

Eurogip

Occupational risk prevention in SMEs in Europe

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. Promoting occupational risk prevention initiatives in SMEs and microenterprises: initiatives at the Community level.....	5
1.1. The European Commission	
1.2. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA)	
1.3. The social partners	
1.3.1. The European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (UEAPME)	
1.3.2. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)	
1.3.3. BUSINESSEUROPE	
2. Promoting occupational risk prevention in SMEs in European countries	9
2.1. Transposition of the framework directive and national adaptations for SMEs	
2.1.1. Shortcomings	
2.1.2. National adaptations for SMEs	
2.2. Policies and initiatives intended for SMEs and microenterprises in some European countries	
2.2.1. Support and assistance for SMEs and microenterprises	
2.2.2. Tools and information for SMEs	
2.2.3. Encouraging SMEs and microenterprises to practise occupational risk prevention	
3. Examples of good occupational risk prevention practice in SMEs.....	17
3.1. Measures to involve workers with regard to OH&S	
3.2. Training and counselling	
3.3. Measures to improve health and safety in the workplace	
Conclusion.....	19
Appendices	20
Bibliography	23

Foreword

EUROGIP has produced this thematic report as part of the work of the Policy Committee on Working Conditions, "Comité d'orientation sur les conditions de travail" (COCT, http://www.travail-solidarite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/doc_presentation.pdf). It presents a non-exhaustive overview of policies and actions carried out in the area of occupational risk prevention in SMEs through various examples at both the Community level and in the European Union Member States.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are faced with real difficulties in preventing occupational risks, which can be explained in particular by their small size and the relatively modest resources that they can deploy for this activity.

Now, it is all the more necessary to examine occupational risk prevention in these enterprises in that they represent the great majority of firms, constituting the "backbone of the European Union's economy"¹, and are increasingly numerous. This phenomenon is, moreover, considered as an "emerging risk"² by the Risk Observatory of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work.

The aim of this special report therefore is to review the situation in Europe regarding occupational risk prevention in SMEs and microenterprises, at both the Community level and in various member states (Germany, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Italy, United Kingdom, Sweden), and to identify any good practice rules that could be disseminated.

For this purpose, the measures and initiatives existing at the Community level (institutions and various stakeholders) will be detailed. This will be followed by a description of the policies adopted by certain member states to promote occupational risk prevention in SMEs. Finally, examples of good risk prevention practices in SMEs and microenterprises will be

reviewed.

The context

A number of reasons can be suggested to explain the difficulties faced by SMEs in preventing occupational risks.

Their small size has repercussions on their resources, which are limited, and on their organisation, which is often informal. This explains why employers are rather reluctant to invest in occupational risk prevention. They often see preventive activities "as costly obligations rather than as aspects of sound management"⁴.

Moreover, SMEs are subject to high turnover and hence a shorter average life cycle than large enterprises. It is therefore less easy for the employer to measure the importance of occupational risk prevention over time and the potential economic benefits of good occupational risk management.

Accordingly, some shortcomings are observed with regard to the application of European OH&S legislation in SMEs (risk assessment obligation, information for employees, OH&S department, etc.). The size of the enterprise, for example, often determines the level of

European definition of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) ³				
At the European level, enterprises that meet the following two criteria are considered as SMEs:				
SME	Headcount	Turnover	or	Balance sheet
	≤ 250	≤ €50 million	or	≤ €43 million
- Medium-sized	50 to 249	≤ €50 million	or	≤ €43 million
- Small enterprises	10 to 49	≤ €10 million	or	≤ €10 million
- Microenterprises	0 to 9	≤ €2 million	or	≤ €2 million

1. <http://osha.europa.eu/fr/sub/sme/about>

2. <http://osha.europa.eu/en/riskobservatory/risks/intro>

3. European Commission, The new definition of SMEs - User Guide and model declaration, 2006.

4. European Commission, communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions relating to the practical implementation of the provisions of the health and safety at work directives No. 89/391 (framework directive), 89/654 (workplaces), 89/655 (work equipment), 89/656 (personal protective equipment), 90/269 (manual handling of loads) and 90/270 (work with display screen equipment), Brussels, 5 February 2004.

information for employees (see Appendix 3), to the detriment of the smallest.

SMEs, consulted by the European Commission, mention potential improvements:

- Improvement of employers' management skills;

- Training provided locally and by people who know the enterprise;
- Supply of information and assistance by the intermediary organisations;
- Improvement in the accessibility of information, by sector and targeted;
- Adaptation of equipment.

SMEs in Europe in a few figures (2005)⁵

- **19.6 million SMEs** and microenterprises in all in Europe
- **29.6% of European wage-earners** work in microenterprises (less than 10 employees)

Europe's SMEs and microenterprises represent:

- **99.8% of enterprises** (microenterprises alone: 91.8%);
- **57.6% of total value added**;
- **85 million employees**;
- **67.1% of the labour force** of the European Union;

- **2395 fatal injuries** (compared with 337 in large and very large enterprises), i.e. 87.7% of the total number of fatal injuries⁶

- 1,049 in microenterprises
- 865 in small enterprises
- 481 in medium-sized enterprises;

- **2,416,906 occupational injuries** resulting in more than three days' sick leave (compared with 655,743 in large and very large enterprises), i.e. 78.7% of the total number of occupational injuries.

5. Eurostat database

6. Calculation based on Eurostat 2005 data

1 Promoting occupational risk prevention in SMEs: Community initiatives

1.1 The European Commission

Reminder of Community occupational health and safety legislation

In 1989, a framework directive was adopted establishing, among other things, the principle of occupational risk prevention and defining the responsibilities of both employers and workers.

Employers' obligations

- Ensure workers' safety and health in all aspects related to work, in particular based on stated general principles of prevention, at no financial cost to the workers.
- Assess occupational risks, including in the choice of work equipment and the design of workplaces, and establish protective and preventive services.
- Keep a list of occupational accidents and establish the relevant reports.
- Take the necessary measures for first aid, fire-fighting and evacuation of workers, and take measures in the event of serious and imminent danger.
- Inform and consult workers and allow them to take part in discussions on all questions relating to safety and health at work.
- Make sure that all workers receive sufficient and appropriate training in safety and health during their working hours.

Workers' obligations

- Make correct use of machinery and other means of production, personal protective equipment and safety devices.
- Report any work situation that represents a serious and immediate danger, and any shortcomings in the protection arrangements.
- Cooperate in meeting health protection requirements to enable the employer to ensure that the working environment and working conditions are safe and pose no risk⁷.

In the European Commission, the Directorate General of Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities⁸ is competent in the area of Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S).

2007-2012 OH&S strategy and focus on SMEs

The European Commission, aware of the difficulties faced by SMEs in applying Community legislation regarding OH&S, pays increased attention to them in its 2007-2012 strategy for occupational health and safety. The aim is to demonstrate that occupational risk prevention is economically efficient (reduction in the number of injuries and diseases, hence in absenteeism, improved efficiency of employees who work in better physical and moral conditions, etc.) and that it is within reach of the manager of a SME.

Among the stated objectives is the will to "support SMEs in applying the legislation in force" and to "adapt the legal framework to changes in the working world and simplify it, with special attention to SMEs"⁹.

Accordingly, the EU Member States are invited to improve the quality of occupational risk prevention "especially in SMEs and high-risk sectors", through:

- the dissemination of good practice rules at the local level;
- training and establishment of simple tools to facilitate risk assessment;
- dissemination in simple language of information and guidelines that are easy to understand and apply;
- improved dissemination of information and improved access to advisory services;
- access to outside risk prevention services of a high level of quality at an affordable cost;
- labour inspectors acting as intermediaries to promote improved compliance with the legislation in SMEs;
- use of economic incentive measures at the Community level (for example via the structural funds) and the national

7. http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/health_hygiene_safety_at_work/c11113_fr.htm

8. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/home.jsp?langId=fr>

9. European Commission, communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on "Improving quality and productivity at work: Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work", Brussels, 21 February 2007.

level, especially for microentreprises and SMEs”.

Likewise, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work is to focus its action more on SMEs, by organising campaigns. The Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health is invited to make its Good Practice Guides more easily understandable for SMEs.

But if the Commission is looking into the requirements of SMEs in the area of occupational health and safety, it is also with an economic goal of reducing their bureaucratic obligations. This is the aim of its “Better Regulation” strategy, which involves overhauling the existing Community legislation, in order to lighten the obligations of SMEs, especially in terms of occupational risk prevention. This strategy is in line with European policy for SMEs, which advocates the principle of “Think Small First”¹⁰. The aim is to make allowance for the specific situation of SMEs in working out legislation.

The “Better Regulation” strategy

The “General strategy for improving regulation”, known as “Better Regulation”, aims to improve existing European regulations in order to move toward growth, jobs and social and environmental objectives. It reflects the desire to simplify and reduce administrative obligations in order to obtain “simpler, clearer and less bureaucratic legislation”¹¹. OH&S in SMEs is targeted by these simplification measures, because the expert group appointed by the European Commission to work on this subject, the “Stoiber Group”, considers that the OH&S management obligations placed on employers are an “administrative burden”¹² for enterprises. Thus, according to its recommendations, in particular “small enterprises should be allowed to no longer produce a risk assessment document”. Other proposals concern a reduction in the number of inspections and risk assessments in workplaces, or again, adaptation of the obligations introduced by REACH according to the size of the enterprise.

1.2 The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (OSHA)

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (located in Bilbao, Spain) was set up by the European Union in 1996. With a staff of specialists in occupational health and safety, communication and administration, it works with governments through a network of focal points, the employers and employee representatives. Its objectives include the sharing and dissemination of good practice rules and the communication of information. Also, the Agency offers to help understand occupational health and safety legislation. Its European Risk Observatory performs long-range planning so as to anticipate emerging risks, and provides a discussion platform for decision makers.

The initiatives of the Bilbao Agency in favour of SMEs come within the framework of the Community's 2007-2012 strategy for occupational health and safety. A few more or less recent examples can be mentioned.

A website dedicated to SMEs

The European Agency has created an aid and advisory tool specially dedicated to SMEs in the form of an online “Safety and health guide for SMEs”¹³. This guide disseminates advice, information concerning the Agency's European projects designed to improve OH&S in SMEs (in particular funding programmes to promote good safety and health practices, launched by the European Parliament and the European Commission), or again practical examples of assistance services for SMEs in the area of OH&S. This Web section also provides access to a large quantity of information on good health and safety practices in SMEs.

Funding programmes

At the instigation of the Commission and the European Parliament, the European Agency in Bilbao established funding programmes in favour of SMEs. These programmes, based on calls for projects, were designed to encourage an improvement in the quality of the OH&S measures put in place in SMEs. These annual projects were focused on “training, information and communication, or

10. http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/think_small_first.htm

11. European Commission, communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Third strategic examination of the “Better Regulation” programme in the European Union, 28 January 2009.

12. <http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/fr/newsevents/newsfiche.asp?pk=1253>

13. <http://osha.europa.eu/fr/sub/sme/about>

Zoom on advice for SMEs concerning dangerous substances¹⁴

Regarding dangerous substances, the European Agency proposes a step-by-step approach:

- Link to the fact sheet "An introduction to dangerous substances in the workplace", available in 11 languages;
- Definition of risk assessment and links to websites of the Member States providing advice (Germany, United Kingdom, Spain);
- Link to an Italian website which offers a database of practical solutions;
- Definition of elimination and substitution (elimination of dangerous substances or replacement with non-dangerous substances) and link to the fact sheet "Elimination and substitution of dangerous substances in the workplace";
- Definition of risk control (minimising the risk of release of dangerous substances during the production process and reduction of worker exposure) and link to the French website of the French national research and safety institute INRS;
- Definition of the "last resort" concept (personal protective equipment (PPE): Residual risk mitigation measures when exposure cannot be limited by other means) and link to Spanish and British guides;
- Importance of communication and link to the fact sheet on "Communicating information about dangerous substances in the workplace";
- Importance and definition of regular monitoring of safety and health standards (surveys of workers' health and safety)

good practices in the area of occupational health and safety in SMEs¹⁵ and covered a particular subject chosen annually.

The European Parliament and the European Commission had granted the Bilbao Agency a budget of 4 million euros for the 2003 programme, thus enabling the funding of 40 projects (14 transnational projects and 26 national projects)¹⁶.

At present, the Agency no longer proposes a specific funding programme for SMEs.

A European campaign, "Healthy workplaces", on occupational risk assessment

The 2008-2009 European campaign carried out by the European Agency in Bilbao, entitled "Healthy workplaces. Good for you. Good for business", especially targets SMEs and encourages them to improve occupational risk prevention by systematically performing their own risk assessment internally, by a participative approach. According to the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities, Vladimir Spidla, risk assessment is "the best way of lowering [the] figures [for occupational injuries and diseases]"¹⁷.

The campaign emphasises that this activity is within reach of all enterprises, even SMEs, and is not reserved for experts. To convince of this, the Agency recommends a simplified 5-step approach and uses the argument of economic efficiency: workers in good health are less often absent and are more motivated, hence more productive. The campaign aims to "demystify the process of risk assessment and show that it is not necessarily complicated, bureaucratic, nor the prerogative of experts"¹⁸.

Publication

The Agency recently published a report entitled "Occupational Safety and Health and Economic Performance in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: a Review", which demonstrates the positive relationship existing between the economic performance of SMEs and OH&S. This publication is based on the observation that a lack of recognition of this relationship "limits the efficiency of operations aimed at disease and injury prevention".

1.3 The European social partners

The UEAPME

The European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (UEAPME) is a European social partner which defends the interests of the crafts and of SMEs in Europe, with 83 member organisations in 36 countries. The French members are the "Assemblée permanente des chambres de métiers" (APCM), the "Union professionnelle de l'artisanat" (UPA) and the "Confédération générale des petites et moyennes entreprises" (CGPME).

14. "Assistance for small and medium-sized enterprises - dangerous substances", http://osha.europa.eu/fr/sub/sme/products/dangerous_substances

15. "SME funding programmes", <http://osha.europa.eu/fr/sub/sme/index.htm/fs/index.htm>

16. Funding scheme 2003-2004, <http://osha.europa.eu/fr/sub/sme/fs/index.htm/publications/fs2003/index.htm>

17. European Commission, press release, "Reducing the number of occupational injuries and diseases through improved risk assessment", Luxembourg, 13 June 2008, http://ec.europa.eu/luxembourg/news/frontpage_news/259_fr.htm

18. "About the campaign", <http://osha.europa.eu/fr/campaigns/hw2008/about/index.html>

The UEAPME is involved in the signature of framework agreements and in European legislative plans, through lobbying work and the drafting of policy statements.

In its lobbying work, the UEAPME defends a reduction in bureaucratic obligations generally for SMEs. Regarding OH&S, it considers that occupational risk prevention problems in SMEs are due not to a lack of regulations but to poor application of the regulations. It therefore expects of the European Union non-binding measures, especially in the form of guidelines, to help SMEs apply the regulations.

The “Preventisme” project

In 2001 the UEAPME initiated the “Preventisme” project¹⁹, funded by the Bilbao Agency, which involves collecting and disseminating, via a report, good practices for occupational injury prevention in SMEs. The Belgian institute for occupational risk prevention, Prevent, provided expert services within the framework of this project. The final report, entitled “Preventisme - Practical Prevention of Accidents in SMEs”, proposes to show through the analysis of good practices that SMEs are aware of the potential economic benefits offered by OH&S, that they are acquainted with the risks and know how to assess them, that they are capable of taking measures to prevent them and incorporate them in an overall strategy, and that they do so in partnership with outside structures by involving their employees.

ETUC

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)²⁰, founded in 1973, brings together 82 member organisations and 12 European trade union federations. It acts in cooperation with the European institutions to work out economic and social policies and negotiates with the employers for the signature of framework agreements. It also has a European trade union activity and performs lobbying work on various European employment-related topics. The ETUC has set up the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), which is its centre of expertise.

The Health and Safety Department of this Institute has an Observatory on the application of European directives and works out joint trade union strategies. It also has a role providing expertise for the Advisory Committee on Safety,

Hygiene and Health Protection at Work and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. It performs studies and coordinates networks of experts on technical standardisation and dangerous substances.

The European Trade Union Confederation campaigns at the European level for the improvement of OH&S, as an engine of competitiveness and growth. For example, as part of its work and research on SMEs, it has organised a series of seminars, which led to the production of a summary document containing research on OH&S in SMEs. This research concerns European initiatives, legislative or not, in this area, and then the national practices of certain Member States.

Another ETUC publication of 2002, co-financed by the Bilbao Agency, contains four national reports produced by partners in the project and analyses the role and significance of workers' representation in the area of OH&S in SMEs.

The ETUC is also involved in the signature of sector framework agreements, the most recent of which, signed in 2007 by the European trade union and employers' organisations, concerns mobbing and violence.

As regards the European regulation relating to chemical agents, “REACH”, the Confederation pays special attention to SMEs. In particular, in a resolution it proposes considering the establishment of an “assistance plan”²¹ especially in favour of SMEs. Within the framework of its participation in the REACH information campaign, it emphasises the problems of accessibility of information for SMEs, which “risk breaking the law” through ignorance of their new obligations.

BUSINESSEUROPE

BUSINESSEUROPE, founded in 1958 under the name of “Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe” (UNICE), represents 39 employers' federations in 33 European countries. The French member is the French employers' association MEDEF (Mouvement des Entreprises de France). BUSINESSEUROPE proposes “releasing corporate energy, boosting innovation, completing the internal market, improving the functioning of the labour market, making environmental policy more efficient and effective, and promoting international trade and investment”.

19. <http://www.preventisme.org/>

20. <http://www.etuc.org/fr>

21. http://www.etuc.org/a/312?var_recherche=pme.

BUSINESSEUROPE deals with OH&S in its Social Affairs Commission.

BUSINESSEUROPE is involved in European projects, such as that relating to the establishment of REACH or again that relating to the "Better Regulation" strategy, through policy statements.

Generally, the European employers' organisation demands the least possible regulation, in particular to prevent any bureaucratic overloading of SMEs. Accordingly, the

Union has taken position in favour of the Better Regulation strategy. Within the framework of the new REACH regulations, it advocates a reduction in obligations for SMEs, which in some cases have had to recruit a specialist consultant. Among the positions defended can also be found the idea that the "principle of precaution" increases the administrative burden (Position Paper of 27 May 2009: "Seven Priorities for Optimising Implementation of REACH: Lessons Learned from the First Two Years").

2 Promoting occupational risk prevention in SMEs in European countries

2.1. Transposition of the framework directive and national adaptations for SMEs

2.1.1. Shortcomings

In a 2004 Communication, the European Commission reviewed the application of the 1989 framework directive and the individual Directives in the Member States. It noted shortcomings, chiefly concerning SMEs and micro-enterprises, in certain areas.

Regarding **information for employers and workers**: small enterprises have difficulties understanding the legislation. This is the case in Spain, where "68% of enterprises have not understood the obligations placed on employers" and where "16% complain of inadequate information concerning occupational health and safety". This is also the case in Sweden and the United Kingdom, where "for 80% of employers, the main reason that led them to take measures was the obligation to comply with the law".

The obligation of **risk assessment, documentation and monitoring** for employers is applied unevenly in the various countries. In Germany, enterprises of less than 10 workers were exempted from the "obligation of providing documents summarising the results of a risk assessment", for which the country was convicted by the European Court of Justice²². In Denmark, SMEs make the fewest risk

assessments (27% for enterprises of 5 to 19 workers). In the United Kingdom, 22% of enterprises "have no document" concerning risk assessment (including a majority of small enterprises, which were formerly exempted from this obligation).

As regards **protective and preventive services**, the directive requires that enterprises appoint one or more employees in charge of occupational risk prevention, giving priority to in-house departments. If the enterprise does not have in-house competencies, it should call on an outside risk prevention service. In Germany, about 50% of SMEs employing less than 20 people have no safety manager. In Austria, small enterprises are covered "rather superficially" by preventive services. In Denmark, "only 12% of enterprises with less than 10 workers had made use of a service of this type in 1994". In Sweden, 45% of enterprises with less than 10 employees benefit from preventive services.

The **information, consultation and participation of workers** are considered inadequate in all the enterprises. With regard to the training of workers, safety managers and employers, it is especially in SMEs that major shortcomings can be observed.

The **organisation and management of OH&S** are rare in SMEs.

22. Court of Justice of the European Communities, Judgment 2002/C 84/01 of 7 February 2002 in case C-5/00 (Commission/Federal Republic of Germany)

For **application of the legislation**, compliance with the legislation by enterprises is checked chiefly via labour inspections. Now, the Member States claim that they lack resources to perform these inspections in all enterprises, especially the smallest ones, which are the most numerous.

2.1.2. National adaptations for SMEs

The transposition of the 1989 framework directive regarding OH&S in the countries has given rise to various adaptations. Moreover, to help SMEs comply with their new legal obligations, most of them have taken measures to overcome their financial, technical and organisational difficulties. It is interesting to mention a few examples of these adaptations, with regard to preventive services in-house and outside the enterprise, and "safety representatives".

Under the directive, enterprises must appoint one or more employees in charge of occupational risk prevention or, if in-house competencies are lacking, call on an outside preventive service. For SMEs, the European countries have therefore adapted this obligation.

For example, in Germany, Austria, Spain and Italy in particular, the head of a small enterprise can himself act as the preventive service. He can obtain training, sometimes from the social security organisation that is competent for OH&S.

The in-house preventive service is not always compulsory for the smallest enterprises. It is compulsory for no enterprise in Austria, while in Spain it is compulsory for enterprises with more than 500 workers, and in Italy for those with more than 200 employees. For example, the safety representative, or safety manager for the enterprise, depending on his title, is optional for the smallest enterprises, just like the Works Council or the Health and Safety Committee (Austria, Germany, Sweden, France, United Kingdom, etc.).

For SMEs, the safety representatives are sometimes territorial, in other words they cover several enterprises in a given sector or a given geographic area (Sweden, Italy or France, for example).

Zoom on the **Swedish territorial representative**

Largely funded by the government, the objective of these representatives, appointed by the trade unions, is in particular to raise awareness, ensure the adoption of preventive measures and workers' information, take part in the training of safety representatives at the local level, and disseminate their experience and knowledge at the trade union or federal level. They also have a monitoring role.

The competent social security organisations, or the state where applicable, usually provide advice and information free of charge to help SMEs apply the new regulations (Austria, Germany, Italy, France, etc.).

2.2. Policies and initiatives intended for SMEs in some European countries

2.2.1. Support and assistance for SMEs

In many countries, SMEs are offered assistance to enable them to apply the legislation correctly and improve the health and safety of their workers. This assistance generally takes the form of public funding, a training policy and/or a public or private advisory service.

Funding

Some countries, such as **France** and **Italy**, provide for dedicated funding to support SMEs in the improvement of OH&S. This may involve funding for new and safer machines or else for workplace design.

In **France**, the regional health insurance funds (CRAM) propose an occupational health and safety contract for enterprises with less than 200 employees in the form of a "convention nationale d'objectifs" (agreement signed for four years between the French national health insurance fund for employees (CNAMTS) and one or more trade associations). Under this contract, based on a risk diagnostic, the enterprises concerned undertake to implement measures to improve OH&S, for which the CRAM provides funding. This scheme also includes simplified financial assistance, for certain SMEs, in defined sectors and for defined risks, or for putting in place specific measures (replacement of equipment to mitigate risks, for example).

In France, example of a project carried out within the framework of an OH&S contract signed between the RhôneAlpes CRAM health insurance fund and a butcher in the Ardèche region employing up to six workers (project benefiting from funding and advice from the CRAM): Setting up of a new laboratory and a new butchery in another district due to lack of space, with a hoop ladder for secure access to the roof, safety barriers on the roof, a rail to transport quarters of meat and avoid manual handling, air conditioning, nonskid floor tiling, etc.
- Training in safe driving for two new employees.

In Italy, the National Institute of Occupational Injury and Disease Insurance (INAIL) provides for a support fund intended for the safety representatives of SMEs and for equal representation, within the framework of the collective labour agreement. It finances loan interests or part of the amount of the loan, in a call for projects. In 2006, INAIL's funding in favour of SMEs amounted to about 60 million euros²³ (no new funding has yet been provided since then).

Training

Some Member States have set up a training scheme for SMEs. In Germany and Austria, the "Entrepreneurial model" (Unternehmermodell) allows the head of a small enterprise to himself provide the preventive service, which is compulsory (if he does not call on either a private consultant, or the preventive service of the country's occupational injury and disease insurance organisation). If he makes this choice, training courses in OH&S are offered to him by the legal occupational risk insurance organisation to enable him to perform this function.

Zoom on the German company manager model²⁴

German enterprises with less than 50 employees can choose to apply one of the three proposed models to meet their obligation of having a preventive service. Either they can choose to call on an outside service, or they call on the services of their BG (OH&S insurance organisation for their branch of activity), or they decide to manage occupational risk prevention themselves. In that case, their BG offers them training courses in OH&S. These courses, adapted to each occupational branch, consist of initial training seminars (common core) in which their awareness of OH&S is developed: responsibilities, obligations and potential legal consequences, fundamentals of risk assessment, economic aspects of occupational risk prevention and proposals for assistance and advice. Regular further training seminars then enable them to develop their knowledge in greater depth and update it. These seminars provide information on the latest developments in OH&S, in-depth knowledge regarding risk analysis and occupational risk prevention, a list of contacts, assistance content if need be, and exchanges of experience.

In Belgium, the Walloon region subsidises the Walloon institute for alternance training for self-employed workers and small and medium-sized enterprises (IFAPME)²⁵. This public interest organisation proposes training courses for the managers of SMEs, especially in OH&S. For instance, the Liège centre offers courses in "cardiopulmonary reanimation and automatic external defibrillation", courses on risk, regulations and remedies for legionnaires' disease, in OH&S consulting (various levels), first-aid work, or again emergency fire response. Enterprises with less than 250 employees following training courses at the IFAPME benefit from the "training cheque" scheme of the Walloon region, which provides 50% funding for the courses (a training cheque bought for €15 is worth €30)²⁶.

In parallel to these training courses partly funded by the region, the Prevent Institute, a "multidisciplinary institute focusing on occupational risk prevention by promoting the quality of working conditions and the improvement of work organisation"²⁷, proposes training courses specially designed for SMEs: from reporting to analysis of occupational injuries, risk management, from practical analysis to management, or again, basic knowledge for OH&S advisers.

In Spain, a Catalan training programme, GESTPYME (closed), was launched as part of the EU ADAPT initiative. The aim was to establish appropriate training programmes to enhance skills in the enterprise, the working environment and competitiveness, and including the topic of OH&S. The training was carried out via a website and involved electronic media, in text or in video or CD-ROM form.

In France, the occupational injury and disease insurance system is developing some training offers specially designed for SMEs (e.g. the Ile-de-France Regional Health Insurance Fund (CRAMIF)²⁸).

Advice for the benefit of SMEs

In most countries, small enterprises can obtain free advice provided either by the OH&S insurance organization or by the government, or else call on private consultants.

In Germany, the "Company Manager model" (see above) provides for assistance from the BGs for small enterprises,

23. "Roma. Sessanta Milioni di euro per le PMI che investono in prevenzione e sicurezza", in www.inail.it

24. <http://www.stbg.de/site.aspx?url=umodell/umod.htm> (available in English version).

25. www.ifapme.be

26. <http://www.ifapme.be/index.asp?ID=100>

27. <http://fr.prevent.be/net/net01.nsf/p/DB7EB5F4A9F01CEFC1256F690024BBF0>

28. <http://www.cramif.fr/entreprises/prevention/formations-stages-prevention-chef-entreprise-dirigeant-encadrement.asp>

including information, motivation, risk analysis performance and occupational advice. This system is estimated to have helped reduce accidents in small enterprises by 30%²⁹.

In **Austria**, the AuvaSicher programme is intended for the heads of small enterprises with less than 50 employees which have chosen to call on the preventive services of the OH&S insurance system (Auva). It is designed to cover most of the enterprises concerned, with principles of proximity (there is one occupational risk prevention centre in each Land) and quality (the personnel is adequately trained or specialists under contract are used). A software has been created for performing risk assessment in particular. According to the Auva, during the ten years for which this system has existed, from 1999 to 2009, the number of accidents has declined sharply³⁰.

In **Denmark**, a project in the Frederiksborg occupational health service centre, assisted by two researchers from the Centre for Alternative Social Analysis (CASA), aimed to create a service model suitable for small enterprises, which could be incorporated in their everyday operations. The project was based on interviews with managers of small enterprises to learn their attitudes and expectations regarding occupational health services and the development of service methods and offers. A personal contact (who will make visits) has been assigned to each enterprise. Tools are made available, including, in particular, a telephone service and a special risk assessment method. Seminars and forums are also organised. The evaluation of the programme showed the importance of the specialists' qualifications (so that they may be capable of working with SMEs), of the clarification of constraints (economic, legal or professional) and of direct contacts.

In **Spain**, a national programme called "Prevea" is designed to improve occupational risk prevention in small enterprises which suffer a high accident rate. Within this framework, enterprises voluntarily undertake to establish, over 24 months, measures to improve occupational risk prevention and working conditions. In exchange, they benefit from the technical support, advice and equipment of the Mutuas (accident insurance organisations) and the national occupational health and safety institute (INSHT).

In addition, the "Stop Riesgos Laborales" programme (Stop Occupational Risks) carried out by the INSHT and the Autonomous Communities provides SMEs with a telephone and email service to help them organise OH&S

activities. The dedicated website also provides links to the websites of useful organisations and a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section.

In **France**, SMEs coming under the general Social Security regime can receive free advice and information from the occupational risk prevention services of the regional health insurance funds (CRAM).

2.2.2. Tools and information for SMEs

Since SMEs do not often have an in-house technical expert, they need information concerning occupational risk prevention to be readily available in a simplified form. Numerous tools have been developed as an aid to understanding and to provide simplified information for SMEs in the various countries. They may take the form of guides, manuals, technical data sheets, tools especially for risk assessment, or else dedicated websites. They are proposed by national authorities, institutes, societies or else social partners.

Guides, manuals and technical data sheets

Numerous guides, manuals and technical data sheets have been designed specially for SMEs in the various countries. Generally, they give information concerning the responsibilities and legal obligations of employers, adopt a step-by-step presentation of occupational risk prevention activities (elimination and then assessment of risks, then design of a risk prevention plan with the measures to be taken, which are sometimes associated with a specific risk) and provide a list of contacts, which are the organisations and institutes to contact for any formalities or questions. Sometimes, they contain an inventory of risks or are accompanied by tools to help establish a risk prevention system.

In **Germany**, the legal insurance organisation for occupational injuries and diseases (DGUV) makes available various instructive guides³¹ covering various subjects intended for SMEs. These guides provide information which is intended to be clear and practical concerning the organisation of occupational risk prevention in the enterprise depending on the subject, and indicating whom to contact depending on the subject and the question posed.

For example, the guide entitled "A healthy back, healthy joints" explains in illustrated form the risk assessment procedure, the measures to be taken, how to manage

29. Prevent, Organisation of outside protective and preventive services in 15 European Union Member States, December 2006.

30. <http://www.auva.at/portal/index.html?sessionId=638E7A6AFC762410030B50B454D2ACA9?ctrl.cmd=render&ctrl.window=auvportal.channel> content.cmsWindow&p menuid=68782&p tabid=3

31. http://www.dguv.de/inhalt/praevention/fachaus_fachgruppen/wirk/kmu/index.jsp.

absenteeism and ageing personnel, and provides information on organisations and institutes to contact depending on the type of problem. It provides in appendices a check-list, a table of processes for in-depth assessment of risks, information concerning the manual handling of loads, and links to other information.

In **Denmark**, the Center for Alternative Social Analysis has published a manual entitled "One big family - How to transform small enterprises into attractive workplaces". This manual is based on the development of models and tools to diagnose psychosocial risks and enhance OH&S in SMEs, and on a collection of good practice rules.

In Spain, the association of mutual insurance organisations for occupational injuries (Asociación de Mutuas de Accidentes de Trabajo, AMAT) proposes, for example, a manual on auditing of occupational risk prevention in SMEs (La Auditoría de prevención de riesgos laborales en la PYME). This manual gives a reminder of the nature of legal auditing of occupational risk prevention, it explains step by step the audit and the aspects which should be covered by the audit, and contains a questionnaire and the objectives of the report; the appendices contain a form and the list of Mutuas.

The trade union institute for the work environment and health (Instituto Nacional de Trabajo Ambiente y Salud, ISTAS) has published a guide intended for the OH&S representatives of SMEs (Guía de los delegados y delegadas de prevención de las Pequeñas y Medianas Empresas), which explains the role of these representatives, informs them of the instruments available to them (training, inspections, advice, etc.) and provides information concerning the Mutuas.

In France, the French national research and safety institute INRS ("Institut national de recherche et de sécurité") likewise proposes guides specially designed for SMEs. That entitled "Évaluation des risques professionnels. Aide au repérage des risques dans les PME-PMI" (Occupational risk assessment. Aid for identification of risks in SMEs/SMIs), to be downloaded from www.inrs.fr (or to be purchased in hard-copy version), describes instructively the procedure for step-by-step risk assessment, provides risk data sheets containing examples of situations and solutions, the list of hazard symbols with their meaning, a list of preventive measures and the organisations to contact for any problems or questions (with a list of contact data of the OH&S departments of regional health insurance funds (CRAM)).

In Italy, the higher institute for occupational risk prevention and safety (Istituto Superiore per la Prevenzione e la Sicurezza sul Lavoro, ISPESL) provides guidelines concerning, in particular, risk assessment applied to small and medium-sized enterprises (Linee guida per la

valutazione del rischio Applicazione alla piccola e media impresa).

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in the United Kingdom also proposes guides for SMEs, notably including "An Introduction to Health and Safety - Health and Safety in Small Businesses". In FAQ form, this guide gives general information concerning OH&S and risk prevention, information on how to identify risks, and the legal references and specific contacts for each type of risk.

Practical tools

In some European Union Member States, tools are available to SMEs to facilitate their occupational risk prevention activities. They may take the form of questionnaires, as in **Belgium** and **Denmark**, an online performance indicator as in the United Kingdom, or else online facilities as in France, or a catalogue and an online database, as in **Sweden**.

In **Belgium**, the internal risk assessment system developed by Prebes, a trade association of OH&S advisers, in cooperation with the Federal Department of Employment, Labour and Social Consultation, aims to allow SMEs to survey and assess risks themselves, simply and quickly, on the basis of a questionnaire, while verifying at all times their compliance with the regulations. This tool also provides for a final assessment which allows a satisfaction index to be calculated against a check-list. Given the low level of participation in the information sessions accompanying the launch of this tool, a few recommendations were made for improvement: it would be preferable if the participants came from the region, if the information concerning legislation were provided by a representative of a national authority and if an entrepreneur were able to report on his experience. The information campaign, for its part, should establish a link between the organisations representing SMEs, Chambers of Commerce, etc.

In **Denmark**, the National Research Centre for the Working Environment has produced questionnaires which are not designed exclusively for SMEs, but which seem appropriate due to their practical aspect and low cost. There is, for example, a questionnaire designed to assess the psychosocial environment, called the "Copenhagen Questionnaire"³². The need to comply with certain ethical rules is recalled at the outset, including, in particular, voluntarism and anonymity.

Again in **Denmark**, the Council for the Working Environment, supported by the employers' organisations and the

government, has decided to develop an integrated method of assessment of the working environment, while taking into account the specific culture of the enterprise. The objective is to establish a link between assessment of the working environment and an assessment of productivity, quality control and the external environment. For this purpose, a toolbox (integrated assessment of the working environment) has been designed. Task forces have been formed to present it to enterprises. The results are positive, because the enterprises have expressed interest.

The **Spanish trade union institute for the work environment and health (ISTAS)** has replicated and adapted the Copenhagen questionnaire, calling it the ISTAS21 Method (CoPsoQ): Instrument for psychosocial risk prevention. In its Spanish version, it is specified that the short version is intended for small enterprises.

In France, the “Risques PME” (SME Risks) website (see below) makes available numerous tools, classified in several categories, to guide and support the entrepreneur in the step-by-step implementation of occupational risk prevention: Start from the existing situation, Define work units, Analyse accidents, Analyse risk situations, Hierarchise risks, Act.

In the United Kingdom, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) proposes, for its part, a performance indicator for SMEs³³ which takes the form of an online questionnaire. This enables the entrepreneur to assess the quality of his occupational risk management and compare it anonymously with that of other enterprises. He also has access to a guide enabling him to improve it.

The “Starter Pack”³⁴ is another tool proposed by the HSE for young entrepreneurs and beginners in OH&S. It consists of a poster, documentation and tools for the establishment of occupational risk prevention activities.

In **Sweden**, an association for the work environment called “Work Life Forum”³⁵ has created an experience sharing model for SMEs, based on prior collection of good practices. This model is disseminated in the form of a catalogue and a database on the www.traffpu.nkt.se website.

Websites

In some countries, the public authorities or organisations make available to SMEs a dedicated website, with information concerning OH&S. This is the case in France and the United Kingdom in particular.

In France, the Rhône-Alpes CRAM fund, the Labour, Employment and Vocational Training services in the Rhône-Alpes region (Ministry of Labour) and the regional agency for the improvement of working conditions and the recognition of social innovation are developing a website dedicated to information for SMEs regarding occupational risk prevention³⁶. It describes concrete experiences, and provides tools, methods and professional contacts.

The Health and Safety Executive (**United Kingdom**) has also created a site³⁷, “Better Business” (see below). In an instructive and humorous manner, it is based on the argument that the improvement of OH&S makes it possible to easily make savings, and guides the employer in his occupational risk prevention activities.

The “Better Business” site developed by the HSE (**United Kingdom**) takes the viewpoint of the employer in its first sections, with a list of areas of action to cut costs: “absenteeism”, “personnel replacement”, “insurance and compensation”, “damage to reputation”, “productivity and efficiency”. The following section explains that a good OH&S programme can save money, and gives information concerning a simple, inexpensive way of managing OH&S. Then, the site gives step-by-step information for carrying out an occupational risk prevention programme, tools (Quiz, FAQ, posters for downloading), a starters' pack, etc. It also contains a presentation of the HSE. Finally, a last section makes it possible to send questions and receive answers either by email, fax or postal letter. There is also a phone number to call for any information concerning OH&S.

32. http://www.arbejdsmiljoforskning.dk/upload/copsoq/uk/copsoq_ii_short_questionnaire_english.pdf

33. <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/haspi>

34. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/business/leaflets.htm#hsestarterpack>

35. <http://www.arbetsmiljoforum.se>

36. <http://www.risques-pme.fr/>

37. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/betterbusiness/index.htm>

Moreover, a section of the HSE website presents “Case studies in small enterprises: examples of good practices”.

And internationally?

A practice of the Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CSST) in **Quebec** can be mentioned as an example. Its website presents a section dedicated to SMEs, entitled “Portrait des risques”³⁸, which provides advice for SMEs according to the potential risks in the various sectors, gives information on the legal rights and obligations of employers and workers, and explains what an occupational risk prevention programme is.

The CSST also organises a competition giving awards to enterprises for their innovative good risk prevention practices. The practices of the winners and finalists are published on the site³⁹, and SMEs are widely represented in the various sectors.

2.2.3. Encouraging SMEs and microenterprises to practise occupational risk prevention

SMEs are extremely hard to reach. They are numerous, and they have very different interests, concerns and organisations, and very often little available time. There is also a definite discrepancy between OH&S objectives, which are long-term and the effects of which are hard to detect, and the objectives of SMEs, which are short-term. A great deal of imagination is therefore needed to capture their attention and convince them that OH&S is also “good for business”. In addition to developing training sessions, websites, preventive services and guidelines, which in themselves are means to reach SMEs, to raise their awareness some countries decide to grant small enterprises awards for their occupational risk prevention performance via prizes for good practices, they launch campaigns, use the approach of worker representation, or else adopt strategies of dissemination and sharing of experience.

In some countries, small enterprises are awarded prizes - such as the “Golden Securitas” in **Austria** or the “Pro-Safe Awards” in **Belgium** - testifying to their OH&S performance. Apart from delivering a symbolic award to a deserving SME, these actions are intended as an opportunity to collect examples of good practices to enable the sharing of experience and to testify to the need for performance at all levels.

In **Austria**, “Let’s get baking” is a comprehensive campaign for risk prevention in bakeries, based on a partnership between the health insurance fund (OOGKK), the accident insurance fund, the Chamber of Commerce of Upper Austria and the Bakers' Corporation. The aim is to encourage risk prevention through information campaigns targeted on the training schools (with a participative approach) and the target group of future master bakers, in particular via the Regional Bakers' Conferences.

Zoom on the Austrian “Let’s Get Baking” campaign

This project is promoted through district meetings and at safety engineer conferences. A “Video-Bus” proposes training for small enterprises which do not have suitable premises. The Auva and the Labour Inspectorate have made numerous visits. The Auva experts have trained the leading supplier of technical equipment for bakeries and the personnel of the Auva's preventive service centres, safety officers and industrial doctors. Evaluations of these measures have shown the importance of a comprehensive approach, and the importance for the enterprise of having suitable equipment and information from the outset.

In **Belgium**, employers' organisations have launched the “Pro-Safe” campaign⁴⁰, with the participation of the Federal Department of Employment, Labour and Social Consultation and coordinated by Prevent (Belgian institute for risk prevention, protection and well-being at work). This comprehensive campaign intended for SMEs comprises the creation of a platform for the launch of OH&S programmes by the intermediary organisations, a website, the “Pro-Safe Awards”, and training sessions. To reach SMEs better, it advocates the use of information channels that they know well, and communication at favourable times (following a work accident or an inspection, for example).

The “Pro-Safe” website contains information on legislation, a “knowledge bank” with information concerning the various risks, a “good practices” section (which includes the winners of the “Pro-Safe Awards”), tools, OH&S news and a FAQ section. Special importance is assigned to the dissemination of good practices, via numerous concrete examples. Some aspects of this site have original features: for example, for several risks in the “knowledge bank” there are little scenarios showing the importance and the principles of OH&S in a literary or humorous manner.

38. http://www.csst.qc.ca/portail/fr/prevention/portrait_des_risques/SelectionSecteur.htm

39. <http://www.csst.qc.ca/asp/innovation/index.html>

40. <http://www.pro-safe.be/p/22A80C4261C7646D80256A96002D9827?open>

Again in Belgium, a Luxembourg foundation has initiated a strategy of fire prevention training adapted to SMEs, based on the exchange of good practices within networks linking SMEs, experts and large enterprises, and on training tools adapted to SMEs. The training was available on a website and consisted of a comprehensive range of tools.

The Spanish Trade Union Institute for Labour, in partnership with the Mutua Universal, has, for its part, considered the idea of using worker representation to improve OH&S. It has accordingly organised seminars to reflect on the conception of effective provisions in collective bargaining agreements incorporating OH&S principles.

Again in Spain, an example of a sector-based campaign aimed at SMEs can be mentioned. A project by the Comisión del sector agrario (Commission for the Agricultural Sector) was designed to enable smallholder farmers in the Navarre region to take into account the risk prevention principles provided for by Spanish law, through an awareness raising programme.

Zoom on the Spanish programme of the Agricultural Sector Commission

The programme endeavoured to facilitate the performance of (compulsory) inspections of agricultural machinery by setting up mobile units. Promotion campaigns accompanied these schemes in their various applications. A training programme for occupational health and safety experts and farmers was then launched, with training packs. To ensure that the impacts of the campaign will be lasting over time, information continues to be disseminated via publications, the government of Navarre has allocated funds to stimulate risk prevention among farmers, and technical training has been enhanced.

Following these initiatives, 80% of the machines in question were inspected. 130 risk assessments were performed and 320 requests for advice were received by the instructors and advisers. These results can be explained notably by the high rate of participation by the trade associations. One of them, moreover, has decided to call on the services of an expert in occupational risk prevention to launch its own programmes.

In France, the "Risque PME" website publishes good practices applied by SMEs. The magazine Crescendo published by the Rhône-Alpes regional health insurance fund (CRAM) disseminates the innovative experience of companies. These publications improve the companies' image and provide them with free publicity.

In Italy, a project by an employers' organisation in the Province of Lucca (Tuscany) was carried out in 2000 and 2001 for the development of an "integrated approach for the dissemination of a safety culture". The aim was to train the corporate "training/information officer", whose role is to identify risks, train personnel, look for solutions, encourage dialogue with institutions, analyse the reasons for a possible lack of interest in OH&S, and assess the impact of preventive measures. The results of this training programme were considered satisfactory on the whole, although the companies' participation and interest had been hard to measure.

In the United Kingdom, the "Good Neighbour Scheme" is an original national programme designed to strengthen the links existing between large enterprises and the small enterprises that work for or with them, so that the latter may benefit from the experience and expertise of the large enterprises with regard to OH&S. This exchange of experience takes place in a forum and is the result of a commitment by the large companies to provide their aid and of small companies to attend the forum. There were positive aspects to this programme, but improvements could be desired, especially concerning the motivation of SMEs to take part. It is also advisable to organise the forums based on sectors of activity.

Another project, in the Lothian region of Scotland, aims to use the provision of primary healthcare to improve occupational health. An experiment has been carried out with seven general practitioners (GPs), supported by two occupational health advisers. The GP questions the patient on his work, and on any occupational diseases or risks in his workplace. The identification of a link between the patient's disease and his work leads to monitoring and the drawing up an information note.

3 Examples of good occupational risk prevention practice in SMEs

There are numerous occupational risk prevention initiatives intended for SMEs or deployed in SMEs. Although tools and models have been developed, the preventive measures that are taken are different, and reflect a particular culture, specific to the enterprise. We shall therefore mention a few examples of measures which illustrate this diversity, in the areas of employee involvement, information and advisory activities, and improvement of health and safety in the workplace.

3.1. Measures to involve workers with regard to OH&S

Some SMEs in Europe adopt a strategy of strong involvement of their employees in their plans for improvement of OH&S. To do so, they develop various methods which aim to involve employees in the projects, even giving them financial incentives for this purpose, and informing them. Here are a few examples.

Involvement of employees in OH&S projects

Enterprises raise their employees' awareness of OH&S by involving them closely in the conception and implementation of risk prevention programmes. This involvement entails the establishment of working groups, the use of questionnaires, or again the organisation of regular discussions between the employees and management.

In **Denmark**, for example, the safety representative of a company of 20 IT consultants, after receiving information on risk assessment from his trade association, produced a questionnaire for the employees, which revealed problems of a psychosocial nature. Individual interviews were therefore carried out to find solutions. Regular meetings were organised to discuss current and future OH&S projects, a working group was established for each project, and interviews were held between the management and each employee.

Likewise, in **Spain**, work teams consisting of members of the personnel of a construction firm are responsible for setting up their own projects. The approach was promoted through training activities. For example, the teams examined the installation of safety nets, the introduction of harnesses and the wearing of special gloves. This approach also made

it possible to develop team spirit and motivation among the personnel.

In **Italy**, a water treatment company has initiated comprehensive measures for the improvement of OH&S and working conditions based on strong involvement of the employees by using regular, anonymous questionnaires, and by establishing a policy of dialogue.

In the **United Kingdom**, an OH&S consulting firm has developed an innovative and original method to raise the safety awareness of building and construction workers. Risk assessment is presented to them in an amusing way, via a theatrical performance involving the public and showing practical visual examples of typical bad practices and their solutions.

Some enterprises use financial incentives to encourage their employees to become involved in OH&S. This is especially the case in **Belgium**, where an industrial waste management company has introduced a monthly bonus of €40 for employees who have complied with the safety instructions.

OH&S information for workers

Some methods are being developed to make information concerning OH&S more accessible, especially to workers of foreign origin.

In **Austria**, "Health: a Valuable Resource in the Waste Sorting Unit Asten", is a comprehensive OH&S project supported by the health insurance organisation. It is based on active participation by the workers, taking into account the workers' culture and allowing for multiculturalism. Bilingual health circles (German and Turkish) grouping the employees together to propose measures have enabled OH&S to be made accessible to all.

3.2. Training and counselling

Some enterprises focus their OH&S policy on training or call on outside expertise to help them introduce OH&S measures. Here are a few examples.

Training through the dissemination of good practices

In Spain, the Foundation for Port Studies has organised a transnational project aimed at improving methods for loading and storage on Ro-Ro vessels, via a training programme through the dissemination of effective examples of good practices. The project was based on a risk inventory and assessment. Online conferences and courses were then organised, with a safety manual as training material.

Support from outside expertise

A UK scaffolding company⁴¹, for example, recruited a safety adviser, who makes visits once a month to improve OH&S.

Again in the United Kingdom, a brick manufacturer decided to reduce the number of injuries related to manual handling of loads. Following a risk analysis, training activities were established with the cooperation of an osteopath, who performs an annual check-up on the workers and comes and treats them within 48 hours in the event of injuries. The company has noted positive results: in particular, it has reduced by 25% the number of workdays lost and by 1.5% the number of bricks not produced because of injuries. In addition, the company has improved its reputation by winning a prize for good practices.

3.3. Measures to improve OH&S

As regards measures to improve health and safety in the workplace, once again a great variety of projects have been developed by SMEs. A few examples should therefore be mentioned, in the areas of risk assessment, improvement of the physical environment and ergonomics, and promotion of health.

Risk assessment

Some SMEs use the tools made available to them to help them with risk assessment in particular.

In France, for example, a painting company with five employees has assessed risks using tools (a software package and a specific program for evaluation of chemical risks) provided by the Organisme professionnel de prévention du bâtiment et des travaux publics (Occupational Risk Prevention Organisation for the Building and Civil Engineering Industries: OPPBTP). As a result, it has established an action plan covering improvement of the work environment, the acquisition of personal protective equipment, substitutes for chemical substances and an OH&S training programme.

Improvement of the physical environment

Some enterprises have taken the initiative of organising the work environment taking into account safety principles as soon as they become set up on their premises.

In Belgium, for example, a joiner's shop was nominated for the "Pro-Safe Awards". With its two employees, it had to move due to a lack of space and problems of waste storage (sawdust). When setting up on new premises, it took into account the principles of improvement of the physical environment, thus making it possible to have more order and cleanliness, more light, a satisfactory temperature and healthier ambient air (installation of filters on the machines). A new waste recovery system not only avoids unnecessary handling operations but also generates savings. The installed machinery base was renewed and cables were located on "suspended reels" to prevent falls.

Improvement of ergonomics

A German company, specialised in the assembly of machine components, opted to supply its employees with ergonomic boots ("MBT")⁴², in order to prevent the occurrence of musculoskeletal disorders (MSD). The adaptation of adjustable office tables and new assembly benches, and training provided by the manufacturer's instructors (often physiotherapists), accompanied the introduction of these boots.

Promotion of health

A Swedish occupational health service unit, in a rural area, proposes to its customers in the steel industry health promotion programmes (exercise, nutrition, weight reduction, drug treatment, etc.), first aid courses, physiotherapy treatments for employees likely to develop MSD, or again seminars. For example, it proposes a programme called "Quit Smoking". It has also initiated special projects, in particular to help people suffering from chronic illnesses and people who have suffered psychosocial problems, to return to work. The health service notes that by reaching medium-sized enterprises it facilitates the acceptance of OH&S by the smallest enterprises.

Improvement of the psychosocial environment

In Italy, "Prevention of job burn-out in psychiatric care" is a transnational project (also carried out in Greece) of the Consorzio fra Cooperative Sociali Elpendu Scrl (Consortium of Social Cooperatives). It provides for the promotion of

⁴¹ <http://www.hse.gov.uk/business/sme-case-studies.htm>

⁴² <http://us.mbt.com/Home/Collection.aspx>

personnel's awareness of risks related to the work environment and to "interpersonal relations", executive training activities "to eliminate organisational and psychosocial risk factors", and personnel training in relaxation and stress management techniques.

In **Sweden**, a company selling computer software has used vocational training and a bonus system

to motivate and retain the loyalty of its employees involved in planning and the decision-making process. It has also taken measures concerning working hours, by allowing employees to adapt them to their private life, introduced sports activities, established a policy of dialogue and taken health promotion measures (access to healthcare specialists, nutrition, alcohol, etc.).

Conclusion

SMEs, including microenterprises, are too numerous, often too small, and have businesses and cultures that are too different for regulations alone to be sufficient to encourage them to protect the health of their employees.

The European Union and the Member States, but also other countries such as the United States, for example (see Appendix 4), are developing various strategies to help them meet their obligations effectively. Funding helps overcome a lack of resources. Training and outside OH&S services can make up for a lack of in-house expertise. The information is available and is disseminated. But on the one hand it must still be simplified, to make it accessible to the SME manager irrespective of his sector of industry, and the manager must also be convinced to take the time to deal with OH&S. The economic argument, by which OH&S is linked to quality, productivity and competitiveness, is often used. But is it heard? How can information be brought to SMEs and microenterprises?

The existing networks (trade associations, company federations, Chambers of Commerce, proximity of small and large enterprises, etc.) are often useful to convey information in a language that is understandable by entrepreneurs. The participation of workers, via collective

bargaining agreements, is also a vector that can be effective. Finally, awards for good practices within the framework of competitions can provide incentives for both occupational risk prevention and experience sharing.

If the enterprise decides to invest in OH&S, one often notes the importance of joint participation of management and workers: their knowledge of the business allows them to propose appropriate solutions, and their involvement seems to have positive effects on morale and the work atmosphere. It is therefore important that they should have access to OH&S training sessions.

Most of the European Union Member States studied here are aware that improving OH&S in SMEs is a major challenge. It seems that only a comprehensive and systematic policy, able to disseminate a culture of occupational risk prevention, is capable of meeting this challenge. This policy should be based on in-depth field knowledge and pool the efforts of all the stakeholders with the support of the existing networks.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Key indicators for enterprises in the non-financial business economy in the EU-27 in 2005*

Key indicators	Total Enterprises	SMEs			Large enterprises	
		Total SMEs	Micro	Small		Medium
Number of enterprises (in millions)	19.65	19.60	18.04	1.35	0.21	0.04
Share in total (as %)	100.0	99.8	91.8	6.9	1.1	0.2
Persons employed (in millions)	126.7	85.0	37.5	26.1	21.3	41.7
Share in total (as %)	100.0	67.1	29.6	20.6	16.8	32.9
Value added (EUR bn)	5,360	3,090	1,120	1,011	954	2,270
Share in total (as %)	100.0	57.6	20.9	18.9	17.8	42.4
Apparent labour productivity (€1000 per person employed)	42.3	36.4	29.9	38.7	44.8	54.4
Relative to total (as %)	100.0	86.1	70.7	91.5	105.9	128.6

* including rounded estimates based on non-confidential data - Source: Eurostat

Appendix 2

Number of occupational injuries according to enterprise size (EU-15 + Norway)

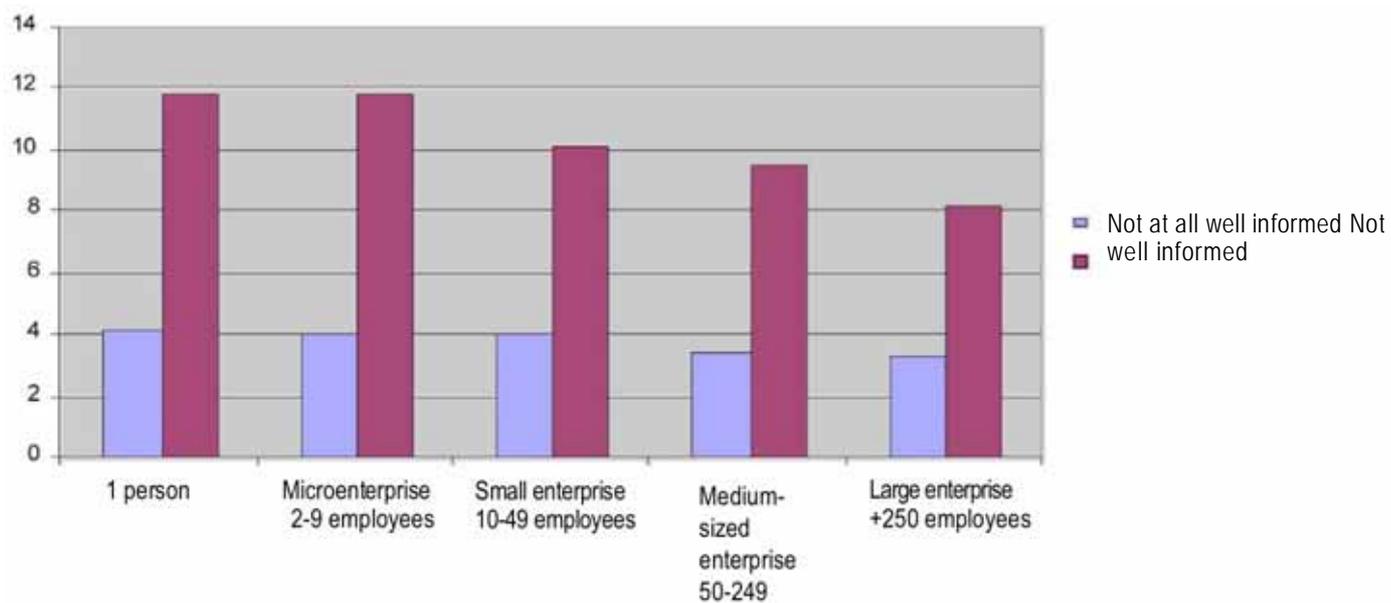
Enterprise size	Fatal injuries	Injuries resulting in more than 3 days off work
Microenterprises (1 to 9 employees)	1,049	718,916
Small enterprises (10 to 49 employees)	845	919,854
Medium-sized enterprises (50 to 249 employees)	481	778,136
Large enterprises (250 to 499 employees)	131	218,361
Very large enterprises (500 employees or more)	206	437,382

Source: Table built based on Eurostat 2005 data

UE-15: Germany, Austria, Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, United Kingdom, Sweden
 U-27: UE-15 + Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Cyprus (except for the northern part of the island) and Malta

Appendix 3

Employees' perception of their lack of information concerning occupational risks according to the size of the enterprise (%)



Source: Eurofound, Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 2007

Appendix 4

US policy regarding occupational risk prevention in SMEs⁴⁴

In the United States, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) provides for a specific policy in favour of SMEs. The latter benefit from reductions in the penalties provided for in the event of non-observance of the regulations, according to their size: 60% for enterprises with less than 25 employees, 40% for those with between 26 and 100 employees, and 20% for enterprises with between 101 and 250 employees. Likewise, enterprises with less than 10 employees are exempted from the conventional file keeping requirements regarding registration and reporting of occupational injuries and diseases.

The OSHA funds the consultation programmes of government organisations and also provides SMEs with free consultation and assistance services for risk identification and improvement of the occupational health and safety management system. The consultation services concern, in particular, assistance with risk recognition and solution finding, contacts for enterprises requiring more in-depth assistance, the production of reports based on an OSH examination in the enterprise, aid with the OSH management system, training and education and a recognition programme (SHARP).

SHARP is a programme by which the OSHA recognises employers that are exemplary in the area of OSH and exempts them for a renewable one-year period from its general inspection plans.

SMEs that have established an OSH management system can also establish cooperation with the OSHA, which enables them to benefit from its recognition of efforts accomplished regarding OSH.

SMEs can call on the “Compliance Assistance Specialists” of the OSHA bureaus, present in the various states. In particular, they organise seminars and workshops for SMEs and other groups and perform promotion of alliance programmes, training sessions and the OSHA website.

The alliance programmes allow the trade associations involved to work together with the OSHA in order to contact and educate employers and their employees and help them improve OSH. Many of the beneficiary enterprises are SMEs.

The OSHA has published a manual for small businesses (OSHA Small Business Handbook) to help them comply with their legal obligations.

In the area of training and education, the OSHA funds non-profit organisations for the development of programmes of assistance to small businesses for establishing OSH programmes and developing appropriate equipment for SMEs.

In addition, the Institute and training centres of the OSHA offer basic and advanced training for SMEs.

Finally, it is possible to order online numerous electronic tools, software, compliance assistance equipment, etc. The OSHA's publications include a special section on SMEs.

44. <http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/smallbusiness/benefits.html>

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Eurogip is a public interest grouping (GIP) set up in 1991 to coordinate on the European level the activities of the Occupational Injuries and Diseases Branch and develop knowledge of occupational risks in Europe.

Its activities focus on five main areas: survey performance, project management, information dissemination and communication, standardisation, and coordination of notified bodies. They all have as their common denominator the prevention or insurance of occupational injuries and diseases in Europe.

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