

**Brief Explanations  
of the Joint German Occupational Safety and Health objectives  
and fields of action 2008-2012**

1. "Reduction in the frequency and severity of work accidents including a reduction in inappropriate mental loads and promotion of the systematic implementation of occupational safety and health in companies"

with the joint fields of action

- **Building and installation work**
- **Logistics, transport and traffic**
- **Newcomers in the company: job beginners, job changers, temporary workers, contractors**

The focal points of the implementation of these fields of action are to be the dissemination and promotion of systematic approaches and concentration on small and medium-sized enterprises.

**Description**

The prevention of work accidents is a key task of occupational safety and health. Consequently, one priority objective is to reduce work accidents in the prevention activities of the federal states and the public accident insurance institutions. In Germany, the activities in this sector have, in the past, already resulted in a continuous fall in the number of notifiable work accidents. In 2006, however, the number of work accidents in trade and industry rose again, the number of fatal work accidents even by around 8%.

High risks continue to arise in small companies and in certain sectors of the economy (e.g. building, agriculture, metal, trade and administration). In micro and small enterprises the frequency of serious accidents resulting in pensions is excessively high – in enterprises with up to 9 employees the frequency is 41% above the average of all enterprises.

The joint strategy of the EU has established the concrete goal to reduce the frequency of work accidents by 25% in the period from 2007 to 2012. Germany must make its contribution towards achieving this ambitious objective.

## **Relevance**

Work accidents are highly relevant to workers, companies and society. On the one hand, they cause human suffering, on the other, high company and social costs. The consequences of a work accident for workers – not seldom when they are still young – lead to a substantial reduction in the quality of life. The financial expenses as a result of work accidents add up to billions throughout Germany (2005: roughly 4.7 billion euros).

## **Joint fields of action**

A further reduction in the frequency and severity of work accidents can only be achieved if the activities of the German government, the federal states and the accident insurance institutions are co-ordinated more than before and the social partners are incorporated into these activities.

Targeted prevention activities must start in branches and activities and with groups of people with a high risk of work accidents. With regard to the size of the company, the activities, sectors and risk enterprises where severe accidents frequently occur are examined in particular (e.g. falls in the building industry and in steel construction, loading and unloading in logistics, railway track companies, traffic routes and their safety or dangerous work equipment and procedures). Owing to the high incidence rates of work accidents, workers in particular who are new in their working environment must be involved (apprentices, young workers and job beginners) or who work under constantly changing conditions (e.g. temporary workers with very flexible working hours/work locations).

Motivated employers and workers in a suitable company organisation are the strongest and most sustainable engines for an improvement in occupational safety and health in companies. Key instruments to reduce work accidents are offers of support to establish an efficient organisation of company occupational safety and health and to implement the risk assessment (allowing for inappropriate mental loads) as well as incentive schemes for the companies.

## **2. "Reduction in musculoskeletal loads and disorders including a reduction in inappropriate mental loads and promotion of the systematic implementation of occupational safety and health in companies"**

### **with the joint fields of action**

- **Health service**
- **Activities involving one-sided load situations or little movement**

The focal points of the implementation of these fields of action are to be the dissemination and

promotion of systematic approaches and concentration on small and medium-sized enterprises. In particular, the ergonomic and age-appropriate design of the work and the inclusion of inappropriate mental loads are to be taken into account.

### **Description**

Diseases and disorders of the movement apparatus are among the most frequent health problems. Working conditions play an important role in the cause and development of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). Inappropriate loads on the musculoskeletal system occur due to, among other things, lifting and carrying heavy loads, constraint postures and vibrations as well as to work which is physically one-sided or involves little movement (e.g. through a continuously sitting or standing activity) or the design of work which requires little movement. Here, the combination with inappropriate mental loads, triggered by work intensification, time pressure, limited latitude for action or a lack of social support can result in an increased risk.

Complaints and diseases of the musculoskeletal system can be effectively influenced with measures of circumstantial prevention (ergonomic and age-appropriate work design) and behavioural prevention (health promotion activities). These measures must be initiated by the bodies responsible for the Joint German OSH Strategy together with the enterprises and with the inclusion of other players, in particular the health insurance funds. The campaigns relating to the world of work are to be supplemented by activities which foster health-promoting behaviour for all age groups in all areas of life.

### **Relevance**

In 2005, MSDs accounted for almost 100 million days lost due to absenteeism; that is almost one quarter of the total time lost. The company and social losses are correspondingly high. In the same year, almost 30,000 people retired early from working life owing to MSDs. That is almost one fifth of all early retirements due to ill health. For the social security systems musculoskeletal disorders therefore represent a major cost factor. Companies not only have a legal obligation to prevent musculoskeletal disorders but they also have a significant economic interest.

Most intensive prevention of musculoskeletal disorders related to the world of work protects the workers from health disadvantages and the company from economic ones. The contribution to be expected to improve workability and employability is in the interest of the whole of society – not least of all in view of the rise in the retirement age and the demographic change.

### **Joint fields of action**

Activities in the health service (including rehabilitation, inpatient and outpatient care) are generally characterised by multiple work loads as a consequence of heavy physical work in conjunction with time pressure and work intensification. This frequently leads to disorders and illnesses of the musculoskeletal system which are to be counteracted with co-ordinated prevention measures.

Another joint field of action comprises branches of industry and jobs with activities involving one-sided load situations or little movement.

These include work in constraint postures as well as the increasing number of activities which are characterised by permanent standing or sitting during work. In order to prevent one-sided movements and a lack of movement, improved and age-appropriate work design is to be implemented, in consultation with the companies and in conjunction with workplace health promotion measures. Special attention is to be paid to the combined effects of physical and mental loads.

Effective prevention of musculoskeletal disorders requires work-related parameters to be taken fully into account. Here, the prescribed risk assessment for the companies is a time-tested tool in order to systematically perform monitoring of the workloads and initiate the necessary action in good time. Furthermore, a good in-house occupational safety and health organisation must ensure that effective prevention approaches and workplace health promotion become established.

### **3. "Reduction in the frequency and severity of skin diseases"**

#### **with the joint fields of action**

- **Work with/in wet environments (wet work)**
- **Contact with substances detrimental to the skin (e.g. cooling lubricants, engine oils, organic solvents, cleaning agents)**

Implementation is also to allow for the substitution of substances.

#### **Description**

Occupational skin diseases are among the most frequent diseases caused by work. Their proportion is roughly one third of all confirmed occupational diseases. One important step has been taken towards improved prevention with the *Prevention Campaign Skin* initiated by the accident insurance institutions and the health insurance funds with the participation of the

government occupational safety and health authorities. Previous studies show that skin diseases are suitable for preventive action and a high degree of efficiency can be attained with company-related activities. This leads to the objective of intensifying such action and adopting new approaches in order to win over those responsible at the companies to eliminate potential hazards and encourage the workers to change their patterns of behaviour.

### **Relevance**

A large number of workers are exposed to risks to the skin. This relates above all to the sectors health, food and beverages, construction, metal and trade. In view of the often serious occupational and economic consequences for those affected by such diseases, the prevention of skin diseases assumes high priority.

The follow-up costs are substantial (estimated cost to the economy in 2004: € 1.25 billion).

### **Joint fields of action**

The joint activities concentrate on the special risk areas of work in wet environments and contact with substances harmful to the skin. Here, the possibility of replacing such substances is to be given priority.

Systematic risk assessments, also in connection with material risks with inappropriate mental loads (e.g. work intensification, time pressure) are to be increasingly introduced into the companies through information, consultancy and monitoring. Increased diligence and motivation for prevention are to be achieved for risks to the skin which are often not taken seriously enough. This prevention is to be integrated into all company processes (starting with the procurement of substances and the design of the conditions for their use). What applies especially to skin protection is that systematic preventive action on the basis of a risk assessment is generally quite simple and can be implemented with little expense and with success which immediately becomes apparent. These are good conditions for motivation, acceptance and efficiency of the measures taken.