

DGUV Kompakt

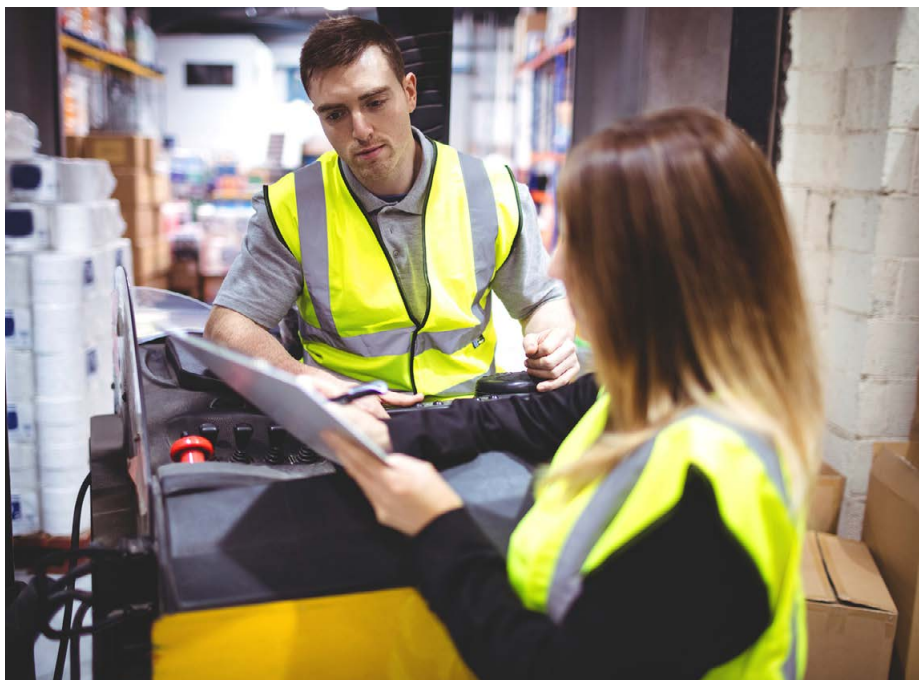


PAGE 4 ► RECOMMENDED
Safe on the road: new
“German Road Safety”
smartphone app

TOP STORY

20 Years of the German Occupational Safety Act

Tool for risk assessment established for the first time



A risk assessment identifies potential hazards in the workplace

It was exactly 20 years ago that the Occupational Safety Act (ArbSchG) entered into force. It established, for the first time, a unified OSH law that applies to nearly all occupations and employees in Germany. At the same time, it regulates the fundamental obligations of employers regarding OSH; the obligations and rights of employees; and the monitoring of OSH. The Act has set new standards, particularly with the introduction of the risk assessment. Since then, holistic and preventive approaches have become even more important in OSH. Even though much has been adapted in recent years, the Occupational Safety Act must now face the challenges of Work 4.0.

On 21 August 1996, the EU Directive on the safety and health of workers at work (89/391/EEC) was implemented into German law in the form of the Occupational Safety Act. One of the most important new elements of the Act was the introduction of the risk assessment, which is the basic pre-

requisite for targeted, effective and cost-efficient OSH measures. It obligates employers to assess and document potential hazards for all work activities and all employees, as well as to put in place measures to promote workplace health and safety. In recent years, psychological stressors have

“The Occupational Safety Act is a milestone for modern, preventive-based OSH legislation.”

Dr Walter Eichendorf,
Deputy Director General of the DGUV

become an important issue and since 2013, they are also enshrined in the German Occupational Safety Act.

“The Occupational Safety Act is a milestone for modern, preventive-based OSH legislation. The risk assessment has proven itself to be an effective tool and for years it has contributed to the decline in the number of workplace accidents”, said Dr Walter Eichendorf, Deputy Director General of the DGUV. Companies also benefit from this – fewer workplace accidents and occupational illnesses contribute to better profitability and competitiveness. The relevant social accident insurance institution helps its member companies to implement the Act by providing consultation and information.

The Occupational Safety Act has always moved with the times and as such will also play an important role in the future world of work. “The past 20 years have shown that the risk assessment is flexible and adaptable, which makes it ideally suited to dealing with the changes and unique characteristics of each company”, said Eichendorf. This approach is as modern as it always has been and has a great deal of potential for the healthy design of the digital world of work: “The next step is to expand and develop forward-looking OSH into a genuine culture of prevention”.

Web: www.dguv.de (Webcode: d1023238)
(German only)

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Firefighters in action: minimising the risk of hazardous substances

PAGE 3 ► TOPIC

Making life easier: payroll statements go fully digital from 2019



Digital reality

Dear reader,

Digitalisation is increasingly determining our lives – particularly in our daily working life. This means a number of challenges for us as statutory accident insurance. We need to address the changes in the world of work and the upheavals that come with these changes. How will we design prevention of the future? How does OSH need to change in order to deal with future risks in the workplace? But as social insurance, we also have to take on a forward-thinking role: how can we manage these changes, for example, in terms of atypical employment conditions, so that they don't result in social dislocation? How can we create a system where comprehensive protection of all employees is guaranteed and at the same time ensure the financing of the social security system is sustainable? Our input is called upon when addressing these issues. That's why we deal intensively with these questions, both within our organisation and also with other experts. This is also important so that we can provide support to companies; be it by exploring and testing new technologies to put into practice or by simplifying daily procedures in the company. A current example is the new payroll statement procedure (see "Topic"). This makes it easier for everyone involved and reduces the chance of making an error – just one example of the opportunities that digital transformation can offer.

Dr Joachim Breuer
Director General of the DGUV

“Minimising risks in the firefighting services”

Talking with **Thomas Wittschurky, Managing Director of the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the fire services in Lower Saxony**

When firefighters are on the scene, they are not only exposed to the risk of an accident. They can also come into contact with carcinogenic substances such as soot, asbestos and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. These substances are released during a fire and can enter the body either by breathing them in or through skin contact. This is why firefighters wear personal protective equipment (PPE) when they are deployed. However, recently there has been concern that this protection is insufficient. This issue was recently posed to the State Government of Lower Saxony. DGUV Kompakt spoke with **Thomas Wittschurky, Managing Director of the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the fire services in Lower Saxony, about a new research project being conducted by the German social accident insurance to investigate whether there are gaps in prevention and how to close them.**

Mr Wittschurky, what hazardous substances are firefighters exposed to when fighting a fire?

They are particularly exposed to substances that are a result of combustion such as soot and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Depending on the age of the building that's on fire, there could also be asbestos.

But respirators are supposed to protect against these substances.

And they do. For example, the results of international studies have not found an increased risk of lung cancer for firefighters. However, there have been hardly any studies on whether hazardous substances can enter the body through skin contact.

Is that conceivable?

Conceivable, yes, but we don't know exactly. What we do know is that dust and soot accumulates on the skin – on the forehead and neck, but also partly underneath clothing. Although the soot gets washed off later in the shower and work clothes go to the cleaners, we don't know what the skin has already absorbed. This is why the DGUV has now started its own research project.

How do you want to find out if something has entered the body?

There are now sophisticated methods to test whether someone has been exposed

to hazardous substances. This is where we can draw on the competence and know-how of the institutes of the DGUV. Firstly, our specialists will investigate which hazardous substances are released in typical situations such as when an apartment or car is on fire. We hope we can develop standardised “Hazardous Substance Profiles” from this. This would help firefighters with their documentation – for example, by using the DGUV Exposure Database. Documentation is a statutory requirement for the municipality responsible for the fire brigade. Secondly, we will also look at the firefighters themselves. We can determine whether there has been increased exposure by taking urine and blood samples.

And if you find something in the samples?

Then we can draw conclusions on how we can better protect people. This could mean improving work clothing or better hygiene in fire stations, for example, by putting more effort into separating areas where dirty work clothes are stored from areas where street clothes are kept.

That sounds like it could result in higher costs for local communities.

Not necessarily. Certain clothes and equipment have to be replaced or renewed on a regular basis. So when it's time to do this, you just have to make sure that the latest developments are taken into considera-



Photograph: Matze / Fotolia

Personal protective equipment is supposed to protect firefighters against contact with carcinogenic substances. But does it do enough?

tion. The social accident insurance institutions can provide advice on this. But I'd also like to say, when firefighters risk their lives for others, then they have the right that the community does everything it can to minimise the risks which they face.

Could the results of the project allow occupational diseases to be recognised one day?

Firstly, official recognition of an occupational disease is already possible when an insured person was exposed to hazardous substances and developed a disease that is on the official list of occupational diseases. This also applies to cancer. Recently, there has been talk of cancers that occur frequently in the general population and, therefore, are difficult or impossible to differentiate from an increased risk of cancer at work. Scientific studies on this subject have not produced uniform results. Sometimes, these studies show an increased risk for certain types of cancer and sometimes not. This could be due, among other things, to the fact that service in the fire brigade and the use of PPE can vary significantly from state to state and, in particular,

Photograph: FUK



Thomas Wittschurky
Managing Director of the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the fire services in Lower Saxony

from situation to situation. This is significantly different to a factory worker who is exposed to the same influences at work for years. Our data could possibly be a building block for shedding light on the matter and maybe even dispel any fears that our insured members have of the work-related risk of cancer. It's also possible that the study may indeed find that there isn't an increased intake of hazardous substances.

When do you think you will have the results?

The project will run for a year and a half. I expect, that we will have initial results at the end of this time.

TOPIC

Digital payroll statements

The process for submitting payroll statements to the statutory accident insurance is being switched to a digital process as of 1 December 2016. Following a transition period, payroll statements will be completely digital as of 2019. This reduces the effort required by employers and the social accident insurance institutions, it also minimises the risk of errors being made in data transmission.

The payroll statement is the basis for calculating contributions to the German social accident insurance system. Employers report remuneration, working hours and the number of employees to their social accident insurance institution. Up until now, this has been done using a paper form or online via the Extranet of the relevant accident insurance institution. As of December 2016, the process is being changed. Data will then be retrieved directly from a company's payroll programme. In the event that a company does not use a system-certified payroll programme, there will be a system-certified electronic assistant to help with the process.

Companies will receive a letter with the relevant access data for digitally transmitting payroll statements from their accident insurance institution. The social accident insurance institutions for the private sector will start sending their letters in November; for some social accident insurance institutions for the public sector, this will start early next year. The access data includes the accident insurance institution's company number, the member number of the insured company or organisation and a PIN.

During the transition phase, in addition to being submitted digitally, wage statements for the contribution years of 2016 and 2017 must be submitted using one of the previous methods – online, hard copy or per fax. For the 2018 contribution year (i.e. from 1 January 2019), only digitally-submitted wage statements will be accepted using the new procedure. The transition phase will ensure that employer contributions will also be correctly calculated in the future.

RECOMMENDED

German Road Safety App

The German road system is complex and there are many rules and regulations which, especially for people from other countries, can be new and complicated. "German Road Safety" is a free smartphone app which helps people to learn these rules. It was developed by the German Road Safety Council (DVR) with support from the DGUV. The app is not only aimed at foreigners and refugees but at all people who want to move safely through German road traffic. The app contains information about road safety and mobility in German, English and Arabic. Thanks to a mix of text, audio, video and quizzes, the app offers an interactive way of understanding the topic and provides helpful tips and advice for how to act safely in typical road situations or in an emergency situation.

More online at:
www.germanroadsafety.de



Photograph: DVR

NEWS IN BRIEF

The strain of constant availability

Being always contactable outside of working hours can have negative effects on the health and performance of workers. This was the result from iga.Report 23 by the Initiative for Health and Work (iga). In a cross-sectional study, 125 workers and their spouses were asked about their availability and the resulting stress and strain. The opinions expressed showed that the blurring of the line between work and private life has a negative impact on sleep and recuperation. In addition, it is more difficult to create enough distance from work and to switch off. Family members are also affected by this situation because family obligations and their own rest and recuperation time suffer. The majority of respondents were in favour of introducing company or legisla-



Photograph: Alliance / Fotolia

Always being available can be stressful

tive rules for contacting workers outside of working hours. In addition to the survey results, the report also provides tips of how to tackle the issue in a healthy way and suggests several preventive measures. It also contains a checklist which companies can use to check how well they are set up to deal with constant availability.

Web: www.iga-info.de >
Veröffentlichungen > iga.Reporte
(German only)

New Facebook presence

► The German social accident insurance institutions have a new Facebook page. This provides the latest information about what is happening in German statutory accident insurance as well as giving helpful tips about safety and health at work.

Web: www.facebook.com/UKundBG

IMPORTANT DATES

28 September – 1 October 2016
REHACARE
DÜSSELDORF
www.rehacare.de

11 – 13 October 2016
Arbeitsschutz Aktuell
Safety & Health Conference
HAMBURG
www.arbeitsschutz-aktuell.de

25 – 27 October 2016
RI World Congress
EDINBURGH
www.riworldcongress.com

NUMBER OF THE MONTH

79.8 million

people were insured ...

... by the German social accident insurance against accidents at work, at school or while commuting as well as against occupational diseases in 2015. This was around 904,000 more than in the previous year.

LEGAL INFORMATION

Published by: Deutsche Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung (DGUV), Dr Joachim Breuer (Director General). The DGUV is the umbrella association of the German Social Accident Insurance Institutions for the public sector and for trade and industry
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Publishers: Helios Media GmbH, Friedrichstraße 209, 10969 Berlin, www.helios-media.de
Printed by: DCM Druckcenter Meckenheim

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