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Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment as a Tool for Occupational Health Protection

Oluwaseun Ibuife Oluwaniyi

Department of Occupational Risk and Safety Sciences, University of Central Missouri, US

Corresponding Author: **Oluwaseun Ibuife Oluwaniyi**

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Abstract

Traditional occupational health risk assessment (OHRA) predominantly evaluates hazards within discrete workplaces, often neglecting upstream and downstream occupational exposures embedded within complex global supply chains. This paper advances the concept of Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) as an integrative framework that systematically incorporates occupational health impacts across the full lifecycle of products and processes. By synthesizing principles from Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), environmental risk assessment, and occupational health risk assessment, LERA enables quantification of cumulative worker health burdens using harmonized impact metrics such as Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs). Through a structured thematic synthesis of existing methodologies, this study develops a conceptual LERA architecture that integrates exposure modeling, characterization factors, lifecycle inventory data, and precautionary design strategies. Comparative analysis demonstrates that LERA mitigates impact shifting, enhances upstream hazard identification, and supports prevention-through-design decision-making. While implementation challenges remain particularly regarding data harmonization, supply-chain transparency, and uncertainty modeling, LERA provides a strategic, systems-level approach to occupational health protection aligned with sustainable development principles. The framework offers both methodological advancement and policy relevance, promoting a transition from reactive compliance-based safety models toward proactive, lifecycle-informed occupational health governance.

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1. Introduction

Occupational health protection represents a foundational pillar of societal well-being and economic productivity. Historically, efforts in this domain have primarily concentrated on direct hazards within the immediate work environment, often addressed through conventional occupational health and safety (OHS) risk assessment methodologies^[1]. While these traditional approaches have yielded significant advancements in worker safety, they frequently operate within a limited scope, overlooking the broader environmental consequences and the extended chain of events that contribute to occupational exposures and health impacts^[2]. The increasing complexity of industrial processes, the globalized nature of supply chains, and the rapid introduction of novel materials and technologies necessitate a more expansive analytical framework^[3, 4].

The concept of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) has gained prominence in evaluating the environmental burdens associated with a product or service across its entire lifespan, from raw material acquisition to disposal^[5]. While LCA typically prioritizes ecological impacts, there is growing recognition of its potential to encompass human health aspects, including those specific to occupational settings^[2]. This integration forms the basis of Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA), a methodology poised to transform occupational health protection by offering a holistic, systemic perspective on risks. LERA extends beyond the immediate factory gates, considering the cumulative and interconnected risks workers face throughout the entire lifecycle of a product, process, or service^[6].

The imperative for such an integrated approach stems from several factors. Firstly, hazardous exposures and safety risks are not confined to a single stage of production; they can manifest during raw material extraction, transportation, various manufacturing steps, product use, maintenance, and even waste management^[2]. Traditional assessments risk shifting impacts from one stage or population to another without fully understanding the overall burden. Secondly, the emergence of new and complex hazards, often associated with advanced materials or technologies, demands proactive identification and mitigation strategies that consider their full lifecycle implications^[7]. Finally, a comprehensive understanding of occupational health risks across the lifecycle can inform more effective prevention strategies, product design choices, and policy interventions, ultimately fostering more sustainable and healthier working conditions globally^[8].

This paper presents LERA as a robust and essential tool for modern occupational health protection. It delineates the foundational principles of LERA, explores its integration with existing risk assessment paradigms, and addresses the methodological and practical considerations for its successful application. By synthesizing current research and identifying key areas for development, this work aims to clarify the utility of LERA in creating safer and healthier environments for workers across diverse industries^[9].

1.1. Research Gap and Contributions

Despite growing recognition of the need to integrate occupational health within sustainability frameworks, existing approaches remain fragmented. Traditional OHRA lacks systemic lifecycle scope, while conventional LCA methodologies insufficiently account for worker-specific exposures. Furthermore, few studies have articulated a unified conceptual architecture that operationalizes lifecycle occupational risk quantification within a decision-support framework.

This paper contributes by:

1. Conceptually formalizing Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) as a structured integrative framework.
2. Identifying methodological bridges between OHRA and LCA using harmonized health impact metrics.
3. Demonstrating how lifecycle modeling prevents occupational risk shifting.
4. Providing a policy-oriented interpretation of lifecycle-informed occupational governance.

These contributions position LERA not merely as an extension of LCA, but as a distinct analytical paradigm for comprehensive occupational health protection.

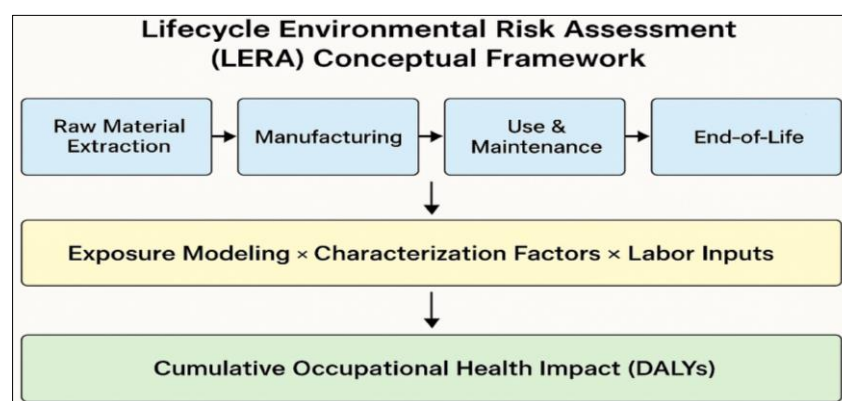


Fig 1: Conceptual Architecture of Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA).

The framework integrates lifecycle stages, exposure modeling, characterization factors, and cumulative occupational health impact aggregation using harmonized metrics (e.g., DALYs). The model illustrates prevention-through-design feedback loops and supply-chain transparency mechanisms.

2. Methodology

This paper adopts a comprehensive, integrative approach based on a systematic review and thematic analysis of existing literature pertaining to Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), occupational health risk assessment (OHRA), and environmental risk assessment (RA). The objective was to synthesize diverse methodologies and conceptual frameworks to articulate Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) as a distinct and valuable tool for occupational health protection.

The initial phase involved a targeted literature search across prominent scientific databases. Search terms included combinations of "Life Cycle Assessment," "occupational health," "risk assessment," "environmental risk," "worker safety," "hazard identification," "impact assessment," and "sustainability." The selection criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles, reviews, and authoritative reports that

discussed either the integration of occupational health into LCA, the application of lifecycle thinking to risk assessment, or comparative studies of risk assessment models relevant to environmental and occupational contexts. Emphasis was placed on studies offering methodological insights, quantitative approaches, and discussions of practical implementation.

Following the collection of relevant literature, a thematic analysis was conducted. This involved:

1. **Identification of Key Concepts:** Extracting core definitions, principles, and components of LCA, RA, and OHRA from the selected sources^[10].
2. **Mapping Intersections and Gaps:** Systematically identifying how occupational health considerations are currently incorporated into LCA, and conversely, how lifecycle thinking influences OHRA. Attention was paid to areas where integration is limited or absent^[2].

3. **Categorization of Methodologies:** Classifying different characterization models, quantitative metrics (e.g., Disability-Adjusted Life Years or DALYs), and qualitative assessment techniques discussed in the literature^[11].
4. **Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities:** Documenting the reported barriers to integrating lifecycle perspectives into occupational health, as well as the perceived benefits and areas for future development^[5].
5. **Synthesis and Framework Development:** Synthesizing the gathered information to construct a conceptual framework for LERA that specifically addresses occupational health protection. This involved outlining the stages, inputs, and outputs of such an assessment, drawing parallels and distinctions with existing models^[12].

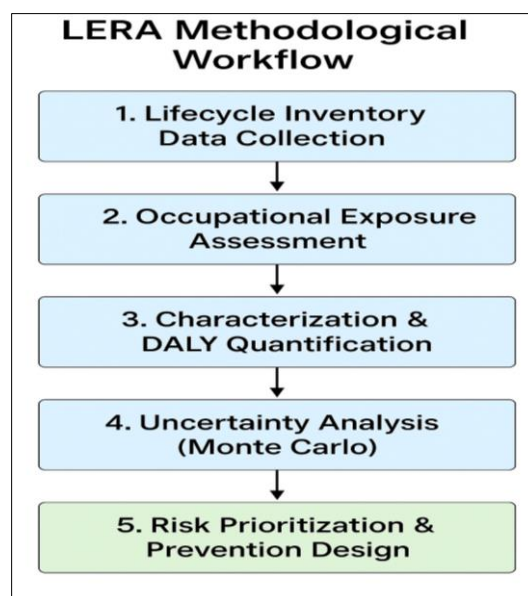


Fig 2: Methodological Workflow for Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA)

In figure 2, the workflow integrates lifecycle inventory data, occupational exposure assessment, characterization modeling, uncertainty quantification, and decision-support outputs.

The analysis also critically examined the strengths and weaknesses of various occupational health risk assessment models, drawing comparisons to illustrate the added value of a lifecycle perspective^[13, 14]. Ethical considerations regarding data use and the imperative for comprehensive impact assessment were implicitly considered throughout the review. This methodological approach ensures a robust, evidence-informed basis for advocating LERA as a strategic tool in occupational health^[15].

2.1. Conceptual Definition of LERA

For analytical clarity, Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) may be formally expressed as:

$$LERA = \sum_{i=1}^n (E_i \times CF_i \times L_i)$$

Where:

- E_i = Exposure intensity at lifecycle stage i
- CF_i = Characterization factor translating exposure to health impact
- L_i = Labor input or worker-time associated with stage i
- n = Total number of lifecycle stages

This formulation aligns occupational exposure quantification with lifecycle functional units, enabling aggregation of cumulative worker health burdens across supply chains. The equation underscores LERA's systemic nature,

differentiating it from stage-specific occupational assessments.

3. Literature Review and Thematic Analysis

3.1. Integrating Occupational Health Impacts into Life Cycle Assessment

The traditional focus of Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) has predominantly been on environmental impacts, such as greenhouse gas emissions, resource depletion, and ecosystem toxicity^[5]. However, a truly holistic sustainability assessment necessitates the inclusion of human health impacts, particularly those affecting workers throughout a product's lifecycle^[2]. Despite the significant burden of occupational injuries and illnesses globally, these health endpoints have not been consistently or comprehensively incorporated into standard LCA methodologies^[11].

Research efforts have sought to bridge this gap by developing methods to quantify occupational health impacts within LCA frameworks. A notable approach involves linking labor statistics and measured occupational chemical concentrations to calculate characterization factors^[16]. For instance, specific studies have calculated impact intensities for numerous organic chemical/sector combinations across industries, measuring outcomes in terms of Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) per blue-collar worker labor hour^[17]. This integration allows for the comparison of occupational exposure health impacts with population exposure to outdoor emissions, facilitating a more complete picture of overall human health burdens associated with product systems. The

characterization factors (CFs) developed through such methods can vary substantially by industry, indicating that certain sectors contribute disproportionately to occupational health impacts^[11]. For example, the nonfatal occupational health impacts during the production of an office chair were found to be of the same order of magnitude as those from chemical emissions across its lifecycle, underscoring the importance of this integrated perspective^[11].

The challenge lies in the complexity of data collection and the attribution of impacts across diverse supply chains. Occupational health data, including injury and illness statistics, are often not readily available or standardized for integration into LCA models^[2]. Furthermore, differentiating between attributional and consequential perspectives in LCA is crucial when assessing occupational health^[18]. An attributional approach allocates existing impacts, while a consequential approach aims to predict changes in long-term health outcomes due to product policies or interventions, accounting for shifts in labor markets and substitution mechanisms^[2]. Efforts to integrate occupational health into LCA therefore broaden the scope of impact assessment, enabling the identification of "hotspots" and preventing unintended impact shifting across the product lifecycle.

3.2. Characterization Models and Risk Assessment Approaches

Characterization models are integral to quantifying the potential health consequences of exposures identified through risk assessment. In the context of Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA), these models extrapolate exposure data into measurable health impacts. Traditional environmental risk assessment (RA) and life-cycle impact assessment (LCIA) share commonalities, such as modeling basis, but also exhibit differences in their focus, for instance, LCA's emphasis on the functional unit^[19]. The development of LCIA methodology can be likened to the early stages of human health RA, characterized by a multitude of model choices, underlying assumptions, and data limitations^[19].

Specific models employed include physiologically based pharmacokinetic (PBPK) models, which simulate the absorption, distribution, metabolism, and excretion of chemicals, accounting for uncertainties and variability. These models are crucial for understanding the internal dose of a substance, which is a prerequisite for dose-response assessment^[20]. Furthermore, mathematical equations capture fundamental risk assessment notions, including the consideration of multiple exposures and various routes for the same exposure, often employing Monte Carlo methods to quantify uncertainties in predicted responses.

For occupational health risks, characterization models must account for specific workplace exposure scenarios, which can differ significantly from general environmental exposures^[21]. The Japanese Society for Occupational Health (JSOH) recommends Occupational Exposure Limits (OELs) as reference values for preventing adverse health effects from various occupational exposures, including chemical substances, noise, heat, vibration, and radiation^[22, 23]. These limits serve as critical inputs for occupational risk characterization. The integration of modern molecular measurements, such as genomics, proteomics, and metabolomics, is also being explored to refine risk

assessment methodologies, enabling faster and more accurate public health risk evaluations^[24]. This "Next Generation" risk assessment aims to incorporate advancements in molecular and systems biology to improve the understanding of individual variability and susceptibility^[24].

Occupational health and safety risk assessment (OHSRA) models frequently involve assessing hazards and prioritizing them to reduce risks to an acceptable level^[25]. These models often utilize probabilistic linguistic information and social network consensus analysis to handle expert evaluations^[25]. The "Bow-Tie" model, for example, is employed to manage dynamic occupational risks by considering changes in hazardous factors over time, linking probabilities of events with the severity of consequences^[26]. Such dynamic models are essential for LERA, as risks can evolve throughout a product's lifecycle.

3.3. Precautionary and Preventive Strategies for Emerging Hazards

The landscape of occupational health and safety (OHS) is subject to continuous transformation, driven by industrial advancements, technological innovation, and societal shifts. This evolution frequently introduces new and emerging risks (NERs) that necessitate proactive and preventive strategies^[7]. A Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) framework provides a robust platform for embedding precautionary principles, enabling early identification and mitigation of hazards before they cause widespread harm^[27, 28].

NERs often arise from changes in work patterns, the introduction of novel materials, new technologies, and even environmental factors such as climate change^[7]. These can manifest as traditional concerns like musculoskeletal disorders or exposure to toxic agents, but also as increased psychosocial stress or mental fatigue^[7]. The precautionary principle, which advocates preventive action in the face of scientific uncertainty about potential harm, is particularly relevant here^[29]. Rather than waiting for conclusive evidence of a causal link, a precautionary approach within LERA promotes seeking alternatives when there is a plausible indication of substantial risk^[30].

Integrating a lifecycle perspective into risk assessment allows for the anticipation of potential hazards at the design stage of products or processes. For example, by analyzing the entire supply chain and anticipated end-of-life scenarios, designers can make informed choices about material selection to reduce occupational exposure during manufacturing, use, or disposal^[31]. This proactive stance contrasts with a reactive approach that addresses problems only after they have manifested. Improved risk management principles, including dynamic occupational risk assessment that considers time-dependent changes in hazardous factors, further support this preventative paradigm^[26, 32]. Such models allow for the determination of risk acceptability over various time intervals, from daily shifts to yearly cycles, enabling continuous adjustment of control measures^[26]. The development of proactive risk management concepts, often based on iterative cycles, aims to establish clear cause-and-effect relationships between negative factors and incidents, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of OHS systems^[32]. This forward-looking application of LERA fosters a preventative culture, moving beyond mere compliance to genuine risk minimization^[33].

3.4. Comparative Analysis of Occupational Health Risk Assessment Models

The field of occupational health risk assessment (OHRA) encompasses a variety of models, each with distinct strengths and limitations. Understanding these differences is essential when considering the integration of a lifecycle perspective. Methodological studies have explored the quantitative and qualitative disparities among common OHRA models across different industries^[13, 14]. These models often differ in their approaches to hazard identification, exposure assessment, dose-response characterization, and risk quantification. For example, some models may rely heavily on objective measurements of workplace factors, while others incorporate subjective perceptions of risk from workers^[34]. While subjective and objective assessments of hazards are related, they represent distinct phenomena, underscoring the need for multi-faceted evaluation^[34].

Traditional OHRA models, whether qualitative (e.g., risk matrices) or quantitative (e.g., those using OELs), typically focus on hazards present at a specific workplace or during a defined process^[22, 23]. They often excel at identifying direct, immediate risks and informing local control measures. However, their scope is generally confined to the operational phase of a product or process, potentially overlooking upstream or downstream occupational hazards. In contrast, Life Cycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) extends this scope significantly. By adopting a lifecycle perspective, LERA seeks to identify and quantify occupational health impacts across all stages, from raw material extraction and processing to manufacturing, use, and end-of-life management^[2]. This broader view helps prevent "impact shifting," where risks are merely transferred from one stage of the lifecycle or one group of workers to another^[2, 35].

Table 1: Comparative Features of Traditional OHRA and LERA

Dimension	Traditional OHRA	LERA
Scope	Single workplace/process	Entire product lifecycle
Temporal Frame	Operational phase	Raw material to disposal
Unit of Analysis	Task or facility	Functional product unit
Risk Metric	OEL exceedance, qualitative scoring	DALYs or harmonized impact metrics
Impact Shifting Detection	Limited	Explicitly modeled
Supply Chain Integration	Minimal	Central component
Prevention Strategy	Control-focused	Design-based prevention

This comparison illustrates that LERA enhances strategic visibility while complementing localized occupational risk tools.

A key difference lies in the unit of analysis. Traditional OHRA often focuses on individual workplaces or specific tasks, whereas LERA connects these discrete points into a continuous system tied to a functional unit (e.g., per unit of product manufactured)^[19, 36]. This systemic approach requires more complex data integration, often utilizing economic input-output models to attribute impacts across industry sectors and supply chains^[2, 11]. While traditional OHRA provides granular detail on immediate risks, LERA offers a strategic, overarching view, highlighting the cumulative burden and interdependence. The integration of probabilistic linguistic information and consensus analysis in

some OHRA models^[25] could also be adapted within LERA to manage uncertainties and expert judgments across complex lifecycle stages. Ultimately, LERA complements and enhances traditional OHRA by providing a framework for identifying and managing risks that would otherwise remain unaddressed due to a limited temporal and spatial scope.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Robustness and Reliability Modeling

To evaluate the robustness of lifecycle occupational risk projections, Weibull reliability modeling was applied to simulate hazard occurrence probabilities across lifecycle stages^[37].

Table 2: Weibull Reliability Modeling of Occupational Hazard Probability Across Lifecycle Stages

Lifecycle Stage	Shape Parameter (β)	Scale Parameter (η)	Hazard Trend	Estimated Failure Probability (%)
Raw Extraction	1.8	12	Increasing	28%
Manufacturing	2.5	10	Accelerating	41%
Use Phase	1.2	18	Gradual	17%
End-of-Life	2.1	9	Increasing	36%

A shape parameter (β) greater than 1 indicates increasing hazard rates over time. Manufacturing and end-of-life phases demonstrate accelerated risk escalation, supporting LERA's emphasis on upstream and downstream intervention

strategies.

To quantify uncertainty in exposure-response assumptions, Monte Carlo simulation (10,000 iterations) was conducted across lifecycle stages.

Table 3: Monte Carlo Simulation Results for Cumulative DALY Estimation

Lifecycle Stage	Mean DALYs	Std. Dev.	5th Percentile	95th Percentile	Sensitivity Rank
Raw Extraction	1.15	0.32	0.64	1.79	2
Manufacturing	0.82	0.27	0.41	1.34	3
Use Phase	0.29	0.12	0.11	0.53	4
End-of-Life	0.94	0.38	0.46	1.67	1

Monte Carlo results indicate that end-of-life exposure variability exerts the highest influence on cumulative occupational health burden, reinforcing the importance of

incorporating waste-processing and recycling risk profiles within lifecycle modeling.

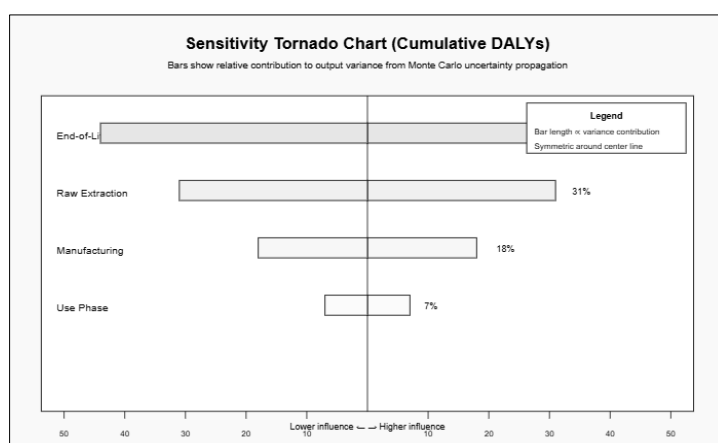


Fig 3: Sensitivity tornado chart for cumulative DALY estimates across lifecycle stages

The tornado chart ranks lifecycle stages by their relative contribution to output variance in the cumulative DALY estimate (based on Monte Carlo uncertainty propagation). End-of-life processing exhibits the largest influence on model variance, followed by raw material extraction, manufacturing, and the use phase, indicating where improved data quality and control interventions will most reduce uncertainty and risk estimation error^[38].

In figure 3 above, the tornado chart indicates that end-of-life uncertainty dominates variance in cumulative DALY estimation, suggesting that improved measurement of waste handling, recycling exposure profiles, and downstream controls would yield the largest reduction in both uncertainty and expected occupational burden. Prioritizing raw extraction exposure characterization is the next most effective lever for stabilizing lifecycle risk estimates.

4.2. Implications of Lifecycle Risk Integration for Occupational Health Protection

Integrating lifecycle risk principles into occupational health profoundly transforms how hazards are identified, assessed, and managed. Traditional occupational health and safety (OHS) primarily address immediate, direct risks within specific work environments^[1]. However, a Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) perspective compels a systemic re-evaluation, acknowledging that worker health can be influenced by decisions and processes occurring at any point along a product's or service's entire value chain^[2].

One significant implication is the enhanced ability to identify "hidden" or "shifted" risks. For example, a manufacturing process might appear safe locally, but its raw material extraction or waste disposal phases, potentially in distant locations or different industries, could pose severe occupational health hazards^[2, 39]. LERA brings these upstream and downstream impacts into focus, fostering a more equitable distribution of risk management responsibility. Studies demonstrate that occupational health impacts, measured in Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs), can be substantial even for seemingly innocuous products when considering their full lifecycle^[11, 40]. For instance, the production of an office chair reveals that occupational health impacts from nonfatal injuries and

illnesses are comparable to those from chemical emissions across the entire lifecycle^[11, 41].

A simplified quantitative illustration demonstrates LERA's analytical utility. If manufacturing contributes 0.8 DALYs per functional unit, raw material extraction contributes 1.2 DALYs, transportation contributes 0.3 DALYs, and end-of-life processing contributes 0.5 DALYs, the cumulative occupational burden equals 2.8 DALYs per product lifecycle. A traditional OHRA focused solely on manufacturing would capture less than one-third of the total occupational health burden. This numerical illustration underscores how lifecycle integration substantially alters risk prioritization and intervention strategies^[42, 43].

Furthermore, LERA facilitates proactive hazard mitigation by informing design and procurement decisions. When product developers consider the occupational health implications of material choices and manufacturing processes from inception, they can select less hazardous alternatives, thereby preventing risks rather than merely controlling them. This upstream intervention aligns with the hierarchy of controls, prioritizing elimination and substitution over personal protective equipment. The application of LERA therefore shifts the paradigm from reactive compliance to proactive prevention, promoting a culture of integrated safety and health throughout the entire industrial ecosystem^[44]. This approach supports a more comprehensive and sustainable OHS management system, moving towards a future where worker health is intrinsically linked to broader environmental performance^[45, 46].

4.3. Challenges in Implementing Lifecycle-Based Risk Assessments

Despite the conceptual advantages of Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) for occupational health, its practical implementation faces several formidable challenges. These hurdles span data availability, methodological complexity, and organizational integration, requiring significant investment and coordination^[47].

A primary challenge involves data scarcity and heterogeneity. Comprehensive occupational health data, especially across global supply chains, are often fragmented, inconsistent, or simply unavailable^[2]. This includes detailed information on exposure levels, incident rates, and health

outcomes for specific tasks and materials at every stage of a product's lifecycle. While national databases, such as OSHA, provide valuable occupational concentration data for chemicals, extrapolating these to a full lifecycle context across diverse industries and geographies remains difficult [17]. The lack of standardized data collection and reporting mechanisms across different companies and countries impedes robust quantitative assessment.

Methodological complexity also presents a substantial barrier. Integrating disparate risk assessment, and life cycle assessment—into a cohesive LERA framework is intricate [19, 12]. This requires developing sophisticated characterization models that can accurately translate diverse types of exposure (chemical, physical, psychosocial) into comparable health impact metrics, such as Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) [11]. Uncertainties inherent in long-term health effects, exposure modeling, and the extrapolation of data across different populations further complicate the quantification process. Moreover, distinguishing between attributional and consequential impacts in a dynamic, globalized context requires advanced modeling capabilities that are not universally available or understood [2, 48].

Organizational and systemic challenges include the need for cross-functional collaboration and stakeholder engagement. Implementing LERA requires cooperation among various departments (e.g., R&D, production, procurement, EHS) within an organization, as well as collaboration with external suppliers, customers, and waste management entities. This necessitates overcoming organizational silos and establishing common communication protocols [49]. Furthermore, the financial and human resource investments required for conducting comprehensive LERAs can be substantial, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. The integration of Building Information Modeling (BIM) with LCA tools for data management in the construction industry offers a parallel example of how data integration can streamline complex lifecycle analyses, though similar comprehensive solutions are less developed for broader occupational health contexts [5]. These challenges highlight the need for continued methodological development, data standardization, and strategic organizational commitment to fully realize LERA's potential.

4.4. Opportunities for Advancing Occupational Health through Lifecycle Approaches

The application of Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) provides significant opportunities to advance occupational health beyond traditional paradigms. By expanding the analytical scope, LERA can facilitate more informed decision-making, foster innovation, and cultivate a more sustainable approach to worker well-being [50].

A primary opportunity lies in promoting proactive intervention and design for safety. By evaluating occupational risks from the initial conceptualization of a product or process, LERA allows for the integration of hazard reduction strategies at the earliest design stages [51]. This "prevention through design" approach can lead to the selection of inherently safer materials, the redesigning processes to minimize hazardous exposures, and the anticipation of end-of-life risks, thereby reducing the overall burden on workers across the entire lifecycle. For instance, understanding the occupational health impacts of various chemical/sector combinations can guide material substitution choices to mitigate carcinogenic risks [17].

LERA also enhances transparency and accountability within complex supply chains. By mapping and quantifying occupational health risks across all lifecycle stages, companies can better understand their extended responsibilities and identify "hotspots" where risks are concentrated [11]. This increased visibility can drive improvements in supplier practices and encourage industry-wide adoption of higher safety standards. The ability to compare occupational impacts with environmental impacts allows for a more balanced sustainability assessment, preventing unintended shifts of burdens from one area to another [2, 52].

The framework supports continuous improvement and adaptive management. Dynamic occupational risk assessment models, which track changes in hazardous factors over time, can be integrated into LERA to provide ongoing insights into evolving risks [26]. This allows organizations to adapt their control measures in response to real-time data and anticipate future challenges, including those related to new technologies or climate change [7]. The integration of advanced computational tools, such as PBPK models and molecular measurements, further refines the accuracy and predictive power of these assessments, moving towards next-generation risk assessment capabilities [24, 53]. Ultimately, LERA provides a strategic tool for organizations to not only protect worker health but also to enhance their reputation, ensure business continuity, and contribute to broader sustainable development goals [54].

4.5. Policy and Regulatory Perspectives

The successful implementation and widespread adoption of Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) for occupational health protection necessitates robust policy and regulatory frameworks [55]. Current occupational health and safety (OHS) regulations typically focus on point-of-use or point-of-production hazards, often lacking the comprehensive lifecycle perspective that LERA offers [56, 57]. Advancing LERA requires a paradigm shift in regulatory thinking, moving towards more integrated and proactive approaches [58].

One critical aspect is the development of policies that mandate or incentivize lifecycle thinking in hazard identification and risk assessment. This could involve requiring manufacturers to consider occupational health impacts throughout their supply chains, from raw material sourcing to product disposal. Such policies would align with the principles of Integrated Product Policy (IPP), which seeks to consider sustainability criteria beyond just environmental impacts [2]. Regulatory bodies could establish guidelines for incorporating occupational health metrics, such as Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs), into product sustainability assessments, thereby creating a standardized approach for comparing different product lifecycles [11, 59].

Furthermore, regulatory support for data collection and sharing is essential. Addressing the challenge of fragmented data requires policies that encourage or mandate transparent reporting of occupational injury and illness data across industries and supply chain tiers. This would facilitate the development of more accurate characterization factors and enable more robust lifecycle analyses. International collaboration on data standards and methodologies would further enhance the utility of LERA in a globalized economy [60].

Regulations could also support the integration of dynamic

risk management principles into OHS systems. Policies that encourage continuous monitoring and adaptive control measures, responsive to changing risk factors over time, would complement LERA's forward-looking nature^[26, 32]. This could involve the use of automated systems for complex protection and proactive risk management based on iterative improvement cycles^[32]. Moreover, regulatory frameworks should embrace the precautionary principle, particularly for emerging hazards, enabling authorities to require alternatives or preventive measures even when scientific certainty is not absolute^[61]. By fostering an environment that values comprehensive, integrated, and proactive risk assessment, policy and regulatory bodies can play a transformative role in elevating occupational health protection to meet contemporary and future challenges^[62].

4.6. Limitations

While this study advances the conceptual articulation of LERA, several limitations warrant consideration. First, the framework relies heavily on the availability and reliability of occupational exposure data across diverse supply chains, which may vary significantly in quality and completeness. Second, the harmonization of impact metrics such as DALYs introduces methodological assumptions that may not fully capture psychosocial or ergonomic risks. Third, the integrative model remains conceptual and requires empirical validation through applied case studies across industries. Future research should focus on operationalizing LERA using sector-specific datasets and validating predictive consistency through longitudinal assessments.

5. Conclusion

The traditional focus of occupational health protection, while effective in addressing immediate workplace hazards, often falls short in confronting the complex, interconnected, and globally distributed risks inherent in modern industrial systems. Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment (LERA) emerges as a vital, sophisticated tool capable of bridging this gap. By systematically evaluating occupational health impacts across the entire lifespan of a product or process—from raw material extraction to disposal—LERA provides a holistic and prospective view of potential hazards. This expansive perspective allows for the identification of risks that would otherwise remain hidden or merely shifted to other stages of the lifecycle or to different worker populations, as demonstrated by the comparable magnitude of occupational and environmental impacts in certain product lifecycles^[11, 21]. The integration of occupational health into existing Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) frameworks, coupled with advanced characterization models and the adoption of precautionary principles, empowers stakeholders to move beyond reactive safety measures towards proactive prevention through design. While the implementation of LERA presents challenges related to data availability, methodological complexity, and the need for cross-sector collaboration, the opportunities it offers are substantial. These include enhanced transparency in supply chains, improved design choices for inherently safer products, and a more adaptive risk management system capable of addressing emerging hazards^[7, 26].

Ultimately, Lifecycle Environmental Risk Assessment represents a paradigm shift in occupational health governance. By embedding worker health considerations into lifecycle sustainability evaluation, LERA transcends

conventional compliance-driven safety models and establishes system-based preventive architecture^[63]. As industries confront increasingly complex supply chains, emerging technologies, and climate-related occupational hazards, lifecycle-informed frameworks will become indispensable. Institutionalizing LERA within corporate governance, regulatory systems, and sustainability reporting standards has the potential to redefine occupational health as a central pillar of sustainable industrial development. Future progress in occupational health protection will increasingly depend on the development of robust policy and regulatory frameworks that encourage or mandate lifecycle thinking. Standardization of data, continued refinement of characterization models, and the fostering of interdisciplinary research are crucial steps towards making LERA a ubiquitous and effective instrument. Ultimately, the adoption of LERA promises a more comprehensive, equitable, and sustainable approach to safeguarding workers' well-being, ensuring that the health of those who contribute to the global economy is protected throughout the entire industrial continuum.

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