

Occupational safety and health put to the test

**Key findings from the Interim
Evaluation Report of the Joint
German Occupational Safety and
Health Strategy (GDA)**

Publishing information:

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The following are the main results of the 2nd interim report on the evaluation of the Joint German Occupational Safety and Health Strategy (GDA). The results are based on data collated in a survey of companies and employees. Approximately 6,500 companies and 5,512 employees were surveyed in the middle of 2011. The still ongoing analysis of the GDA work programmes was not yet taken into account. The full report as well as a short version (both in German) are available online at www.gda-portal.de.

The joint strategy is demonstrating its initial impact

Results from the company survey show that the GDA has had a positive effect on occupational safety and health within companies.

Companies that were involved in the GDA work programmes perform significantly better in important aspects of occupational safety and health (risk assessment in place, safety instructions, support provided by occupational physicians and occupational safety and health experts, etc) than those that were not involved in the programmes. This difference exists irrespective of factors such as company size, sector or geographic location.

Supervisory agencies and occupational safety and health regulations are predominantly perceived as positive by companies

The work of supervisory agencies in the area of occupational safety and health is predominantly perceived as positive by companies. In that regard, companies that have been visited since 2009, i.e. since the start of the GDA, have a more favourable opinion.

68% of all companies feel that they have received competent advice from supervisory agencies in the area of safety and health. This increases to 88% for those companies that have been visited since 2009.

72% of all companies identified only a minor disruption to work processes caused by company inspections. This rises to 92% for those companies that have been visited since 2009.

67% of all companies find that the respective responsibilities of the supervisory agencies (i.e. state authorities or accident insurers) are clearly structured. This increases to 84% for those companies that have been visited since 2009. These results are valid irrespective of sector or company size.

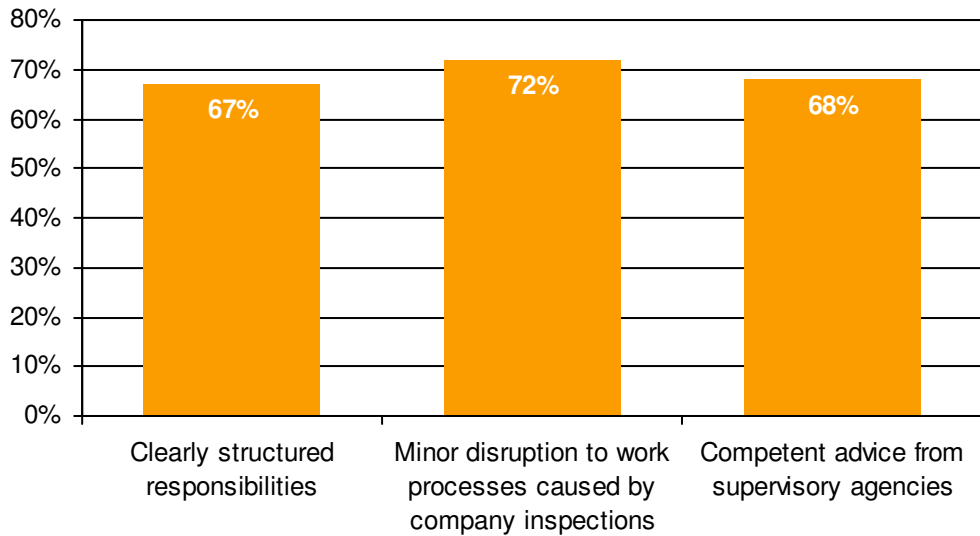


Figure 1 Companies' opinions on the work of supervisory agencies. Source: GDA company survey 2011

Rules and regulations on occupational safety and health enjoy a good level of acceptance among those to whom they apply.

61% of companies find that the regulations “are helpful for practical application”. 69% are of the opinion that the regulations “cover all relevant aspects”. 82% see their responsibilities clearly defined in the regulations and 68% find the regulations easy to understand. However, 60% and 54% respectively of companies find that the regulations are too detailed and “difficult to implement in some workplaces”.

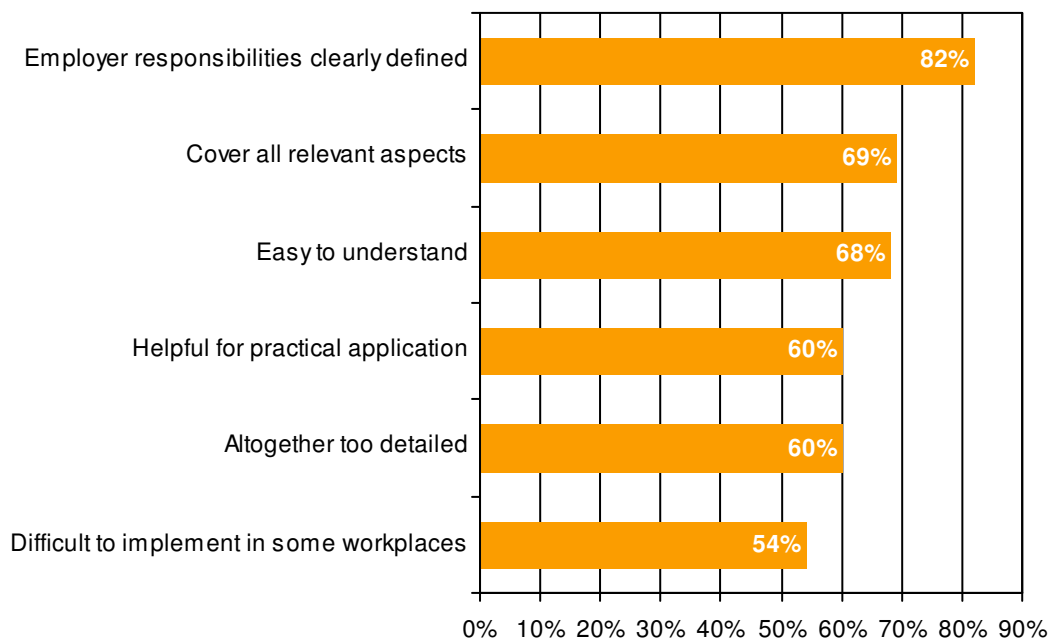


Figure 2 Companies' opinions on rules and regulations for occupational safety and health (multiple responses). Source: GDA company survey 2011

Most companies do not see occupational safety and health merely as a cost to be incurred but are also aware of its benefits.

48% of all companies are of the opinion that company occupational safety and health measures help to reduce costs. A further 40% assume that these measures will at the least have a neutral impact on a company's performance while only 9% consider occupational safety and health to be a cost factor which has no corresponding benefits.

Mixed results - advances and shortfalls in companies' occupational safety and health procedures

Implementing the requirement for risk assessment procedures varies significantly by sector and company size. Shortfalls exist above all in small companies and the services sector.

According to the company survey as part of the GDA evaluation, the implementation rate amounts to 51% in total (as of the middle of 2011). However, this situation is clearly differentiated depending on company size. The proportion of companies with an implemented risk assessment procedure increases with the number of employees:

- less than 10 employees: 41%
- 10 to 49 employees: 70%
- 50 to 249 employees: 90%
- 250 employees or more: 98%

In addition, the implementation rate varies significantly between sectors – it ranges from 36% (provision of services predominantly for businesses) up to 72% (food production).

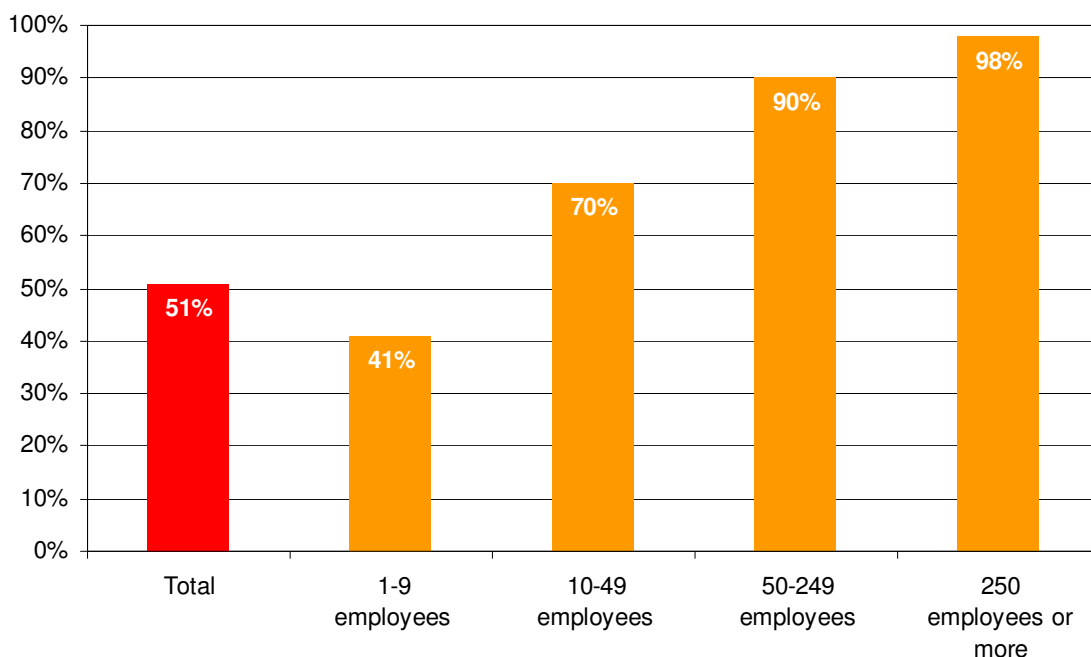


Figure 3 Percentage of companies with risk assessment procedures.
Source: GDA company survey 2011

The majority of companies with a risk assessment procedure in place have a positive view on the benefits of this process. However, some businesses that have implemented risk assessment procedures remain less than convinced about their relevance. This is especially the case for small businesses.

68% of companies that have a risk assessment procedure in place indicated that for them the benefits of such a measure are high or very high. On the other hand, up to one-third of companies that carry out risk assessment procedures rate their usefulness as low or very low.

When companies refrain from having a risk assessment procedure, then it is mainly due to the fact that they do not envisage any relevant risk potential and therefore do not see the prescribed processes as necessary.

The failure to implement risk assessment procedures was justified by 85% of the companies in question on the basis that from their perspective no significant risks or hazards exist in their operations. Indeed, in the services sector, 94% of companies responded in this way. In contrast, insufficient clarity of regulations or a lack of assistance play only a very minor role as reasons for not having a risk assessment procedure (15% of responses each).

Risk assessment procedures continue to mainly focus on the “classic” risk areas relating to the technical, spatial, physical and material-based aspects of work.

Those companies that do carry out risk assessment procedures mainly consider equipment (95%) as well as workplace design and the working environment (89% each). There is considerably less focus on workplace organisation (55%), working time organisation (48%), social relationships in the workplace (44%) and potential emotional strain caused by dealing with difficult groups of people (39%).

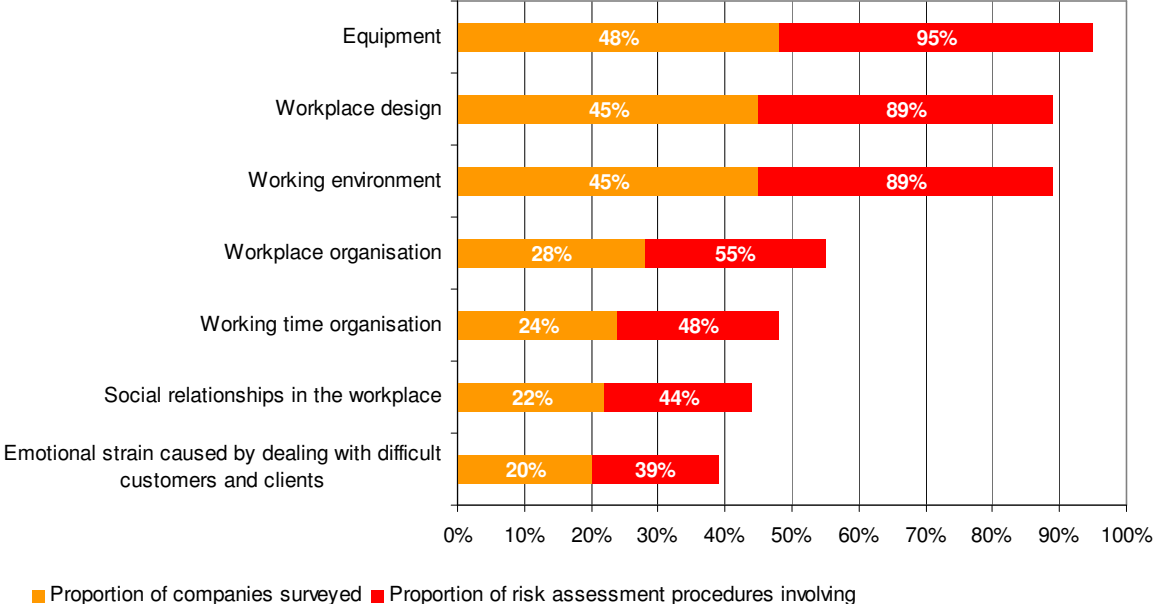


Figure 4 Risk areas incorporated into risk assessment procedures. Source: GDA company survey 2011

Physical strain is considered a much more likely reason for implementing risk assessment procedures than emotional strain.

The probability of a risk assessment being carried out increases significantly in those companies with a high level of physical strain, irrespective of company size or sector. In those companies whose work is strongly characterised by emotional strain, e.g. time pressure or dealing with difficult customers, this is not the case.

There are considerable gaps in the availability of support by occupational physicians and occupational safety and health experts, especially in small companies and some parts of the services sector.

According to their own account, 59% of companies have a technical safety support service in line with the relevant statutory requirements. This figure is only 40% in the case of similar statutory requirements for support by occupational physicians. Shortfalls in the support by occupational physicians as well as support by safety and health experts are particularly noticeable in very small companies (48% and 29% respectively) as well as in the retail trade/hospitality sectors (49% and 27% respectively) and business-related services (42% and 24% respectively).

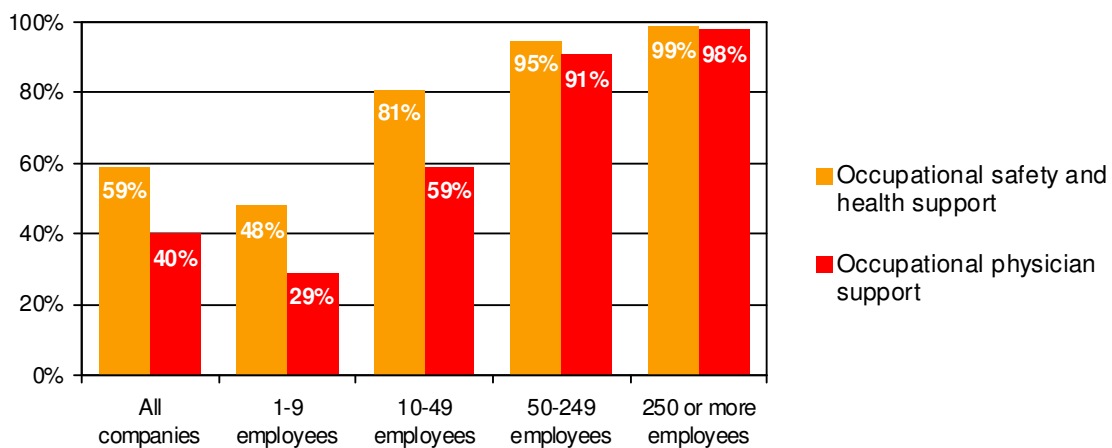


Figure 5 Percentage of companies with support provided by occupational safety and health experts and occupational physicians. Source: GDA company survey 2011

Information, communication and commitment – core elements of occupational safety and health in many companies

Almost all employees receive safety and health training in the workplace with the majority of these feeling that they are either well or very well informed on these issues.

In total 92% of employees surveyed indicated that they had been trained on or informed of safety and health issues. 75% feel that they are either well or very well informed on these issues with a further 13% responding that they are at least satisfied. These findings are almost the same across all company sizes.

Examples of training content include safe handling of machinery and work tools (83%), safe handling of hazardous substances and biological agents (80%), actions to be taken in case of accident or emergency (80%), identifying and removing danger spots (64%), healthy and correct body posture at work (53%) and workplace organisation measures to help avoid stress and strain (42%).

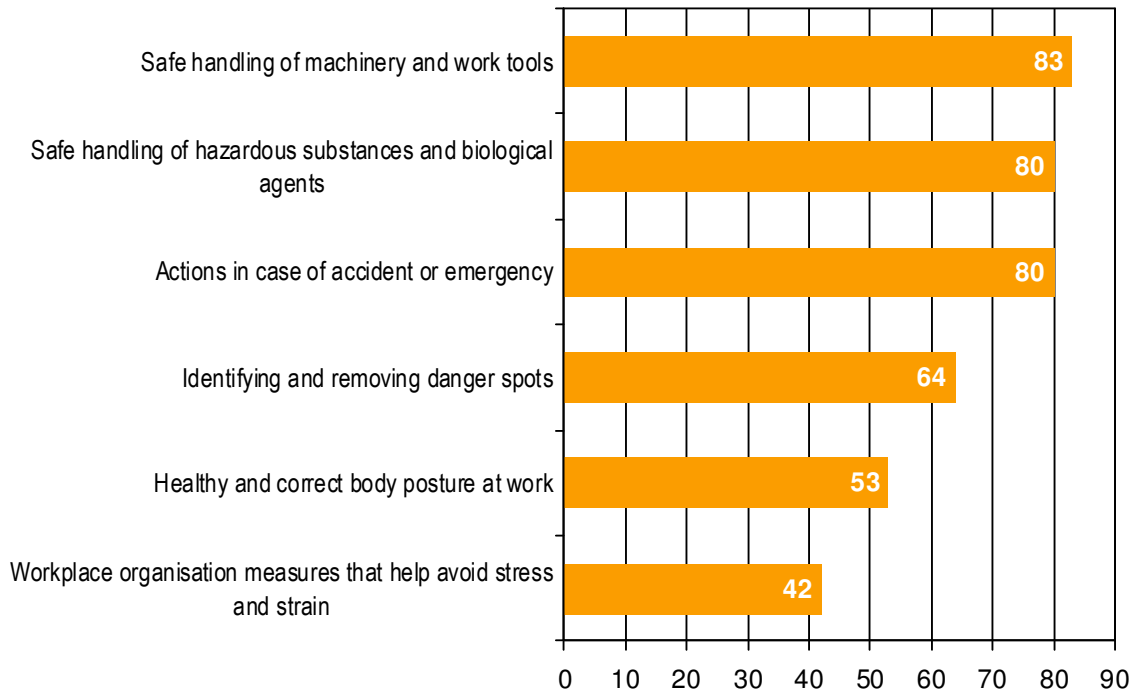


Figure 6 Occupational safety and health topics for which employees received training, % results of surveyed employees, multiple responses.
Source: GDA employee survey 2011

The report did not identify temporary agency workers being put at a disadvantage in relation to occupational safety and health training.

Agency workers do not see themselves as being less informed than other employees about safety and health. Indeed, they tend to be even better informed. Furthermore, in relation to voluntary safety and health programmes, in so far as they exist in a host company, agency workers are not placed at a disadvantage.

For foreign employees without sufficient German language skills, there is room for improvement in relation to occupational safety and health training.

40% of companies that employ foreign workers with poor German language skills provide occupational safety and health information in the workers' native language.

Regular communication on safety and health at work is an established practice in many companies. However, the percentage of companies in which occupational safety and health issues are at best sporadically addressed, is still considerable.

In total, 42% of companies indicated that safety and health issues are addressed several times per year or even per month as part of departmental and section meetings. For a further 28%, this happens once a year. However, in just under 30% of companies such issues are addressed only seldom or not at all. The frequency of such discussions increases with the size of the company.

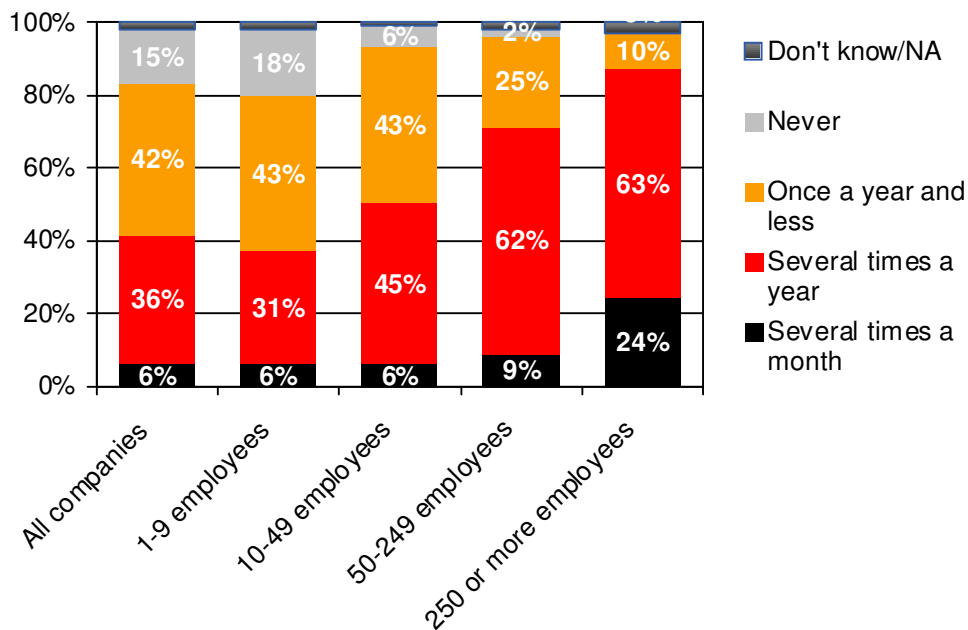


Figure 7 Occupational safety and health as a topic addressed in departmental and section meetings. Source: GDA company survey 2011

Most employees consider internal company rules on occupational safety and health to be clear and easy to understand and find that occupational safety and health deficits are as a rule reported and promptly resolved.

86% of employees strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement that internal company rules are clear and easy to understand. 90% confirmed that it is a matter of course to report safety and health deficits. 86% confirmed that identified deficits are immediately resolved.

The promotion of occupational safety and health skills is paying off – the better employees are informed of safety and health at work, the more likely they are to adhere to the relevant rules.

72% of employees who consider themselves to be well or very well informed about safety and health at work do, according to their own account, “fully” adhere to the relevant occupational safety and health rules in their workplace. For those who consider themselves to be satisfactorily informed, this figure is only 41%.

The vast majority of employees are themselves committed to safety and health in their workplace and company.

81% of surveyed employees consider themselves co-responsible for safety and health in their company. 80% say that they intervene when others do not behave or act in a safety-appropriate way while 56% according to their own account make suggestions to improve occupational safety and health.



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