

Short Outline of the Joint German Occupational Safety and Health Strategy

1 Mandate

The German government, the federal states and the statutory accident insurance funds have launched a Joint Occupational Safety and Health Strategy for Germany. A strategic approach to performing tasks of occupational safety and health is in line with European and international requirements and examples.

2 Core elements of the Joint German Occupational Safety and Health Strategy

- development of joint objectives in the field of occupational safety and health
- elaboration of joint fields of action and work programmes and their implementation according to uniform principles
- evaluation of objectives, joint fields of action and work programmes •determination of concerted action by public occupational safety and health authorities and accident insurance funds based on the division of labour
- establishment of a transparent, reasonable set of provisions and regulations without duplications

3 Targets

3.1 Prevention in enterprises to ensure health and economic success

The Joint Strategy's overarching target consists of maintaining, improving and promoting workers' safety and health through preventive and systematically implemented measures of occupational safety and health, supplemented by corporate health promotion measures. Healthy, qualified and motivated workers are an essential prerequisite for coping with the massive changes in the world of work; they boost innovation, thus securing competitiveness and, after all, the economic success of enterprises. Employers' and employees' awareness of safety and health must be enhanced. A modern approach to occupational safety and health imperatively requires the participation of workers and the stakeholders of corporate occupational safety and health as well as the strengthening of in-plant occupational safety and health structures.

The interface between the Joint Occupational Safety and Health Strategy and health promotion measures by enterprises and health insurance funds establishes a close connection with the prevention approach related to the population as a whole: Hence, occupational safety and health is partially also an integral part of a prevention-oriented health policy which will allow for working lives to be extended, social security systems to be relieved and the economic costs resulting from accidents at work and work-related illnesses to be reduced.

3.2 Occupational safety and health objectives, fields of action, work programmes

The occupational safety and health objectives are determined in a step-by-step procedure which shall also involve qualitative criteria such as "preventive interference", "work-relatedness" and "implementability". Where available, scientifically or empirically collected data and facts are used for the setting of priorities. Decisions on occupational safety and

health objectives that are to be jointly pursued are prepared in a participative procedure. Joint occupational safety and health objectives shall be determined between the partners of the Joint Occupational Safety and Health Strategy in close coordination with the social partners. They shall be determined for a medium term, i.e. for periods of 3 to 5 years. During this period, the partners contribute to achieving the objectives through concerted action and joint measures. Joint occupational safety and health objectives can be:

- objectives in the area of safety and health, e.g. reduction of inappropriate biomechanical stress that contributes to the development of musculoskeletal disorders, improvement of the safety of equipment, products and plants
- objectives relating to structures and procedures, e.g. the integration of occupational safety and health into corporate management, optimization of monitoring and counselling, enhancement of the efficiency and effectiveness of company medical service and security

The occupational safety and health objectives are substantiated at the level of common fields of action.

Currently, three working groups are preparing the key elements of the work programs "Musculoskeletal Stress", "Psyche" and "Safe Handling of Carcinogenic Hazardous Substances". In addition, the working group "Plant visits" is preparing measures to improve the organization of occupational health and safety at the workplace and to conduct appropriate risk assessments in the companies.

In this regard, specific account must be taken of:

- risk-, branch-, person- and system-relatedness
- selection of occupational safety and health instruments, such as monitoring, counselling, qualification, media, research and campaigns at the level of safety and health institutions

In Germany, ensuring safety and health and the related objectives of occupational safety and health have been considered in the wider context of shaping decent work conditions and, in this spirit, "good work" for some years. Already in 2001 – also as a German contribution to the Lisbon Strategy – a programme was launched to improve the quality of work, the "Initiative New Quality of Work" (INQA). It is an alliance of organisations and institutions that are responsible for shaping the world of work in Germany and consider the promotion of a new quality of work to be an important common task. INQA's motto therefore is: "Acting together – with individual responsibility".

INQA anchors a modern, new and holistic concept of safety and health at work in the public and promotes the practical implementation in enterprises. It aims at bringing in line people's interest in positive work conditions that are beneficial for health and personality with the economic interests of enterprises in increased innovation capacity and more growth.

In the beginning, INQA's focus was on specific branches; i.e. it started with initiatives to improve working conditions in the sectors of construction, long-term care and health.

Increasingly, other intersectoral issues, such as office work, stress at the workplace, lifelong learning etc. followed. Currently, INQA is focusing on the management of demographic change in the world of work and the promotion of an employee-oriented corporate culture. Further information at www.inqa.de.

3.3 Indicators, evaluation

The description of safety and health objectives, the setting of priorities and subsequent evaluation require the selection of suitable criteria or indicators. Wherever possible, direct impact indicators shall be selected. Where this is not useful on account of long latent periods, indirect impact indicators describing the impact of interventions on the objectives of safety and health at work should be considered. The achievement of the objectives of the Joint

German Occupational Safety and Health Strategy is quality assured and evaluated. To this end, evaluation concepts are developed that meet acknowledged criteria and procedures.

3.4 Pooled resources, cooperation, coordination

The Joint Strategy pools the resources of the accident insurance funds (in Germany responsible for granting benefits in the case of accidents at work, occupational diseases, and also responsible for prevention) and the authorities of the federal states (in Germany responsible for state labour inspection). A coordinated cooperation of the accident insurance funds and the Länder authorities, based on the division of labour, enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of corporate occupational safety and health and reduces the workload for companies resulting from official measures. Division of labour is primarily effected with regard to specific competencies. All partners act within the scope of their tasks and responsibilities. To ensure close cooperation and coordination in order to update the Joint Occupational Safety and Health Strategy, the partners of the Joint Occupational Safety and Health Strategy shall agree on

- commitments to jointly implementing the objectives and common fields of action identified in the National Conference on Occupational Safety and Health,
- the determination of common principles for the implementation of work programmes and monitoring and counselling activities in enterprises, •the exclusion of substantive or temporal duplications of company activities through a coordinated approach based on the division of labour
- the commitment to exchange the relevant data in an appropriate form.

3.5 User-friendly set of provisions and regulations

Not least, the Joint Occupational Safety and Health Strategy aims at establishing a transparent, reasonable and hence user-friendly set of provisions and regulations. This creates legal certainty both for employers and employees. Today's state occupational safety and health legislation is primarily based on the implementation of the exact wording of European Directives on occupational safety and health. In the course of this development and general deregulation efforts, the provisions' level of detail has been reduced. In order to maintain the level of occupational safety and health, further deregulation measures will require careful evaluation of the provisions, while taking account of the positive economic and social consequences of sensible occupational safety and health measures.

4 National Safety and Health Conference

4.1 Composition and tasks

The "National Occupational Safety and Health Conference" (NAK) will be established as a central body for planning, coordination, evaluation and decisions in the framework of the Joint Occupational Safety and Health Strategy. Members are the federal government, the Länder and the accident insurance funds. Every member sends three representatives to the NAK. The respective representatives of the members are entitled to participate and speak but they are not entitled to vote. The NAK is alternately chaired by the government, the Länder and the accident insurance funds on an annual basis. The social partners participate in the NAK meetings, acting as advisors in developing occupational safety and health objectives.

4.2 Occupational Safety and Health Forum

The systematic dialogue between the partners of the Joint Occupational Safety and Health Strategy and all relevant stakeholders is conducted in the Occupational Safety and Health Forum whose task is to advise the National Occupational Safety and Health Conference. Generally, the Occupational Safety and Health Forum is held once a year in the form of a workshop. Participants of the Occupational Safety and Health Forum are the social partners, professional and industrial associations, health insurance and pension insurance funds, national networks in the area of occupational safety and health and representatives from the academic world.