

## Q4 2020 HELPLINE HEADLINES

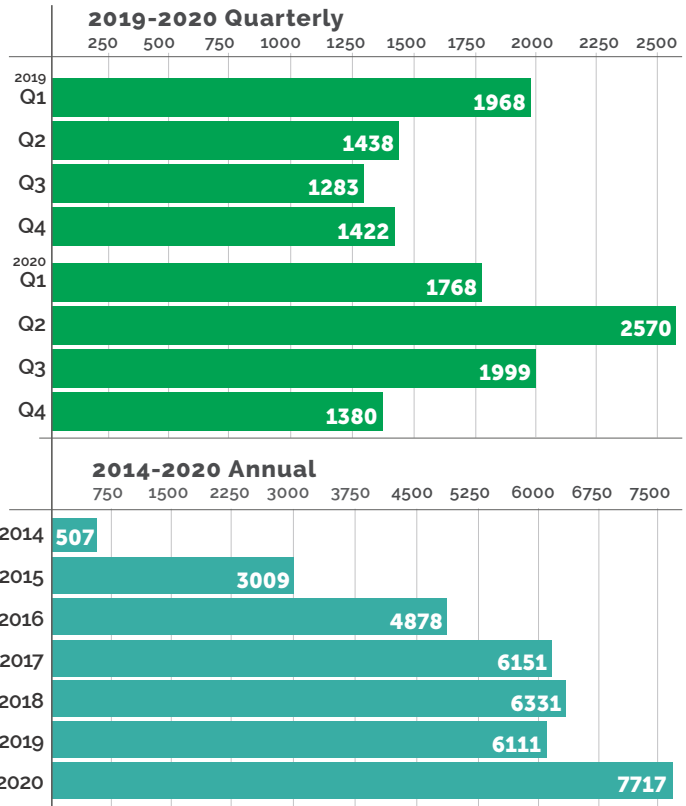
By the end of 2020, the Amader Kotha Helpline had been launched in 1,142 factories reaching approximately 1.5 million workers. In the fourth quarter of the year, 8,171 calls were received for a total of 37,412 calls received in 2020, of which 21 % of calls received were substantive issues. This record high call volume was in response to supply chain disruption and concern for health and safety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the year, workers continued to have access to a toll-free number that is available nationwide.

Helpline operations moved to remote locations following the outbreak of the pandemic in Bangladesh. By the fourth quarter, operations returned to the Amader Kotha Helpline Center located at the Phulki offices in Dhaka from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. weekdays. After hours calls are returned the next business day.

In this edition of *Our Voice*, newly updated Helpline protocols and reporting are introduced following stakeholder input in 2020. After calls to the Helpline about boiler fires, a special **In Focus** article, *An Introduction to Boiler Safety*, provides an overview of proper boiler maintenance. Case studies from the perspective of factories and of a leading brand describe some of the ways the Helpline can benefit workers, factories, and brands alike. Finally, a photo essay shows how Helpline training for workers improves Helpline awareness and understanding.

### SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES REPORTED TO HELPLINE



As always, we look forward to hearing from you with comments and suggestions at:  
[info@amaderkothahelpline.net](mailto:info@amaderkothahelpline.net).



### WHO ARE WE?

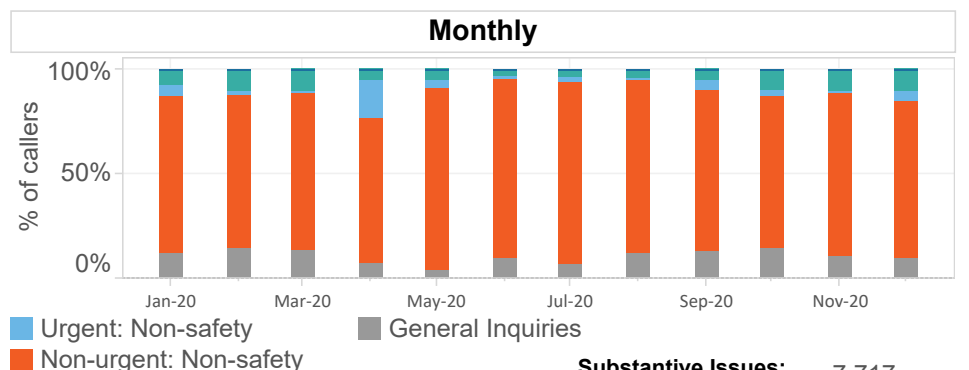
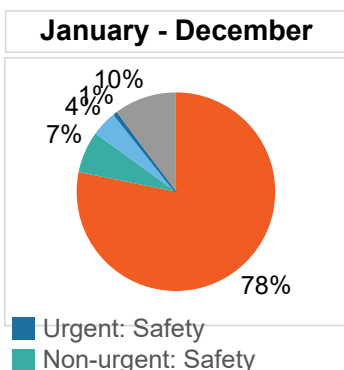
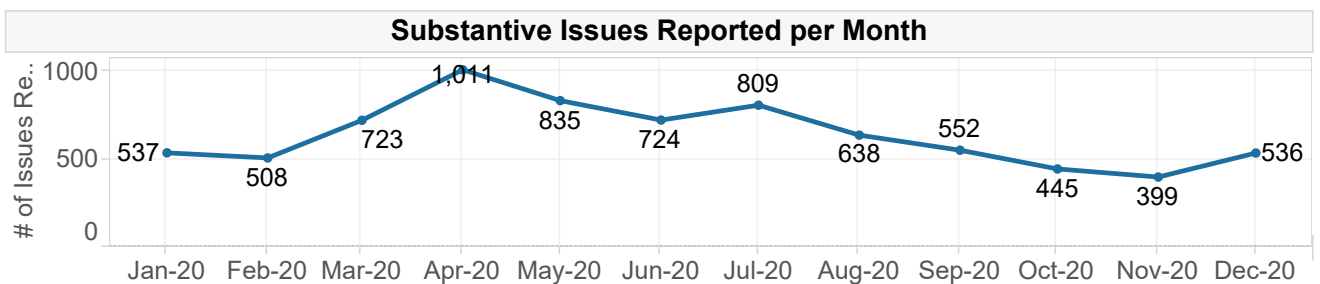
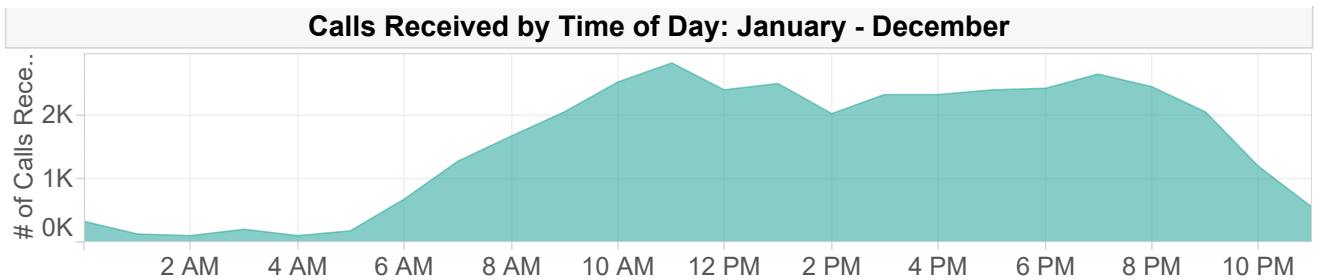
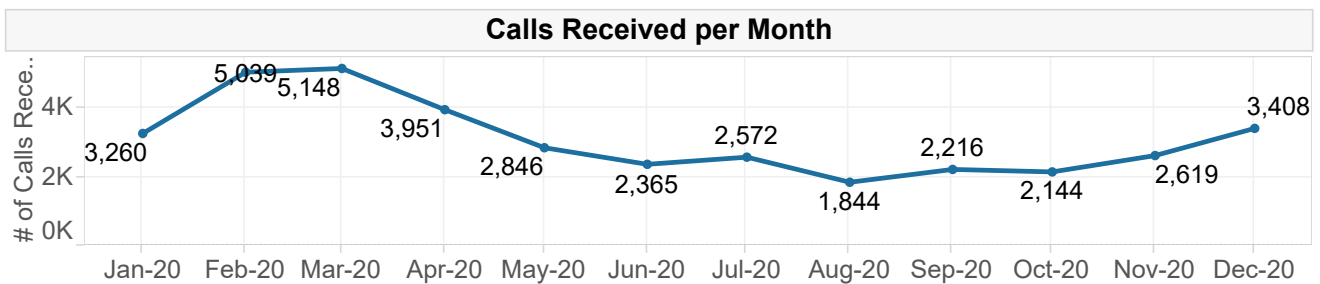
Amader Kotha, or "Our Voice" in Bangla, is a unique collaboration among three project partners—Clear Voice, a project of The Cahn Group that operates hotlines and builds effective grievance mechanisms in supply chains; Phulki, a respected civil

society organization working to improve the lives of workers and their families in Bangladesh; and ELEVATE, the parent company of Laborlink, a leading business risk and sustainability solutions provider. Each partner brings years of experience building innovative, best-in-class labor compliance programs in supply chains.

# FOURTH QUARTER 2020 FINDINGS

## KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- 8,171 calls were placed to Amader Kotha in the last quarter of 2020, for a total of 37,412 calls received in 2020.
- 2020 call volumes remained at historic highs, including a record 5,148 in March due to the spike of COVID-19 related calls from workers.
- 21 % (7,717) of calls received in 2020 were substantial issues. A majority related to immediate health and safety inquiries and job security during the first half of the year, and longer-term needs from workers on the second half. In total, 44 urgent safety and 376 urgent non-safety issues were reported to the Helpline.



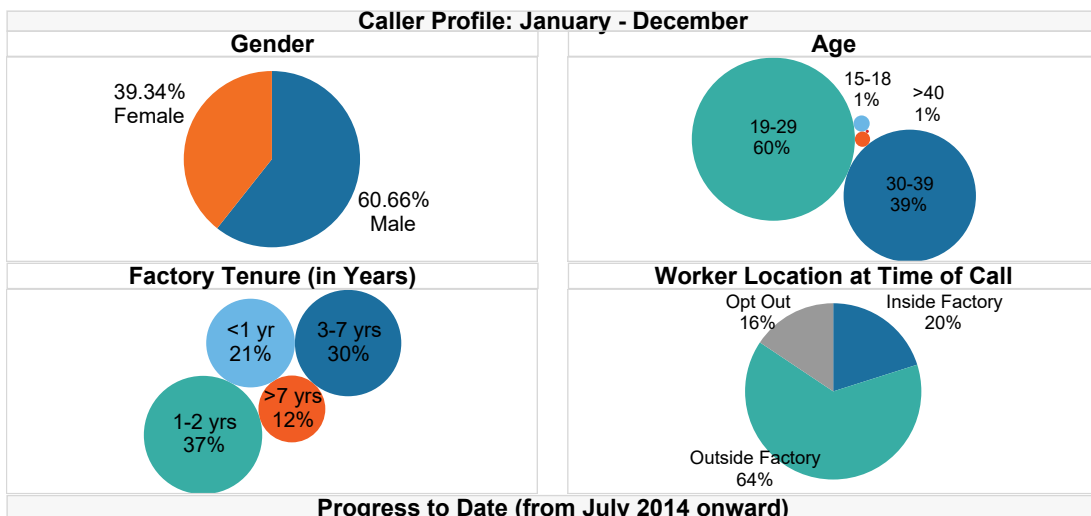
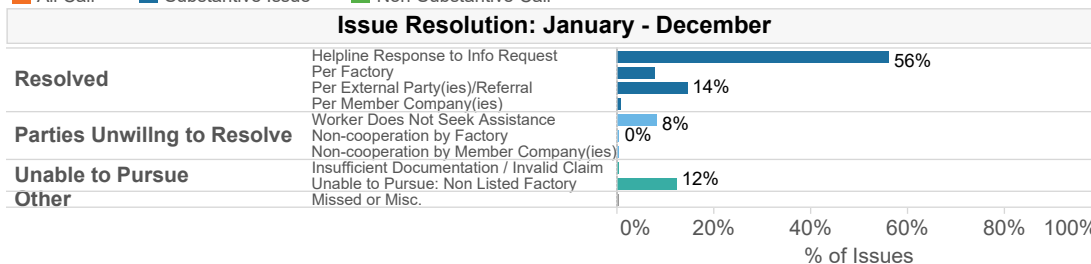
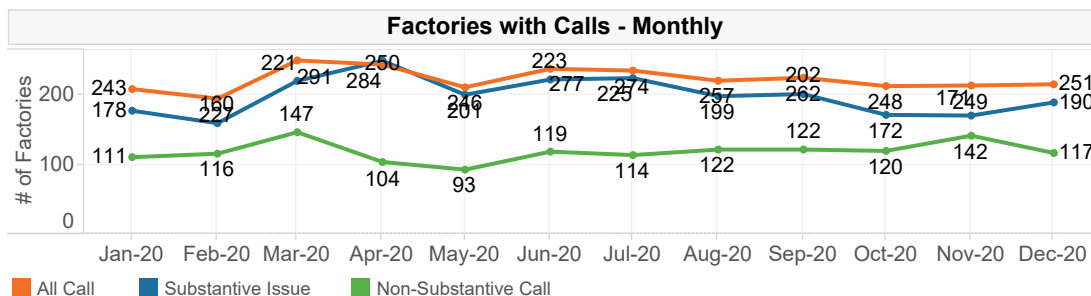
Substantive Issues: 7,717



# FOURTH QUARTER 2020 FINDINGS

## KEY FINDINGS CONTINUED:

- The most reported urgent issues were related to “other” which included issues relating to COVID-19, as well as inadequate facilities, hygiene, freedom of association (worker unrest), compensation, and termination.



Total Calls	Substantive Issues	Helpline Launched Factories
Inbound: 327,055	41,850	Factories: 1,142
Outbound: 247,955		Workers: > 1.5 million

#### Notes:

- Graphs do not include calls from "General Inquiry", "False", or "No category" issue categories, except graphs on calls received and calls by time of day and where otherwise stated.
- Calls have been received from non-participating factories. These calls are included in the call volume and call time and factories with calls graphs above, but not included in the issue or caller profile visualizations.
- Substantive issues per month graph may not match historical newsletters due to changes in issue categorization over time...

• On average, the peak call times in 2020 were between 11:00am and 6:30pm, suggesting workers are more comfortable calling throughout the day.

• 79% of all issues reported in 2020 from workers at factories were resolved and closed by the end of December. All remaining open issues are in the process of being closed in accordance with Amader Kotha protocols.

**NOTE:** Detailed call data is provided to brands after factories have had the opportunity to verify and respond to information provided by workers.



# 2021 Updates to Helpline Protocol and Reporting

## STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

In August 2020 the Helpline distributed an online questionnaire to solicit feedback on proposed modifications to the Helpline’s operational protocols. Proposed modifications included refinements of issue categorization and term definitions, escalation and remediation pathways, and reporting.

## KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

Overall, the questionnaire results evidenced general support for the Helpline’s routine reporting of issues to factories and escalation protocols.

- **69% of participating companies agreed with the current notification timeline of urgent issues for brands.**
- **77% agreed with the 7-day timeline to follow-up with management and workers.**
- **To reflect the wider and current range of safety issues affecting workers in Bangladesh, alternative issue categorizations were submitted for review.**
- **A majority (54%) of survey respondents voted in favor of replacing the current “Urgent Non-Safety” category with “Urgent Labor Issue” to identify the most serious safety and labor-related issues.**
- **For issue sub-categorization, 66% of participants accepted the proposal to broaden the list to include other urgent issues related to safety, health, and occupational hazards, as well as labor issues related to worker rights under employment laws.**
- **65% of participants voted in favor of aligning definitions of sexual harassment / abuse with international standards.**



## PROTOCOL REVIEW

The new protocol provides an overview of roles and responsibilities from brands and factories, Helpline policies, and reporting services. Going forward, the protocol’s issue categories are modified as follows: Urgent Safety, Urgent Labor Issue, Non-Urgent Safety, Non-Urgent Labor Issue, and General Inquiries. The broader list of sub-categories is clearly defined for each reporting case category and type. Definitions of retaliation, physical abuse, and sexual abuse have been strengthened and brought into conformity with international norms. **The full text of the updated protocols based on feedback can be found [here](#).**

## REPORTING REVIEW

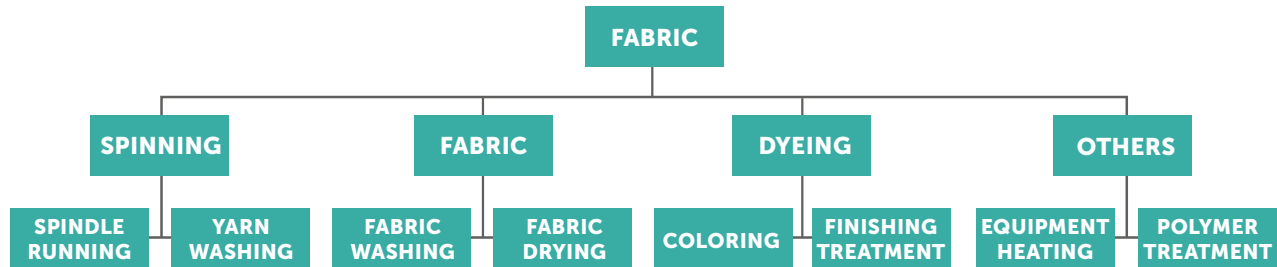
The process and timing for notification of issues to factories and escalation protocols for brands (i.e., urgent cases) remain the same. Monthly aggregate reports for brands have been enhanced to support trend analysis by including call volume across demographic lines (e.g., age, gender) to identify the risks and issue that may affect age or gender groups differently. In addition, monthly reports now offer advanced analytics to support trend analysis by including worker sentiment scores and industry benchmarking. Benchmarking will help brands to leverage Helpline data to identify risks and potential systemic issues early on and take preventive action. 📊

# IN FOCUS: An Introduction to Boiler Safety

–Paul Rigby, Chief Executive and Chief Safety Officer, Nirapon

## WORKER REPORTS OF FAULTY BOILERS LEADS TO NEEDED REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Industrial boilers are a key part of many manufacturing processes in the garment and textile industry, as can be seen in this illustration:



Over the years there has been a history of boiler explosions, caused by either the steam produced in the boiler, or the ignition of the fuel used to heat the water. These accidents have been caused by lack of effective maintenance of the equipment, operator error or misuse of the equipment. Whatever the cause of the explosion the outcome can be devastating, often resulting in the death of workers at the factory. The unfortunate fact is that all of these accidents are preventable, with an effective preventative maintenance programme in place.



A number of potential accidents involving boilers have been avoided in 2020 due to calls from factories alerting the Helpline of boiler hazards in factories. These hazards have been confirmed after engineers carried out follow-up visits. This has resulted in one case of a factory needing to buy a new boiler and a second one requiring repairs to the gas lines supplying fuel to the boiler. What is clear is that workers in the factory are recognizing that there is a problem with a boiler, before an accident involving a malfunction of the equipment takes place.

As can be seen in the photograph above, industrial boilers are very large; any failure of equipment on this scale can result in a significant incident leading to loss of life and serious injury.

The figure at right provides a simple view of the internal working of the boilers that are typically used in the RMG and other industries. Although these systems appear to be relatively simple, operators using such equipment need proper training in the use and maintenance of such equipment.

- 1 Main stop valve
- 2 Safety valve
- 3 Pressure gauge
- 4 Oil/gas burner
- 5 Blowdown valve
- 6 Smoke tubes
- 7 Feed check valve
- 8 Feed water pump

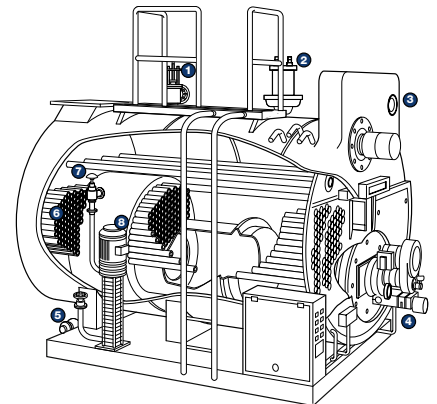
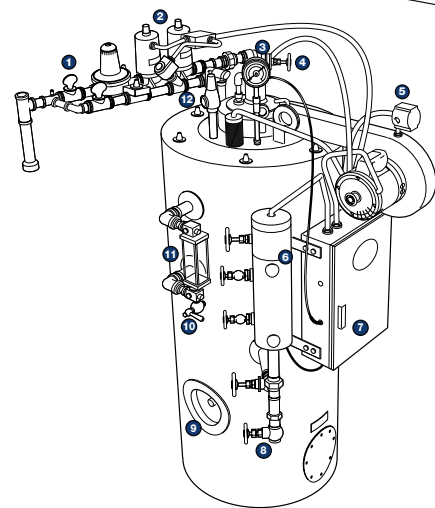


Figure 1 Sectional view of a typical steam-raising boiler



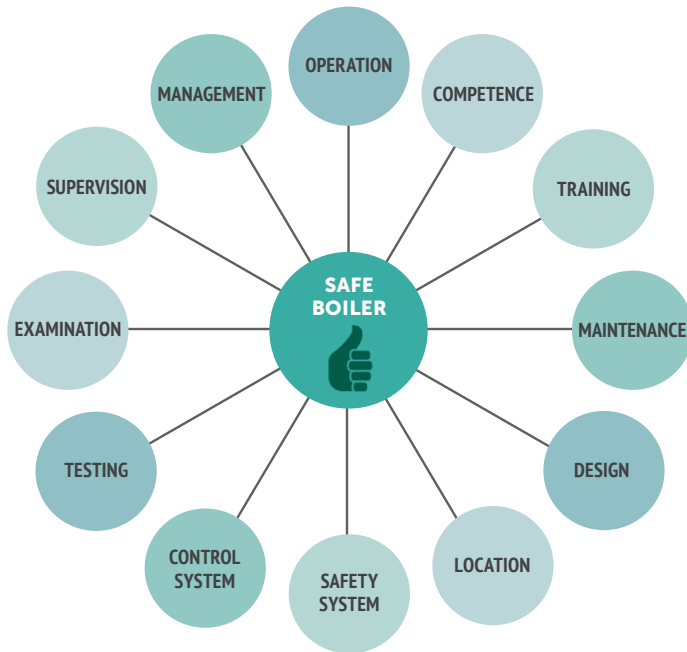
- 1 Manual gas cock
- 2 Gas head assembly
- 3 Steam pressure gauge
- 4 Steam stop valve
- 5 Air safety switch
- 6 Water level probes
- 7 Control panel box
- 8 Blowdown valve
- 9 Mud hole door
- 10 Water gauge blowdown valve
- 11 Gauge glass protector
- 12 Safety valve

Figure 2 Typical vertical boiler

*continued on following page*

# IN FOCUS: An Introduction to Boiler Safety, continued

## WHAT AFFECTS THE SAFE OPERATION OF BOILERS?



*1 liter of water can expand to 2,000 liters of steam under pressure. This highly pressurized steam will seek out any weak points in the boiler system with potentially devastating results.*

### So, why do boilers breakdown?

Very simply the system is subject to a lot of pressure, the water may contain sedimentary products and will most likely also contain mineral deposits. The sedimentary products will gather as silt or mud in low lying areas of the boiler and may be stirred up and moved into other areas of the boiler by the water as it heats up and turns to steam. The mineral deposits will build up as scale on the equipment, this can lead to problems with the diameter of pipes or start to obstruct valves. This effect is very similar to that of cholesterol on the human heart.

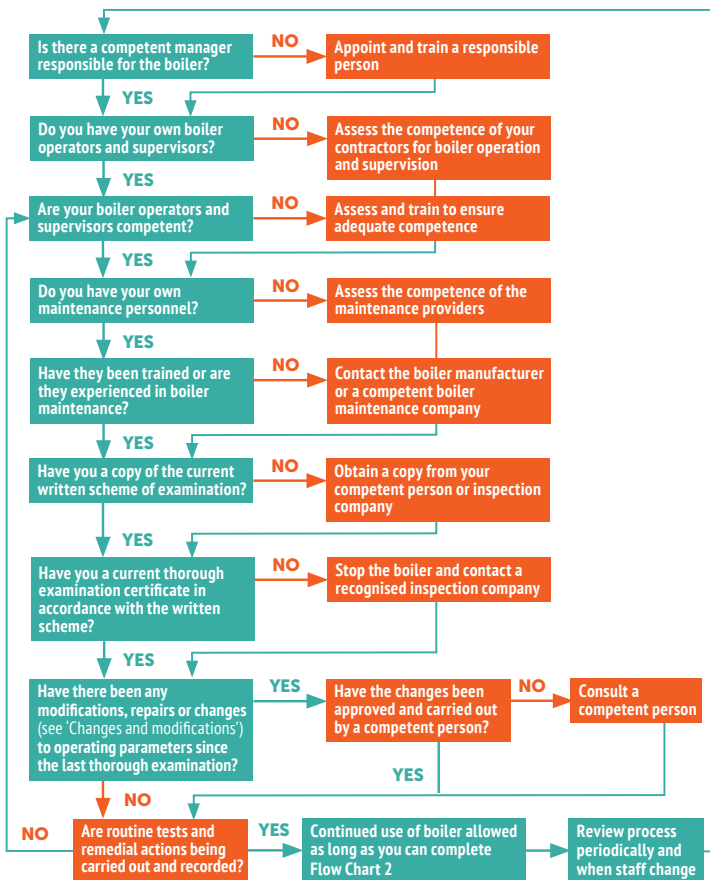
Other factors to consider are that water is corrosive and can cause problems with oxidization resulting in rust and corrosion of parts such as flanges, joints and seals. At normal atmospheric pressure 1 liter of water will expand to 1,700 liters of steam. If that water is contained within a pressurized vessel (a boiler) that expansion could reach 2,000 liters of steam. This is an incredible amount of pressure and that steam will seek out any weak points in the boiler system with potentially devastating results.

There are many other factors that can have an effect on the safe management and operation of boilers, including the fuel supply. These considerations are set out in the figure above left.

Finally, to assist factories in using boilers safely here is a flow chart to assess your current safety management system, for boiler operations at your factory (bottom left).

Improved management oversight over boiler operations by competent professionals, together with input from workers who see potential problems through the Amader Kotha Helpline, can contribute to safer factories and reduced risk of harm to people and property.

## BOILER OPERATIONS SAFETY ASSESSMENT





## Amader Kotha Helpline: TRAINING IS KEY TO HELPLINE SUCCESS

The success of the Amader Kotha Helpline can be directly tied to the ability of workers and managers to have confidence in how the Helpline works. Through awareness training, workers are instructed on how to reach the Helpline and what to expect when reporting a concern. Helpline cards are distributed to all workers and test calls are made using the toll free number. Workers and managers are reminded that retaliation for using the Helpline is not tolerated and that workers may report an issue anonymously if they desire. Recent training sessions are captured in photographs taken in several factories.





## Helpline Support for Brands: A TARGET CORPORATION CASE STUDY

**AMADER KOTHA:** Can you give an example when the Helpline brought an urgent issue to Target's attention and tell us what the company did about it?

**TARGET:** In one case, we received notification from the Helpline of a pay and benefits issue at one of the factories we use. We immediately reached out to understand the situation and to learn about the actions the factory had taken. We learned that the payout of annual leave, per factory policy to be paid out on the employee's work anniversary, was not aligned in the past three months. Payments at the corrected level were made right away even though the factory was not legally required to make payments until later in the year.

**AMADER KOTHA:** What was the root cause of the issue and what did the factory do about it?

**TARGET:** The factory identified lack of proper awareness by management and workers as root cause of this worker-reported issue. This led to the miscommunication. We determined that there was a need to create awareness among the entire workforce about the relevant policy requirements and also to strengthen the factory's internal grievance system. As a result, the factory increased worker trainings on pay and benefits and grievance processes. The human resource department committed to focus more on monitoring and quickly resolving floor-level grievances on payment. This work on creating policy awareness and worker education continues even though the urgent issue was addressed immediately.

**AMADER KOTHA:** In general, what has been the reaction of factories to the Helpline?

**TARGET:** We have found our business partners to be responsive to the need for effective grievance mechanisms since we take a continuous improvement and partnership approach. This approach has resulted in an increased appreciation of the need to follow up on issues raised by the Helpline since the Helpline enhances workers' trust. Our business partners now take the issues highlighted by the Helpline as a key area of continued improvement for their business.

**AMADER KOTHA:** Do you see the Helpline as a cost-saving tool? In other words, does the Helpline's grievance process save your company's compliance team from making additional assessments, site visits, or other activities that reduces costs or frees up resources that can be deployed elsewhere?

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*Our business partners now take the issues highlighted by the Helpline as a key area of continued improvement for their business.*


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**TARGET:** As a collaborative initiative, the Helpline is an efficient and very useful platform to collect worker feedback. It provides us an additional tool to increase workers' trust and serves as a mechanism for direct engagement. In some cases, we have been notified of issues that may not have been raised otherwise during the audit process or perhaps may not have been found out in a timely manner. The Helpline offers a shared tool for worker outreach that, coupled with assessments and our own visits, makes the grievance system more effective and trustworthy. It helps empower workers by capturing their voice independently.

**AMADER KOTHA:** Is Helpline data used to assess overall factory performance and measure risk?

**TARGET:** Helpline data is one of many performance measures to evaluate a business partner. It is not the only tool, but it does play a vital role as we enroll a new factory and continue engagement with existing ones. Although the Amader Kotha Helpline was established for the purpose of protecting worker safety, workers can call about any issue. Similar to Target Integrity Hotline, this gives us greater real-time visibility to factory conditions, directly from workers.

**AMADER KOTHA:** Do any have any other comments about the Helpline's impact on your company's corporate responsibility program?

**TARGET:** We hold ourselves and our business partners accountable to the highest ethical standards. Our Standards of Vendor Engagement (SOVE) require that our business partners share our ethical practices, uphold our standards and make sure that everything we source is produced in accordance with all applicable laws, international standards and our policies. We are committed to the Helpline as it has helped us reiterate this message to our business partners and workers at large and has been one of the most efficient and effective tools to promote understanding and prompt compliance with our policies and commitments. 





## Amader Kotha Helpline: THE FACTORY PERSPECTIVE

Factory managers are the first to receive information provided to the Helpline from workers, taking into account the need for anonymity of workers when requested. In urgent cases, factory management take immediate steps to ensure that workers are safe. Then, they can investigate to understand the scope of the concern and identify solutions.

**NOTE:** The comments below result from a compilation of information from factory managers about Helpline operations and impacts and do not represent the views of any single factory.


### WHAT ARE THE COMMON CASES REPORTED?

A large number of cases have been reported involving physical abuse, verbal abuse, blocked aisles, termination, and wages. The physical abuse cases are most commonly the result of inappropriate action when production targets were not met. This is also true for verbal harassment cases.

### ARE THE NUMBER OF INSTANCES OF COMMON CASES GOING UP OR DOWN?

We see the number of cases going down after initial implementation of the Helpline. Factories are working to strengthen their internal channels so we can learn about problems even faster and resolve them. Management understands that lots of cases need to be addressed with better understanding and implementation of company policies across the group's factories.

### DO YOU ALSO TAKE STEPS TO PREVENT A RE-OCCURRENCE OF THE PROBLEMS REPORTED BY THE HELPLINE?

Absolutely. Our factory needs to conduct different awareness sessions, often in collaboration with the brands such as OHS, fire safety, and anti-harassment training. Helpline training for managers and workers with clear tracking to measure effectiveness is important too. Sometimes brands will send a third-party to investigate a complex issue, such as Better Work. It's hard for the brands to visit the factories every time an issue is raised so we can create our own process for the investigation process. 

### HAVE BRANDS BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF THE USE OF THE HELPLINE IN YOUR FACTORY?

Yes. In general our customers have supported the actions we have taken in response to information received from workers from the Helpline. Our customers have encouraged us. One result is that we have better communications about compliance issues with our customers than before.

### WHAT DO YOU EXPECT TO GAIN FROM THE HELPLINE IN THE FUTURE?

We hope to continue to improve our ability to have open communications with workers, to solve problems when they arise, and to maintain good relations with our customers and as well as between owner and workers.

