



Recognition schemes in occupational safety and health Experiences in the Member States of the European Union

Summary of workshop organised in Bilbao (2 and 3 October 2001) by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

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1. Introduction to recognition schemes

The promotion and exchange of good safety and health practice at workplace level is one of the key objectives of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. A classical way to support the improvement of occupational safety and health (OSH) at workplace level is by providing employers and other stakeholders with detailed information on 'good practices' on how to implement OSH legislation, and/or by providing information on 'best practices' that even go beyond the legislative minimum level of OSH.

A rather new tool is the use of recognition schemes. Under these schemes groups of organisations participate on a voluntary basis to identify 'best practices' on specific subjects. The identification of 'best practices' includes, for example, listings or awards, prizes, labels, and so forth. The concept of a recognition scheme also includes voluntary certification schemes used in issues related to the procurement or marketing of products, goods or services. By implementing or participating in such schemes organisations demonstrate their social interest and corporate social responsibility (1).

This publication contains examples of different types of recognition schemes:

- a recognition scheme for safe products/safe behaviour;
- a recognition scheme for the identification of contractors; and
- a recognition scheme for OSH management at company level.

A large number of schemes have been developed in the Member States that 'acknowledge' or 'recognise' specific products, service providers, and companies as OSH-friendly. These 'developers' are, for example, sector organisations, public authorities, expert organisations, trade unions, or insurance companies. Many initiatives exist. Some have rather limited ambition; for example, simply the inclusion on a list or an attempt to increase the level of OSH awareness within the company. Others, however, have been developed into well-documented and acknowledged voluntary certification systems.

Some of these schemes are well-known, for example, the TCO labels for office equipment like PC screens and keyboards. Tens of millions of workers nowadays actually use these — from the OSH point of view — high-quality work tools. In practice, this label is considered an important feature in the marketing of quality products. It is obtained for a substantial number of all PCs developed; and the availability of such a logo is an important support tool for all those who have a role

in the purchase of adequate/optimal equipment. Many other examples exist, although used on a lesser scale.

Another well-known initiative in the area of identifying qualified subcontractors is the SCC scheme (2). This is a support tool to identify high-quality subcontracting services, for example, in the chemical industry. Many thousands of subcontractors have obtained this certification and use it in those situations where companies put forward a demand concerning the quality of subcontracted work.

In spite of the omnipresence of recognition schemes in the world of work and of economy, little attention has so far been dedicated to this issue at European level. No systematic overview of recognition schemes is available. Access to recognition schemes is therefore rather difficult. In a way this is remarkable as these schemes can affect the working conditions of almost the whole working population in Europe.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work produced a report on the issue of recognition schemes containing a set of examples. The report does not aim to give a complete or systematic overview, but to show the variety and the wide use of these types of non-regulatory initiatives (3).

What is a recognition scheme?

Despite the variety in the types and objectives of recognition schemes, a number of characteristics can be highlighted as features.

- They aim to motivate organisations and/or persons to carry out special preventive efforts.
- They are based on a voluntary initiative from stakeholders.
- They are based on well-documented and stable procedures/criteria.
- They aim to obtain safety levels beyond legal requirements.
- Recognition can be in the form of being allowed to use a logo/label, documents or acceptance in a database.

The question is whether it would be worthwhile to stimulate the use of these schemes and to what extent. In this context there are a number of questions to be dealt with.

- Are recognition systems for products, services, and OSH management equally important or useful?
- Are there specific objections against the use or stimulation of specific types of recognition schemes? If so, in which specific area(s)?
- To what extent can recognition schemes be harmonised/integrated?
- Can recognition schemes be exported from one Member State to others?
- Would employers and organisations be interested in having improved access to information on existing recognition schemes?
- Most importantly, which options are there to improve access to and the use of recognition schemes?

The last point was dealt with at a workshop in Bilbao where a number of specific options were discussed. These were considered with the aim of stimulating the use of and access to recognition schemes. In addition, a number of

presentations were given on examples for each of the different types of recognition schemes:

- recognising products
- recognising contractors
- recognising OSH management.

2. Recognising products: the GS-mark and the BG-Prüfzert mark ⁽⁴⁾

There are several examples of recognition schemes that deal with OSH aspects of products. Besides the two labels mentioned in this scheme, there are, for example:

- the TCO label for ergonomic office equipment;
- the NF HSA label for bakery equipment by Bongard; and
- the Danish society of indoor climate labelling.

For many years, in Germany, there have been initiatives for labelling or marking safe products. This started before the introduction of the CE-mark. Two of them are described in more detail below.

The GS-mark

The GS-mark (*Geprüfte Sicherheit*, meaning tested safety) is based on the German Equipment Safety Act. Technical equipment may be labelled with it (working devices ready for use, e.g. tools, working equipment, prime movers and powered machines, hoisting and conveying devices and vehicles). There is, however, no obligation to obtain this mark. It is a voluntary system but well known in Germany and in demand by consumers and companies. The requirements often exceed legal standards.

There are about 50 accredited testing/certification institutions in Germany. Institutions from all over the EU and the EEA can be accredited and awarded this GS-mark. Examples of accredited bodies are the 19 testing and certification bodies of the *Berufsgenossenschaften* (statutory accident insurance and prevention institution in Germany). The objective of these bodies, grouped as BG-Prüfzert, is to promote the occupational safety of products. They assist manufactures, vendors and users in the design, testing and procurement of technical equipment. BG-Prüfzert's collated efforts benefit the customer by ensuring efficient services on behalf of occupational safety. They have good contacts with industry associations, manufacturers, and participate in national and international standardisation.



The GS-mark can be applied to products that are covered by the EU single market directives as well as those not covered by them. The mark remains valid for a period of five years maximum. In cases of misuse or technical changes, it can be withdrawn by the testing and certification body.

The GS-mark has developed over a period of more than 20 years into a safety mark recognised throughout the world. There are no figures available on how many GS-marks have been issued in Germany in total. But within the BG-Prüfzert there are about 6 000 valid certificates at the moment.

BG-Prüfzert

In addition to the GS-mark there is also the BG-Prüfzert label. This label is used for a broader range of products than the GS-mark. It can also be used for not-ready-to-use equipment (e.g. components and auxiliary devices) and partial aspects of equipment (aspects in the fields of ergonomics, hazardous emissions, operating instructions, wood dust, etc.). About 1 900 valid certificates are in circulation, which allow manufacturers to label their products with the BG-Prüfzert

mark. This label is also appreciated as a marketing tool for products.

The testing and certification activities of BG-Prüfzert cover, in particular, machinery, electrical operating equipment, personal safety equipment and quality-management systems. They appraise and test equipment and the associated technical documentation. They record their results in a detailed test report. After a successful test, a certificate is issued confirming that the product is sound from the point of view of safety engineering.

BG-Prüfzert has developed a database of all tested products with valid certificates and installed it on the Internet. The fact that it is being used at an increasing rate also demonstrates that it is a practical aid for buyers. Its goal is to promote the occupational safety of products and this goal coincides with that of their customers.



Employers may only provide their employees with safe, suitable or appropriately adapted equipment. A test by an independent testing and certification agency offers many advantages in this respect. In the BG-Prüfzert database the employer can look up companies from whom he can purchase products that he can rely upon to be safe.

3. Recognising contractors: CHAS – A contractor's health and safety assessment scheme ⁽⁵⁾

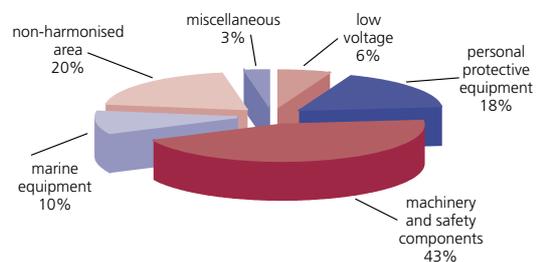
There are several examples of recognition schemes that deal with OSH aspects of contractors. Besides the CHAS scheme there is, for example, the SCC checklist for contractors.



CONTRACTORS HEALTH & SAFETY ASSESSMENT SCHEME

Public organisations such as local authorities, health trusts, housing associations, and so

forth, have, as an employer, a duty to ensure they protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and others (such as clients, visitors, contractors, etc.) who may be affected by their work. As part of that responsibility, public bodies when selecting contractors for their approved (or select) list, carry out an assessment of suitability in a number of areas including technical ability, financial standing, environmental awareness, equality, public liability insurance and health and safety arrangements.



Why is CHAS needed?

- To select a list of contractors.
- To combat poor standards.
- To help members and contractors.
- To establish common objectives.
- To avoid duplication of effort.
- To improve standards (SMEs).

The scheme protects the health, safety and welfare of the employees of a public body. The scheme is also meant to guarantee the employees' safety, but others' as well (such as

clients, visitors, contractors, etc.) The scheme is run jointly by a number of local authorities across the United Kingdom.

The aim of this scheme is:

- to provide a common approach that is adopted and pursued by all participating organisations with a common standard for contractors undergoing first stage health and safety assessments;
- to overcome inconsistency in assessment with some companies being approved by one (public) employer but not others;
- to avoid duplication of effort for both contractors and councils. By avoiding this duplication considerable resources are saved by the contractor and the purchasing organisation;
- to provide a reasonable level of guidance to small and medium-sized contractors who fail the initial assessment so that they are able to improve and demonstrate adequacy in their health and safety management arrangements at reapplication.

The CHAS assessment scheme is designed for the selection and monitoring of contractors who apply, and undertake work on behalf of a member organisation. The process within this scheme identifies a basic level of administrative adequacy in policy arrangements (a demonstration of adequate health and safety management). Participating organisations will — prior to awarding a contract or work to a company from their approved list — ensure that the company has specific competency for the type of work they have been awarded or invited to tender for. This is normally achieved by reviewing method statements, specific risk assessments, and examples of previous similar work completed. The third stage is monitoring the work as it is undertaken to ensure method statements are properly implemented, work is adequately resourced and supervised, liaison is effective, and the organisation and arrangements described in a policy are both implemented and managed.



The accreditation for the applicants is to appear in the CHAS database as a recognised organisation. The fact of being in this database makes it easier to be contracted by a public body.

So far there is no specified validity period. Every time an applicant asks for a tender, the database is checked. If a company persistently fails to maintain adequate health and safety standards it can be removed/suspended from an approved list. However, it should be emphasised that this course of action will only be taken in the most serious cases.

The development and implementation of CHAS is undertaken on behalf of members via a special interest group made up of health and safety and contract management professionals with support from the Health and Safety Executive and the Federation of Master Builders. A newsletter is periodically published, where every member can update the evolution of the scheme.

In the assessment process there is an element of subjectivity. However, quality control mechanisms are built into the scheme to ensure its standards are maintained and applied.

4. Recognising OSH management: the Audelco OSH management label (6)

There are several examples of recognition schemes that deal with OSH management. Besides the Audelco schemes there are, for example, the '6E management scheme from TCO'.

According to Spanish regulations, all Spanish companies that have organised their prevention system on their own and not with a specialised external organisation must submit their prevention system to an audit when:

- the employer develops prevention activities by him/herself;
- the employer has designated one or several workers to carry out these activities;
- the employer has created an internal prevention system.



This audit should be repeated every five years, or when the labour authority requires, taking into account accident rates or other circumstances that make it necessary to review the results of the last audit.

Recognition to develop audits

Institutions that aim to develop the audit activity should apply for authorisation to the regional labour authority (*Comunidad Autónoma*) with competence in the place where their main installations are established.

The company submits its application in one region and if the go-ahead is given, it will be able to carry out its activity in this place and all other regions included on the application form.

The legal requirements say that the audit has:

- to include a systematic, documented and objective assessment of the efficiency of a prevention system;
- to be carried out according to the established technical standards;
- to take into account the information received from workers.

Its objectives will be to:

- check how the initial and regular assessment has been done, analyse its results and verify them, if necessary;
- check that the type and organisation of prevention activities follows the general standard as well as the policy on specific hazards that has to be applied, taking into account the results of the evaluation;
- analyse the adaptation between the procedures and resources required to carry out prevention activities that have been mentioned in the previous paragraph and the employee's resources, either on their own or with an arranged institution, taking into account how to organise or coordinate them;
- evaluate the efficiency of the OSH risks prevention system.

The results of the audit are reflected in a report that the audited company keeps for the labour authority and workers' representatives.

Audelco

Audelco is the first organisation certified by the labour authority in Spain to make the legal audit. The certificate and quality label given by Audelco is not based only on what one could call 'minimum audit' (as the law requires), but it takes into account more indicators and a higher level of quality.

The audit and the certificate

As soon as a company requests an audit, Audelco prepares an offer on the basis of a few key features, such as number of employees, sector of activity and geographic area of activity. The audit examines an organisation's safety management system. This includes:

- policy
- organising
- risk assessment
- preventive plan and its implementation
- measure and review performance about hygienist risks (exposure to chemical and physical pollutants)

- worker qualifications
- investigation of accidents
- coordination with other works subcontracted
- emergency plan and its implementation
- participation of the workers' representatives
- technical control of the hazards (through safety inspections, individual protection sets, management, legal check-up of critical sets, etc.)
- health surveillance, etc.

This leads the auditor through a detailed examination of both documented procedures and the way activities are actually being controlled in practice and implemented correctly, through intensive field work. There is a certificate and a label that recognises a reasonably well-implemented and effective system.

The employees' representatives participate in the process. They state their opinions to the auditors.

These organisations have to renew this process every year in order to maintain the label.

5. Options to enhance the use of recognition schemes

At a workshop held on the 2 and 3 October 2001 in Bilbao, a number of options were discussed that aim to promote the accessibility and use of recognition schemes (see box below).

The options discussed

- To make existing recognition schemes better known/more accessible by listing them on, for example, the Agency's web site (Option 1).
- To make/publish descriptions of recognition schemes without giving any qualification (Option 2).
- To evaluate recognition schemes in a systematic way by giving strengths and weaknesses (Option 3).
- To make evaluations of recognition schemes with uniform criteria (Option 4).
- To value/identify successful/good schemes and to give them a label/logo/certificate (Option 5).

Outcomes of the workshop

In general, the participants of the workshop indicated that a rather simple approach to the issue would be most suitable to increase the accessibility of recognition schemes. Participants stressed Option 2 'to make/publish descriptions of recognition schemes without giving any qualification' and suggested adding elements of Options 3 and/or 4.

It would be worthwhile to consider including only schemes that have been consulted and/or developed with the support of social partners.

Participants pointed out that there is no need to develop new, additional systems at European level (Option 5). It would already be of value to bring the information about such schemes together and share this information. The participant indicated that some specific considerations have to be taken into account.

- It was stressed that in order to include a specific recognition scheme in an overview it would have to live up to some criteria with respect to quality such as continuous improvement/updating of the scheme, user-friendliness and transparency.
- A number of questions have to be taken care of before initiating work for such an overview such as liability issues, property rights and, most importantly, the expected or end-users.
- The precise purpose of such an overview should be clear to users.
- An overview would have to be an open system where examples or elements could be added when needed.
- The concept of 'recognition' is still a rather broad concept. A more specified definition would be desirable.
- Any process for this purpose would have to be transparent in order to avoid potential legal issues. Such a process could, for example, include national nominations and/or official publication for calls for proposals.
- There is a need to clarify who are the expected users (persons, organisations) and their precise needs. In this context design issues should also be dealt with.

In addition to the considerations already mentioned, it should be stressed that initiatives in this area are not necessarily limited to public institutions at European or national level. Also, private initiatives can aim at increasing the accessibility of recognition schemes by producing inventories or classifying/evaluating existing recognition schemes, for example, in the context of corporate social responsibility.

REFERENCES

- ¹ *Green Paper promoting a European framework for corporate social responsibility;*
- ² *Safety contractors checklist (VCA).*
- ³ More examples of recognition schemes can be found in an Agency on-line publication, *Recognition schemes in occupational safety and health: a first inventory (forthcoming).*
- ⁴ Rüdiger Reitz, Referatsleiter Prüfung und Zertifizierung/Geschäftsstelle BG-Prüfzert, Hauptverband der gewerblichen Berufsgenossenschaften.
- ⁵ John Murphy, Safety and emergency planning manager, CHAS Scheme Manager, London Borough of Merton.
- ⁶ Vicente Riveiro (Professor, Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingenieros Industriales, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid).

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