively rich collection of digital documents about occupational safety and health at work and the environment under the name SafeWork ([www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework)). These include policy documents, standards, codes of practice, legislative texts, full-text papers, and training materials.

The bibliographic database CISDOC ([www.ilo.org/dyn/cisdoc](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/cisdoc)) was created to help find information about these kinds of documents. It was then enhanced by many other databases, both directory-style and full-text. Somewhat surprisingly, ILO goes out of its way to advertise the fee-based version of its database suite as much as its own, but the reverse is not true. The fee-based Canadian host does not link to the free editions of the many ILO databases.

Overview of databases and services		
Databases (click on the name for description)	Availability	Connect NOW!
<a href="#">The bibliographic database (CISDOC/CISILO)</a>	On-line (free, commercial), CD	<a href="#">Whole database (ILO version), whole database (commercial version), sample screen shots for the commercial version</a>
<a href="#">Safety and Health at Work - ILO/CIS Bulletin</a>	Printed	<a href="#">Sample pages</a>
<a href="#">Encyclopedia of Occupational Health and Safety</a> <small>Imported into the users of Microsoft Windows XP</small>	On-line (free, commercial), CD, printed	<a href="#">Whole database (ILO version), whole database (commercial version), sample screen shots for the CD version</a>
<a href="#">Legislative Texts on OSH (LEGOSH)</a>	On-line (free)	<a href="#">Whole database</a>
<a href="#">CIS Thesaurus on Occupational Safety and Health</a>	On-line (free), printed, diskette	<a href="#">Whole database (ILO version), samples for the printed and diskette version</a>
<a href="#">Occupational Safety and Health Glossary</a>	Printed	<a href="#">Sample pages</a>
<a href="#">International Chemical Safety Cards (ICSCs)</a>	On-line (free)	<a href="#">All cards</a>
<a href="#">International Hazard Datasheets on Occupation</a>	On-line (free)	<a href="#">All datasheets</a>

The database suite of ILO CIS with links to its own free version and to the fee-based, commercial version

The homepage reports about the availability of 65,000 records, but there were about 68,775 bibliographic records in the database as of June 1, 2009—obviously because of the updates since the creation of the information page about CISDOC. The database spans more than 35 years, going back to 1974.

This is a genuinely international database. Although English is still the dominant language of the source documents (38,561 records), followed by French (12,286), German (6,890), and Spanish (4,294), there are also a substantial number of records for Russian (3,081), Portuguese (918), Polish (784), and Japanese (755) documents. The high proportion of Swedish (1,690), and Dutch (1,109) documents reflects the extensive regulations concerning work conditions in Sweden and the Netherlands.

The variety of source document types is also a positive feature, but it is a disservice that no search option is available for searching or filtering results by document type, even though the document type codes consistently appeared in the records in my test queries. The core of the database is represented by 400 journals.

The interface and help file, as well as the descriptors and subject categories, are available in English, French, and Spanish, and often the abstracts are also available in these three languages. The quality of the multilingual descriptors is far higher than in PASCAL, one of the few other databases that offers multilingual content. Searching by descriptors helps in overcoming the problems of different terminology and spelling used in the various versions and dialects of English.

There are a number of predefined display/print formats and the format can be customized. Links to full-text source documents (sometimes in two or more languages) are a welcome enhancement. Even though this applies to only a small subset of the database, it is a worthy pursuit.



A record from ILO CIS reveals that it can be downloaded as a PDF and gives both English and French internet addresses for the download.

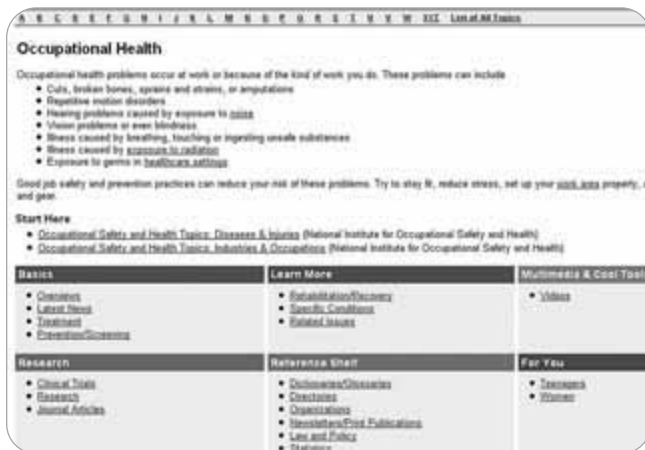
All the essential software features are available. You can save and rerun searches if you register (at no cost) instead of using the default guest searcher mode.

The help file has some stylistic oddities and strange choices of words (that I can much relate to), such as “the search history is effaced if the interface language or user changes as well as via the Clear button without warning.” One of the examples for the Boolean NOT operator is silly: cement –cement, instead of the correct asbestos –cement, but these are minor problems.

### MEDLINEPLUS OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH SECTION

There is much to like in MedlinePlus ([www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/occupationalhealth.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/occupationalhealth.html)) beyond its being open access. It was already my pick years ago, and it remains an excellent source for both health service providers and recipients, or for any layperson interested in health issues.

MedlinePlus is an ideal portal and hub for getting information about the best websites (at least the best U.S. websites) for a large variety of general health issues, specific diseases, and treatments. It has a section dedicated to occupational health that follows the layout and structure of the hub pages of the other sections. It has a good coverage of occupational health websites as long as the user is interested only in U.S. websites. I emphasize this because its link collection does not include a single link to any of the ILO databases, which can be justified only because of the geographic focus of MedlinePlus.



The occupational health hub of MedlinePlus

The majority of the links are, understandably, to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). All are excellent, comprehensive resources. There are also links to several other, much smaller (at least in terms of occupational health) but equally high-quality sites dealing with a particular job condition.

The layout of the portal guides users through the broader aspects of occupational health very well, such as prevention versus treatment and screening versus rehabilitation, as well as specific issues, diseases, and conditions relevant for particular types of occupations or patterns of work, such as hairdressers' exposure to cancer (not from a group of rightly concerned hair stylists, but from the American Cancer Society) or sleeping strategies for shift workers (not from a sleepless blogger but from the National Sleep Foundation). For those more oriented toward video than text, there is a video—no, not a funny one from YouTube, but an educational one from Harvard University.

Beyond these MedlinePlus elements, there is the MEDLINE database itself for practitioners and students specializing in occupational medicine. Its predefined, sophisticated searches can save the agony of formulating the best search, and they take users to a broad set of records about docu-

ments. These can then be refined by clues much more easily than specifying the information need in a syntactically appropriate format. One lets you limit the search to full-text documents—and MEDLINE volunteers to show the number of such records in order to facilitate the decision. Obviously, no one wants to go through 15,000 documents, even 575 full-text documents with occupational health assigned as major subject heading, but it is a good point for quick start. Having seen the query filters and results in action, it becomes much easier to tailor a broad search and just add a word to limit it.

MedlinePlus represents an excellent mix and wide choice, as well as software that does not look hostile even for casual users.



the pan

#### CISILO OF CCOHS

Arriving at the CCOHS website ([www.ilocis.org/en/cis\\_srch.html](http://www.ilocis.org/en/cis_srch.html)), I had the impression that I was at the website of ILO CIS. The URL clearly suggests this, but the name International Labour Office sounded odd. I was not aware that the ILO changed its name from “Organization” to “Office.” Well, it didn't, and the content is indeed from ILO, the U.N. agency based in Geneva, although the website is that of the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, which displays several logos.

I know, in the French version of the name of the agency the word “Bureau” is used, but the acronym of the French version is BIT—so this looks like those watches, bags, shirts, and underwear that show the logo of Gucci, Toshiba, Camel, and Calvin Klein but spell the names as Guci, Thoshiba, Camil, and Kalvin Klain that are sold on the backstreet markets of Khartoum, Sudan.



The real logo of the ILO and the one created by CCOHS

No need to worry, the content is genuine ILO—it comes from the International Labour Organization, and it is only a few hundred records shorter than CISDOC, being behind it only by one update cycle, with a total of 68,588 records.



Subscription required for displaying records both from the ILO Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety and the CISILO database

The difference is that that you must have a subscription with CCOHS to show the indexing/abstracting records in their full glory. This version can be searched for free, and the result list shows the title of the matching records, but that's all without the \$600 (CAD) or \$900 (CAD) subscription.

The retrieval programs are very similar in functionality, but both have some features that the other lacks. The CCOHS version offers proximity and positional search operators—not terribly exciting for indexing/abstracting records—and British/American spelling interpretation (useful for such an international database). The native version uses British spelling conventions and does not translate, say, labor to labour. It also offers thesaurus navigation and a Spanish interface, as well as output formats and content in more languages than simply English and French.

I don't see the reason why was this version developed by CCOHS and have no idea who anyone would pay a subscription fee for the CCOHS version.

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