

Occupational Health & Safety Strategy 2009-2013: towards health-sustaining working environment

This strategy document defines the development targets of Estonian working environment for years 2009-2013. Several relevant documents have been considered when composing this strategy, including the European Commission's community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work, Action Plan for Development of Estonian National Health 2008-2020 and Action Plan for Growth and Jobs 2008-2011 (for implementation of Lisbon Strategy).

Vision for year 2013

Working environment of Estonian employees has significantly improved – number of work accidents resulting in death has decreased, there is better overview and awareness of work-related diseases and accidents, their causes and possible prevention measures.

Legislation regulating Estonian working environment is clear, contemporary and consistent. Legislative framework takes into account the specific needs of different employment types (including the self-employed) and contracts (including subcontracting), ensuring the protection of employees.

There are diverse government incentives for improving working environment. Occupational accidents and disease insurance focused on prevention is in operation.

The role of Labour Inspectorate has changed and its focus has shifted on activities aimed at awareness rising of employers and employees. Labour Inspectorate has an overview of the Estonian working environment.

Significantly improved scientific potential has created a basis for describing the workplace risks, identifying their causes and impacts and developing preventive measures.

Broad-based training is offered in the field of occupational health and safety, the training is integrated into the curricula of all levels of education. Specific focus is on improving the qualification of work environment specialists working in enterprises.

Rise in awareness has resulted in changed attitudes of both employers and employees.

Significant improvement in the availability of good quality occupational health services has encouraged organisations to invest in prevention of occupational diseases and accidents.

State government and local governments have improved measures to facilitate returning to the labour market to the victims of occupational accidents and diseases. Co-operation between the Estonian Labour Market Board, health sector and social security system has improved.

In the context of aging workforce, employers are more interested in employing older workers and adjusting the working conditions (including working environment) to the needs of older employees.

Working environment has become an important issue of social dialogue and in addition to the governmental bodies, employers and employees acknowledge their role in improving the working conditions.

Estonia is an active participant in the discussion concerning working environment in EU with the aim to improve the flexibility of legislation concerning working environment, leaving the member states the freedom in choosing the means for achieving the aims.

Areas of development, goals and actions for achieving the goals

1. Legislative framework of occupational health and safety

To aid the implementation of legislation, the consistency of existing legislation needs to be improved, excessive regulation must be avoided and the requirements for employee health protection need to be extended to new forms of work. Existing legislative framework in the area of occupational health and safety needs to be analysed, compared to best international best practice and updated.

In establishing safe and healthy working environment, employers need to be supported with efficient guidance and tools, training, good practice and counselling.

Following goals have been set in this area:

Goal: Legislative framework of occupational health and safety is contemporary and efficient.

Goal: Employers are provided with efficient tools for implementing the requirements of occupational health and safety legislation.

2. Rising awareness of the value of health-preserving work environment

To facilitate the design of health-sustaining working environment it is important to raise both employer and employee awareness of the impact of work on health and productivity and the importance of healthy work environment to the society as a whole. Networks of different employment sectors or levels are an efficient way to disseminate good practice and support in creating healthy workplaces. At the same time, economic mechanisms should facilitate good practice implementation, specially in small and medium sized enterprises.

Following goals have been set in this area:

Goal: General awareness of occupational health and safety has been raised at relevant target groups.

Goal: Different level networks in the field of occupational health and safety are active.

Goal: A mechanism for stimulating preventive activities of occupational health and safety has been created.

3. Occupational health and safety training

Work environment specialists, employee safety representatives and members of health and safety councils are the specialists arranging the occupational health and safety activities with their employers. Their training needs to have similar voluntary legislative basis, accustomed to the roles these specialists play in their organisations. Training needs must depend on the state of the work environment in a specific enterprise and in case of identified need by a labour inspector, a specialist can be referred to the training.

Occupational health specialists are occupational physicians and nurses, ergonomists, occupational hygienists and occupational psychologists, providing their service to customers in preventing work-related ill health. Availability of good quality occupational health specialists must significantly improved.

Following goals have been set in this area:

Goal: Efficiency of preliminary and additional training of work environment specialists.

Goal: Efficiency of preliminary and additional training of employee safety representatives and occupational health and safety council members.

Goal: The number of competent occupational health specialists providing preventive occupational health services is sufficient, systematic additional training is provided for the specialists.

4. Occupational health services form an integral part of general healthcare

Diagnosing of occupational diseases must be based on common principles, financed by the state. Possible causal relationship between an illness and work must be considered in general healthcare system as well as by the occupational health physicians. Availability and analysis of statistical data on illnesses and occupational accidents of employed persons shall enable to establish the high-risk economic sectors, facilitating the design of effective preventive measures.

Occupational health services, provided by occupational physician and nurse, occupational hygienist, ergonomist and occupational psychologist, form an important part of general healthcare system. For ensuring the quality of service of these specialists, criteria need to be established for their qualification and service, surveillance system established and surveillance carried out. Additional training opportunities need to be provided by the Estonian Healthcare Board.

Following goals have been set in this area:

Goal: Early diagnosis of work-related illnesses and occupational diseases is facilitated in general healthcare system, rehabilitation of occupational disease patients is a relevant part of occupational health system.

Goal: Competency requirements of occupational health specialists are clear, there is systematic surveillance of these services.

5. Emerging risks in the work environment

Developing world of work brings about increased use of different forms of work (distance working, rental work, self-employed etc), demographic changes bring into the focus the occupational health problems of older workers. Developing technology brings about new risk factors in the workplace, assessing the risks of co-existence of different risks gains more importance. Increasing attention is needed in dealing with occupational risk factors leading to musculoskeletal problems, chemicals, and psychosocial risks

Identifying emerging occupational risks and collecting information on them, composing guidance for prevention and rising awareness on emerging risks needs to be a systematic activity, shared between state institutions, scientific institutions and international organisations. Labour inspectors must be aware of the emerging risks and shall be able to carry out efficient surveillance.

Network of accredited work environment measurement laboratories needs to be sufficient for availability of all measurements required by law (including asbestos, electromagnetic fields, optic radiation etc.).

Following goals have been set in this area:

Goal: A system has been established for identifying and reducing the impact of emerging risks.

Goal: Service of measurement of risk factors is available to employers.

6. Rising knowledge-based approach and administrative capacity in policy making and implementation.

Adequate overview of situation and good quality policy analysis are essential for knowledge-based policy planning. Policy analyses needs to be increasingly used as an essential part of the policy making cycle – in developing the policies and estimating possible consequences of different solutions as well as in implementing the policies and analysing the results.

Statistics of occupational health and safety based on diverse sources of data are essential for good quality policy analysis. Reliability of statistics on occupational accidents, occupational diseases and

work-related diseases needs to be improved, linking the data from different operative registers (Estonian Health Insurance Fund, Estonian Tax and Customs Board etc) would enable further analysis of the consequences of these diseases.

Surveillance activities of work environment must be efficient and up-to-date, focusing mainly on the actual state of the work environment and less on the formal documentation. Awareness raising forms a part of surveillance activities. Labour Inspectorate needs to have an adequate overview of the Estonian work environment.

Following goals have been set in this area:

Goal: Policy decisions in the area of occupational health and safety are knowledge-based

Goal: Reliable occupational health and safety statistics

Goal: Labour Inspectorate has sufficient administrative capacity and acts as a good partner to employee, employer and other government institutions

7. Scientific knowledge generation in occupational health and safety

There is insufficient co-ordination of activities between institutions dealing with work environment issues and lack of co-coordinative and supportive system for using the scientific potential for policy design and implementation. A competency centre of applied science is needed in the area of occupational health and safety for scientific research, development and maintaining networks. Taking into account the size and limited scientific potential of Estonia it is important to develop cooperation with other EU countries.

Applied and scientific research of occupational health and safety must be considered as a priority and funded from different funds and programmes.

Following goals have been set in this area:

Goal: Establishing a central co-coordinative competence centre in the field of occupational health and safety

Goal: Ensuring sustainability and financing of scientific research in the field of occupational health and safety

8. National and international co-operation

Social partners need to be included in policy making and surveillance through efficient work of tripartite Work Council, established on the bases of several previous councils in the area of working life. Branches of social partner organisations participate in disseminating guidance and good practice in the field of occupational health and safety among their member organisations, these activities are partly financed by state-supported funds and programmes.

Occupational health and safety issues need to be integrated into the activities of different ministries, universities and institutes, health and safety effects are part of general impact analysis of new legislative acts.

International cooperation helps to import up-to-date information, work with other EU member states in promoting our interests and exchange good practice.

Following goals have been set in this area:

Goal: Involvement of social partners in occupational health and safety matters, establishing a Work Council mis ühendab endas senist Töökeskkonna Nõukoda, (Advisory Committee on Working Environment) Tööhõive Nõukogu (ILO konventsiooni alusel) ja Tööinspektsiooni tööõiguse nõukogu.

Goal: Occupational health and safety is integrated into other government activities and policies

Goal: Representing Estonian interests in international organisations