

GERMANY'S PROGRAMME FOR 'SAFE HANDLING OF CARCINOGENIC HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES (KEGS)': SUPPORTING OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH COMPLIANCE (CASE DE6)

Introduction

Promotion of effective occupational safety and health (OSH) practices is a key element of safer and healthier workplaces. Improving arrangements and practices for managing OSH across a whole range of industry sectors and firm sizes — large, medium and small — is stimulated, supported and sustained by a range of institutional actors and processes both internal and external to firms. Scientific research highlights, among others, the critical role that state regulators for OSH, such as labour inspectorates but also prevention services, can play (EU-OSHA 2021). This case study is part of a research project¹ conducted in Germany to provide further insight into this topic.

The focus of this case study is the Joint German Occupational Health and Safety Strategy's (GDA) work programme 'Safe handling of carcinogenic hazardous substances' (KEGS). The qualification modules described here have been developed within the framework of the third period of the GDA.²

Description of the case

The German OSH system has a dual organisational structure (state and the statutory accident insurance institutions (UVTs)). The state side is completed by the federal states and the responsible federal state OSH authorities, while the self-governing UVTs form the counterpart to the state side. In Germany, monitoring activities are carried out by both the federal state OSH authorities and the UVTs.

In the third period (2021-2025) of the GDA, it is planned to carry out around 200,000 company inspections, with a particular focus on SMEs. In Germany, company inspections are also carried out by both the federal state OSH authorities and the UVTs. The third GDA period focuses on coordinated cooperation between the Federal Government, the federal states and the UVTs to successfully implement the strategic goal of 'Making work safe and healthy – prevention through risk assessment'.

In terms of content, this third period focuses on three central key areas: 'Musculoskeletal Strain' (MSB), 'Psychological Strain' (Psyche) and 'Safe handling of carcinogenic hazardous substances' (KEGS). A coordinated approach to monitoring activities should ensure that a larger number of companies carry out appropriate risk assessments and establish an effective occupational safety organisation.

For this purpose, special basic data sheets and technical data sheets were developed, which are available to labour inspectors in addition to other qualification and training modules. These instruments are intended to help increase the quality and efficiency of inspections within the framework of the GDA and thus achieve the desired goals in the area of OSH. In addition, managers and workers can also use the materials for further training and support.

Aims

The overall objective is to improve the efficiency and uniformity of the monitoring activities of federal state OSH authorities and UVTs. This is to be achieved through increased education in the form of

¹ The full report is available at: <https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/germanys-approach-supporting-occupational-safety-and-health-compliance-role-labour-inspectorate-and-prevention-services>

² See: <https://www.gda-portal.de/EN/>

qualification and training modules to strengthen the necessary competences within the labour inspectors. To this end, educational material is provided that is specifically geared towards monitoring activities and the requirements and priority programmes of the third GDA period.

Work programme 'Safe handling of carcinogenic hazardous substances'

Work-related cancers continue to be considered the most common work-related cause of death in Germany. The aim of the 'Safe handling of carcinogenic hazardous substances' work programme is to minimise hazards in the workplace from carcinogenic hazardous substances and thus prevent the development of occupational cancers. The corresponding GDA training courses and qualification modules support labour inspectors in successfully implementing the programme.

The following sections refer specifically to the qualification modules developed in the 'Safe handling of carcinogenic hazardous substances' work programme. Qualification offers have also been developed for the other work programmes 'Musculoskeletal Strain' (MSB) and 'Psychological Strain' (Psyche) but are not addressed here.

Target group

The training and qualification modules for the three priority programmes (mentioned above) are intended for the labour inspectors of the federal state OSH authorities and UVTs. Ultimately, the modules are freely accessible to multipliers as well as companies and workers.

In the context of the GDA, the labour inspectors of the federal state OSH authorities and the UVTs are required to pursue a coherent strategy for assessing the establishments to be inspected. The qualification and training modules created for this purpose serve to support the implementation of the priority programmes as well as uniform company assessments by labour inspectors (federal states/UVTs).

On the one hand, it was necessary to create suitable learning materials. For this purpose, a specialised team of experts had to be assembled. In addition, the learning content was made available to the relevant target group (labour inspectors (federal states/UVTs), managers, etc.) online or in person.

What was done, and how?

Risk assessment becomes the focus of attention during this GDA-period. The goal here is a comprehensive integration of appropriate risk assessments in the companies. In order to be able to successfully pursue this goal, the standards for monitoring and advising companies are also being renegotiated and redefined. The Working Group 'Company Visit' set up for this purpose consists of representatives of all institutions and is working on qualifications, training, instruments and measures to promote the development of a uniform model for monitoring and counselling activities.

The purpose of the company visits is to check the adequacy of the risk assessments. For this purpose, it is essential that the labour inspectors of the UVTs, as well as the labour inspectors of the federal states, are adequately trained and qualified and informed about the relevant instruments and guidelines, so that standardised and coordinated company inspections are possible.

In 10% of the companies to be inspected during the third GDA period, it is planned to use one of the three specialist data sheets (one for each specific work programme) in addition to the basic data sheet, which contains the procedure for the so-called system assessment.

In order to promote a uniform system assessment, standardised guidelines focusing on 'risk assessment' and on 'the organisation of OSH' were developed. The system assessment always includes a dedicated compliance audit. The compliance audit systematically examines whether the company complies with relevant OSH regulations and thus acts in accordance with the rules. The audit of the structural and procedural organisation is based on 15 organisational elements.

The specialised technical data sheets are tailored to the topics of 'carcinogenic hazardous substances' and support the labour inspectors (federal states/UVTs) in the technical assessment of the companies.

Furthermore, the individual work programmes provide a comprehensive range of information and support services for companies. These tools and services have been developed within the framework of the work programme for companies, their workers and for the labour inspectors (federal states/UVTs).

What support does the 'Safe handling of carcinogenic hazardous substances' (KEGS) work programme offer?

- GDA Hazardous Substances Check. This is an online tool including a glossary, a brochure and the link to GDA-ORGCheck.³
- GDA Best Practice Database (under development). Best practice examples from companies, practical guides and measurement programmes will be collected and made available.⁴
- Qualification offer for labour inspectors (federal states/UVTs) like training modules, workshops and so on.⁵

The corresponding attachments are available after registration.

How is the training programme structured?

The self-study area of the GDA's KEGS work programme can be accessed via the DGUV's e-learning platform 'Ilias'.⁶ There, four training modules are offered on how to use the technical data sheet, and finally a CMR (carcinogenic, mutagenic and reprotoxic substances) quiz can be taken for self-testing.

- Training module 1: Presentation of the work programme and how to use the technical data sheet.
- Training module 2: Explanation of the technical data sheet related to the following sections: hazardous substances; operating instruction; and occupational medical and toxicological advice (A1-A3).
- Training module 3: Explanation of the technical data sheet related to the following sections: determination of exposure; risk through skin contact; compliance with occupational exposure limits (AGW); action plan; and exposure register.
- Training module 4: Explanation of the technical data sheet for sections B – support, overall assessment of risk assessment – and C – administrative action.
- CMR quiz: answering 11 test questions.

The training programme also offers: the GDA-KEGS technical data sheet; the instructions for the technical data sheet; the text modules for an announcement letter; the list of industries that are exposed to the occurrence of the 12 carcinogenic hazardous substances; the GDA-KEGS substance information sheets; the flow chart for the technical data sheet; the link to the GDA portal for companies; the link to the central exposure database; and so on.

The company inspections carried out have already provided initial findings before the end of the third GDA period. The KEGS work programme conducted an exchange of experience with labour inspectors (federal states/UVTs). The aim of this first exchange of experience, which will be followed by others at a later date, was to gather information on whether the work programme needs to adjust its accompanying processes and what options for action result from the findings. The evaluation has not yet been completed.

The programming of the database of good and best practice solutions is on the home stretch and was completed at the end of 2023. There is still a great need to make easily usable solutions available and to enable operational practice to benefit from other successfully applied examples. The feedback in a specially organised event in autumn 2023 showed that the efforts to collect practical examples still need to be intensified. For this purpose, the labour inspectors (federal states/UVTs) are also called upon in the training documents to look for simple and good solutions during the company visits and to display them in the database.

³ See: <https://www.gda-gefahrstoff-check.de/daten/gda/index.htm>

⁴ See: https://e-learning.dguv.de/ilias.php?ref_id=206432&cmd=view&cmdClass=ilrepositorygui&cmdNode=wt&baseClass=ilrepositorygui

⁵ See: https://e-learning.dguv.de/ilias.php?ref_id=156819&cmd=view&cmdClass=ilrepositorygui&cmdNode=wt&baseClass=ilrepositorygui

⁶ See: https://e-learning.dguv.de/login.php?target=&client_id=iaq

Degree of innovation

The modules are available online and the exchange of experience between labour inspectors (federal states/UVTs) is also possible via the digital communication channels of the Ilias platform. This enables faster and geographically independent communication and ensures a more efficient exchange of knowledge.

Approach

The work programmes should proceed successfully by integrating the following elements:

- Qualifying labour inspectors (federal states/UVTs) through specially developed online modules.
- Strengthening their consulting skills.
- Improving the skills of operational actors.
- Developing and providing tools to support the implementation of risk assessments.

The qualification modules serve to implement 200,000 company inspections by the labour inspectors of the federal state OSH authorities and UVTs. The focus is on companies with up to 250 workers. The 'Safe handling of carcinogenic hazardous substances' work programme is aimed at companies in which one or more carcinogenic hazardous substances are handled or in which such hazardous substances are produced or released.

What was achieved?

The improvement of safety and health in the workplace is strengthened by the qualification and training programmes for labour inspectors (federal states/UVTs), but also by putting at the disposal of companies and workers the resources and practical material developed. The training of labour inspectors promotes uniform assessment and creates transparency about uniform assessment standards in the companies.

Success factors

Based on the detailed description of the procedures for monitoring activities and the additional training modules, a successful basis for a uniform assessment system has been created.

Transferability to other EU Member States

The qualification and training modules described here serve to standardise assessment procedures by the federal state OSH authorities and UVTs. For this reason, they are a specificity resulting from the dual OSH system in Germany.

Nevertheless, the development of qualification and training modules for labour inspectors (as well as companies and workers) for increased monitoring of risk assessment and OSH organisation could also be considered in other European countries.

Further information

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Homepage: https://www.gda-portal.de/DE/GDA/3-GDA-Periode/AP-krebserzeugende-Gefahrstoffe/AP-krebserzeugende-Gefahrstoffe_node.html

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Internet presence of the GDA work programme 'Carcinogenic Hazardous Substances (KEGS)': https://www.gda-portal.de/EN/GDA/Objectives/2019-2024/2019-2024_node.html (accessed 20 September 2023).

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