

# The Joint German OSH Strategy

## The dual OSH system in Germany

The “dual OSH system”, in which the OSH administrations of the regional governments and the accident insurance institutions hold joint responsibility for workplace safety and health, has existed in Germany for nearly 125 years. Despite the evident success of prevention work conducted by the OSH institutions, closer examination also reveals deficits, for example in the co-ordination of the inspection work of the state OSH authorities and the prevention services of the institutions for statutory accident insurance and prevention (BGs) and public-sector accident insurers.

The OSH legislation, too, is regarded at enterprise level as being in some way opaque, impractical, and excessively bureaucratic at times.

At the same time, the requirements imposed upon companies and employees are changing in a way never previously observed: a new world of work is emerging with new vocations, bringing with them new challenges and in some cases also adverse effects. Mental factors such as high responsibility, time pressures, excessive demands and fear of job losses

are rapidly growing in importance. The impacts of demographic change constitute a further major challenge for companies.

## The EU Strategy on Safety and Health at Work

In the face of such trends in Germany and other European countries, the EU has set out an OSH Community Strategy and developed action plans which are founded upon the guiding concepts of high-quality work and prevention encompassing all areas of life. This EU Strategy on Safety and Health at Work is to run from 2007 to 2012. Under it, the European Commission calls upon the member states to support the EU targets with national OSH targets of their own.

In Germany, the socio-political discussion which had already begun in advance of the European initiatives led to the conference of the ministers for labour and social affairs of the German regional governments recommending a Joint German OSH Strategy (Fig. 1).

## Development and objectives

The Joint German OSH Strategy has the objective of retaining, improving and promoting the safety and health of workers at work. In addition, it aims to contribute

in the long term to reducing the financial burden upon companies and the social security systems.

The development of the Joint German OSH Strategy has been supported by the creation of a statutory framework: the act for modernization of the accident insurance system (UVMG). One of the essential new provisions of the UVMG, which entered into force on 5 November 2008, is the creation of the statutory basis for the Joint German OSH Strategy. The German federal and the 16 regional governments and the accident insurance institutions hold joint and equal responsibility for the Strategy. At the same time, the UVMG accords an important role within the Strategy to the social partners, i.e. employers and employees. Common OSH targets and issues are to be defined within the Strategy.

In anticipation of the legislation, efforts led by the DGUV were already under way in early 2006 to select possible OSH targets and common issues in conjunction with the social partners. For 2008 to 2012, three OSH targets with common issues were defined:

- OSH target No. 1 is the “Reduction in the frequency and severity of occupational



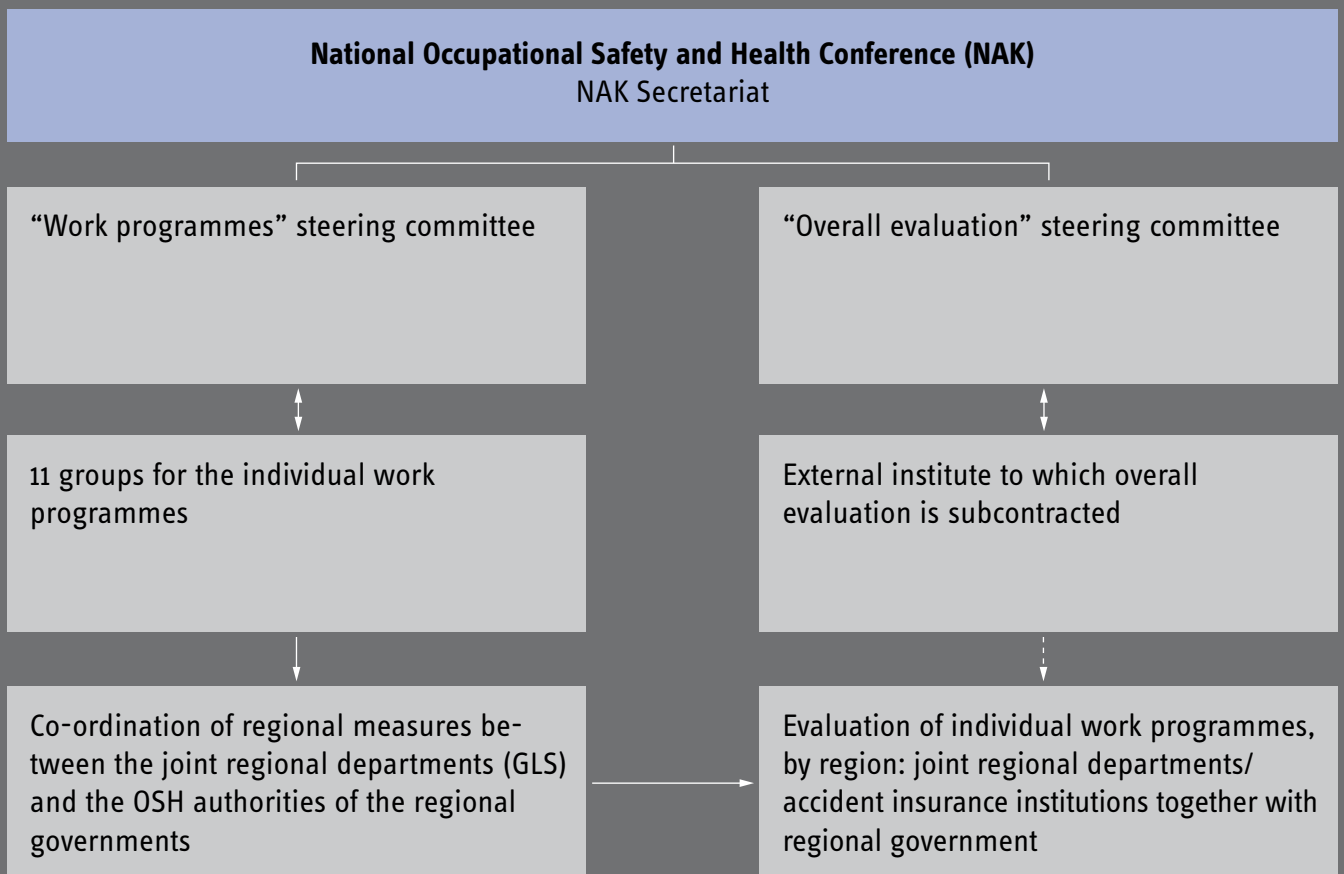
With the Joint German OSH Strategy, occupational safety and health in Germany is to become more efficient and more purposeful. A fair division of labour is certainly more effective than uncoordinated work conducted in isolation. I therefore welcome the Strategy and am pleased to be involved in shaping it.

Michael Jansen, Central Prevention Division of the German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV)

**Institutions party to the Joint German OSH Strategy (Figure 1)**



**Organ structure of the national Occupational Safety and Health Conference (NAK) (Figure 2)**



accidents” (OAs). In order to attain this target, adequate measures are also to be taken to reduce impairing mental stress and to promote systematic consideration of occupational safety and health within companies.

- OSH target No. 2, the “Reduction of musculoskeletal workloads and disorders” (MSDs), primarily concerns the common issues of “health service” and “tasks involving imbalanced stress or a lack of movement”. In these areas, the BGs, public-sector accident insurers and state OSH authorities are above all to compile and disseminate their expertise in the area of systematic prevention. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will be targeted. The shaping of work from an ergonomic perspective and in consideration of older employees, impairing mental stress, and promotion of the systematic observance of occupational safety and health within companies are also to be given appropriate consideration.
- In OSH target No. 3, the “Reduction in the frequency and severity of skin diseases” (SKIN), the focus lies upon work with or in damp environments (wet work) and

contact with substances harmful to the skin (e.g. cooling lubricants, engine oils, organic solvents, cleaning agents). Particular attention is to be paid here to the use of substitute substances.

### **Obligations in the context of implementation**

In the coming years, implementation of the jointly formulated targets of the Joint German OSH Strategy will play an important role in the prevention activities of the individual accident insurance institutions and of the DGUV. The accident insurance system’s statutory mandate continues to apply without restriction, however. The statutory accident insurance institutions and their partners therefore remain free to work on issues outside the work programmes of the Joint German OSH Strategy, provided such work effectively supports the shared OSH targets.

All parties to the Strategy are obliged to co-operate in its implementation; what capacity they make available for this purpose is however at their own discretion. They thus retain full control of their own

personnel and finances. Since a key element of the Joint German OSH Strategy is however the systematic evaluation of the results attained, all parties to it will have substantial interest in the Strategy becoming a successful model.

### **The NAK and the reform of the OSH system**

At institutional level, the Joint German OSH Strategy is guided by the National Occupational Safety and Health Conference (NAK) (Fig. 2). The NAK’s constituent meeting was held on 15 December 2008. NAK comprises three voting representatives each from the German federal government, regional governments, and the statutory accident insurance institutions, and up to three advisory representatives each from the umbrella associations of the social partners. A NAK secretariat has been set up at the BAuA (Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) in order to support the NAK.

The NAK serves as a co-ordination platform which guides the policy of the Joint German OSH Strategy, develops it further, optimizes the entire process during its

## **The work programmes of the Joint German OSH Strategy (Figure 3)**

### **6 projects, harmonized and mandatory throughout Germany, with maximum priority (“lighthouse” or “Category I projects”)**

- Construction and fitting work
- Temporary work
- Safe driving and transporting
- Nursing care
- Office work
- Wet work and skin-damaging material

### **5 projects conducted according to criteria harmonized for the whole of Germany (“Category II projects”)**

- School
- Food industry
- Precision assembly
- Restaurants and hotels
- Local public transport

implementation, and finally evaluates it. The involvement of the social partners ensures that the OSH targets are geared as closely as possible to the needs in the field and that their impact is felt within enterprises.

Besides the NAK's guiding function for the process, the national OSH forum, which takes the form of a specialist conference, enables the Strategy's subject-matter and results to be presented directly and regularly to OSH experts, players in associated areas of policy, and the scientific community and wider specialist public.

### Principal issues

For the duration of the first Joint German OSH Strategy programme, from 2008 to 2012, the parties to the Strategy have agreed upon principal issues and work programmes based upon the common OSH targets. The issues and work programmes are to be implemented in accordance with uniform principles, and evaluated with regard to their effectiveness.

For the first implementation phase, beginning in 2009, six priority work programmes (Fig. 3) were agreed, to be carried out nationally in accordance with harmonized criteria ("lighthouse projects" or "Category I projects"):

1. Safety and health during construction and assembling tasks
2. Safety and health in temporary work
3. Safe driving and transporting (within enterprises and on public roads)
4. Safety and health in nursing care
5. Healthy and successful office work
6. Protection of health during wet work and tasks involving substances harmful to the skin

These projects are to be mandatory for all parties to the Joint German OSH Strategy and conducted uniformly throughout Germany.

Beyond the Category I projects, a further five work programmes ("Category II projects") were adopted for implementation by the three parties to the Strategy. Key points

were also agreed for these programmes. Uniform implementation throughout Germany is however not a binding requirement upon all Strategy partners in this case.

"Awareness-rising of the subject of safety and health in schools" was for example agreed as a further work programme for the OSH target of "occupational accidents". The decision was also taken to conduct four further work programmes for the promotion of safety and health in relation to tasks involving imbalanced stress or a lack of movement within the OSH target of "musculoskeletal workloads and disorders":

- At production workplaces in the food industry
- At production workplaces in the area of fine mechanical assembly tasks
- At restaurants and hotels
- On local public transport

### Evaluation and public information work

The target of the Joint German OSH Strategy is for the incidence of occupational accidents to be reduced by 25 % in all sectors and areas in Germany within the short period from 2008 to 2012. Sub-targets and indicators are also to be formulated for all discrete targets and issues. Whether the parties to the Strategy are meeting these and other self-imposed OSH targets is to be reviewed regularly by means of objectifiable methods. An evaluation method conducted both during the process and following its completion is thus an elementary component of the Joint German OSH Strategy. Only by this means can mistakes be identified in good time and the effectiveness of the strategy improved.

A uniform presence in the media is to underline common aspects and to contribute to the Strategy being presented to the public as a model for success. The NAK has therefore decided to develop a common logo as a brand with high recognition value and an appropriate slogan. The logo of the Joint German OSH Strategy is to feature on all reports on the Strategy's activities, and thus to promote awareness of them.

Further information:  
[www.dguv.de](http://www.dguv.de) (Webcode d2022)

## Specific projects of the Joint German OSH Strategy

### Reduction in the frequency and severity of skin diseases

Wet work and work involving substances which are harmful to the skin are essential causes of occupational skin diseases. One OSH target of the Joint German OSH Strategy is therefore the “Reduction in the frequency and severity of skin diseases”. The work programme has the heading “Protection of health during wet work and tasks involving substances harmful to the skin”.

Since December 2007, this topic has been addressed by a working group and the results prepared for implementation in enterprises. The working group comprises representatives of the BGs (the institutions for statutory accident insurance and prevention), public-sector accident insurers and state OSH authorities who possess expertise and experience in both the medical and technical spheres. In its activities, the working group is able to build upon the experience and success of the Healthy Skin Campaign conducted by the German statutory health and accident insurance institutions up until December 2008, and will also continue some of the work in this area.

A concrete objective of this target of the Joint German OSH Strategy is a measurable increase in the number of enterprises giving consideration to wet work and substances harmful to the skin during risk assessments of workplaces, and which correspondingly specify suitable protective measures in the enterprises and implement them at the workplaces concerned. In the course of agreed inspections and consultations, the labour inspectorates of the accident insurance institutions and state authorities will conduct a survey of the actual and desired situations in the enterprises in order to evaluate this work programme. A standardized questionnaire which has been agreed between the parties to the Joint German OSH Strategy will be employed for this purpose.

### Reduction in the frequency and severity of musculoskeletal workloads and disorders

The common OSH target of a “reduction

in the frequency and severity of musculoskeletal workloads and disorders (MSD)”, identified by the parties to the Joint German OSH Strategy, will constitute a particular focus during the first implementation phase of the Strategy from 2009 to 2012. Common issues for this OSH target are the health services and tasks involving imbalanced stress or a lack of movement.

In these areas, the BGs, public-sector accident insurers and state OSH authorities are above all to disseminate expertise for systematic prevention. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will be targeted. The shaping of work from an ergonomic perspective and in consideration of older employees, impairing mental stress, and promotion of the systematic observance of occupational safety and health within companies are also to be given appropriate consideration.

An interdisciplinary working group was set up to handle this subject. In the group, issues and key points were developed for implementation within work programmes. The working group was led by a BG expert, and consisted of experts from the accident insurance institutions, the regional state OSH authorities, the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and BAuA, and the social partners. This working group has drawn up six work programmes for MSDs:

The two work programmes of the Joint German OSH Strategy are as follows:

- Safety and health in nursing care
- Healthy and successful office work

These work programmes will be addressed nationally, in accordance with uniform criteria and indicators, as top-priority, i.e. “Category I” or “lighthouse” projects, for mandatory joint implementation.

Beyond these, the working group drew up four further work programmes of lower priority (“Category II”) for occupational safety and health relating to tasks involving imbalanced stress or a lack of movement:

- At production workplaces in the food industry
- At production workplaces in the area of fine mechanical assembly tasks
- At restaurants and hotels
- On local public transport

For these work programmes, too, the working group has developed key points and has specified indicators and parameters. It has drawn up concepts to underpin the six MSD work programmes, produced project plans, and communicated them to the National Occupational Health and Safety Conference (NAK).

### Reduction in the frequency and severity of occupational accidents

A further target selected by the parties to the Joint German OSH Strategy which is to be addressed jointly is the “Reduction in the frequency and severity of occupational accidents, including the reduction of impairing mental stress and promotion of the systematic safeguarding of occupational safety and health within companies”. For this purpose, issues and key points were developed for implementation in work programmes. Experts from the accident insurance institutions, the regional OSH authorities, the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), BAuA and the social partners joined forces in the “Occupational accidents” working group. Further experts were invited for special topics.

For implementation of the common OSH target and its issues, the working group proposed six initial work programmes. Three of these projects will be conducted with the highest priority:

- Occupational safety and health and health protection in temporary work
- Construction and assembling work
- Safe driving and transporting (within enterprises and on public roads)

These projects were confirmed by a conference of the German regional ministers for labour and social affairs and of the

autonomous administration of the accident insurance system. The working group then drew up project plans to underpin the implementation of uniform projects throughout Germany.

### **The evaluation concept of the Strategy**

One of the basic policy documents developed as a result of the consultative discussions between the parties to the Joint German OSH Strategy is the “basic paper on the Joint German OSH Strategy”, which in particular also forms part of the political resolutions passed on 16/17 November 2006 by the 83rd conference of the regional ministers of labour and social affairs. Among other things, the basic paper contains the explicit requirement that the targets of the Joint German OSH Strategy must be accompanied by quality assurance and evaluation.

### **Success monitoring of the deployment of resources**

Projects on the scale of the Joint German OSH Strategy cannot be launched and conducted with the deployment of considerable personnel and other resources without the use of the resources being verified, evaluated and ultimately justified by scientifically robust monitoring of the results. This is even more the case in economically difficult times. For this reason, the evaluation of the Joint German OSH Strategy, i.e. monitoring of target attainment conducted on a validated and verifiable basis, is a strict component of the Strategy and is also enshrined in the act for modernization of the accident insurance system (UVMG).

The basic paper concerning the Joint German OSH Strategy states explicitly with regard to the procedure that an evaluation concept is to be drawn up. Accordingly, in December 2007, the summit meeting between the Commission for occupational safety and safety engineering of the German regional governments (LASI), the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) and the institutions of the statutory accident insurance system commissioned a working group comprising representatives from the three parties to the Strategy with the task of developing an evaluation concept.

### **Overall evaluation**

The task of the working group relates to overall evaluation, i.e. it concerns the entire process. During the overall evaluation of the Strategy, the targets described in the agreed concepts are to be examined and evaluated in terms of their implementation and effectiveness. These generic targets concern issues of optimization of the dual OSH system, in particular regarding a co-ordinated procedure for inspections and consulting in enterprises; an orderly and reliable exchange of information between the parties; and an agreed and easily comprehensible body of rules and regulations, up to and including the desired relieving of the burden upon the national economy through improvements in in-plant processes which are to be attained by means of occupational safety and health. Ultimately, the overall evaluation must reveal which effects have been attained across the board by the Joint German OSH Strategy among the target groups of in-plant occupational safety and health.

### **Further evaluation levels**

Evaluation will be conducted on other levels in addition to this “overall” evaluation. This will inevitably result in individual measures co-ordinated between the BGs and public-sector accident insurers and the regional authorities responsible for occupational safety and health having to be subjected to evaluation, i.e. examination of their effectiveness, at regional and company level. The parties responsible for operative implementation of the individual work programmes and campaigns must however ensure that this aspect is considered from the outset during performance of their measures.

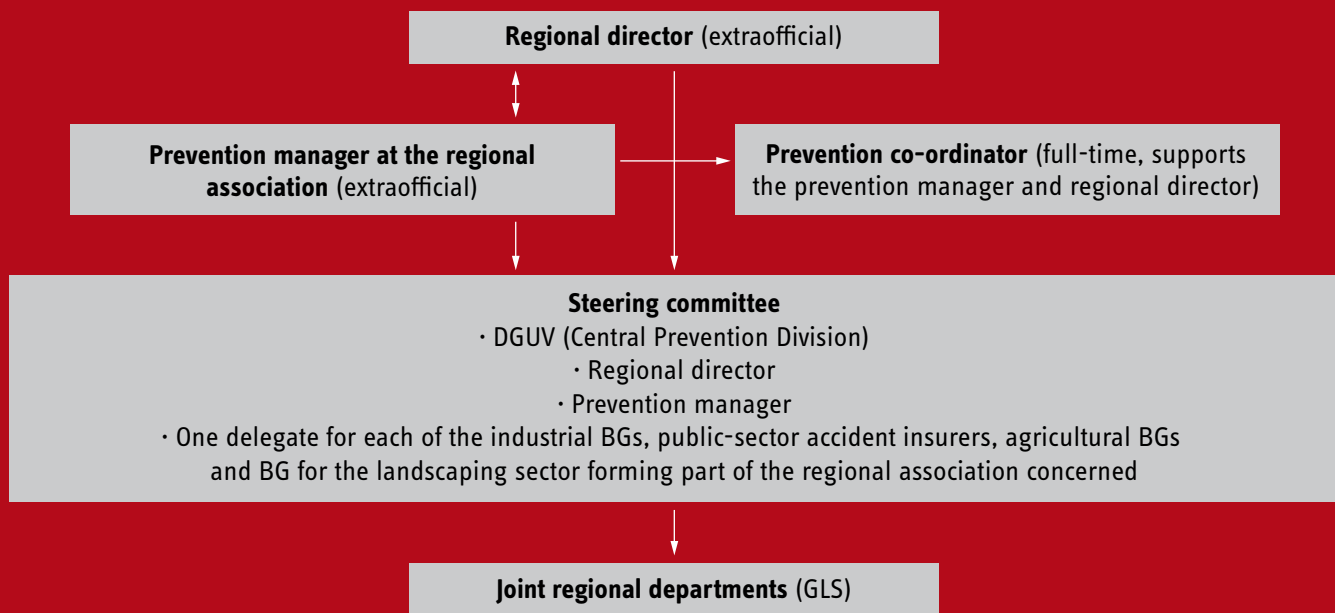
In this respect, the concepts employed in overall evaluation of the Joint German OSH Strategy will relate initially only to the process as a whole, into which the evaluation of the individual measures will ultimately have to be integrated to form an overall result. Planning of evaluation will be verified and if necessary adapted in the short term by means of a feasibility study.

### **Launch of the evaluation**

The first overall evaluation of the Joint German OSH Strategy is to be conducted in 2011 based upon a snapshot of the data as at 31 December 2010, and repeated at intervals of five years. The baseline survey will be conducted in 2009 and 2010. Performance of the evaluation in 2011 to 2013 will enable its results to be given consideration in decisions concerning the following period of the Joint German OSH Strategy.

Further information:  
[www.dguv.de](http://www.dguv.de) (Webcode d2022)

## Organization of operative prevention work in the regional associations



## Prevention work in the regional associations

The regional associations of the German Social Insurance (DGUV) carry out the common regional prevention and rehabilitation tasks of their member institutions. During the merger of the Federation of Institutions for Statutory Accident Insurance and Prevention (HVBG) and the Central Federation of Public Sector Accident Insurers (BUK), the autonomous administration reorganized the six regional associations as “regional bodies” of the DGUV. This step paved the way for new tasks and responsibilities which have taken shape through the act for modernization of the accident insurance system (UVMG).

### GLS joint regional departments

In future, the “joint regional departments” (GLS) at the regional associations will therefore be involved in implementation of the Joint German OSH Strategy at regional, district and local level. They will strategically determine the course taken by the joint activities of the BGs and public-sector accident insurers in negotiations and

agreements with the state OSH authorities. A particular new feature is that the GLS have the authority here to reach binding agreements on behalf of the statutory accident insurance institutions in their respective regions. These agreements are based upon a framework agreement drawn up by the parties to the Joint German OSH Strategy. The agreements already in place in many German regions between the regional OSH authorities and the BGs and public-sector accident insurers active in the region concerned will be amended to bring them into line with the provisions of the framework agreement.

In consultation with the highest OSH authority responsible for the region concerned, the GLS guide implementation of the work programmes of the Joint German OSH Strategy, and are involved in evaluation of the results. In consultation with the regional OSH authorities, they also co-ordinate the accident insurance institutions in the inspection and supervision of enter-

prises. In addition, the GLS together with the regional state OSH authorities promote the development of a common online database of inspections conducted by the labour inspectorates of the German regions and the accident insurance institutions.

### Restructuring of GLS activity

The DGUV’s Central Prevention Division is responsible for central co-ordination of the prevention tasks of the regional DGUV associations, particularly the implementation of the Joint German OSH Strategy through the joint regional departments (GLS). The regional tasks are to be assumed, as has generally been the case in the past, by DGUV officials who are employed in a primary function in the prevention service of an accident insurance institution. In order for the creation of new administrative structures to be avoided, the new edition of the German Social Code (SGB) VII makes explicit provision for the GLS to remain integrated within the organization of the DGUV’s regional associations. In conjunc-

tion with the Central Prevention Division, the regional associations have reorganized the prevention work. In each regional association, "steering committees" (LAs) have been set up. All accident insurance institutions active within the catchment

area of the regional association concerned appoint a mandated delegate with substantial prevention skills to these committees. Further members of these steering committees include the managers (regional directors), the prevention managers of

the regional associations, and in each case one delegate of the DGUV's Central Prevention Division. The GLS of each region is staffed by the regional director and the prevention manager of the regional association.

## Guiding principles of risk assessment in the Strategy

An important goal of the Joint German OSH Strategy is the optimization of Germany's dual OSH system. For this purpose, the resources of the accident insurance institutions and the regional authorities are being co-ordinated and their tasks apportioned. The aim is for inspection and consultancy elements of in-plant OSH activity to be made more efficient. In order for such a co-ordinated approach to consulting and inspection in the plants to function, common principles are required, together with a consensus between the regional labour inspectorates and the accident insurance institutions.

The first successful agreement of this kind was reached in 2008 in the area of risk assessment. A co-ordinating committee set up by a summit meeting between the Commission of the German regional governments for occupational safety and

safety engineering (LASI), the accident insurance institutions and the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS) drew up the guidance document entitled "Risk assessment and documentation" under the aegis of the DGUV. The guidance document sets out the consensus of the labour inspectorates concerning "risk assessment and documentation".

The co-ordinating committee first defined the essential concepts in the area of risk assessment, i.e. risk, risk assessment and the resulting OSH measures, groups particularly at risk, and documentation of risk assessment. The procedure followed by the labour inspectors of the accident insurance institutions and regional authorities for review of risk assessment performed in the plants was described. The subject-matter includes the presentation of the principles by which em-

ployers are motivated to conduct risk assessments.

The annex of the guidance document also contains, for the first time, an overview of risk factors which has been agreed for Germany. The overview serves to define a uniform structure of risk factors for future use in guidance documents and in training documentation.

The guidance document was approved for use and publication at the summit meeting held on 11 June 2008 between the LASI, accident insurance institutions and BMAS. The observations and experience gained during the two-year launch phase will be exploited for further optimization of the inspection and consultancy activity.

Further information:  
[www.dguv.de](http://www.dguv.de) (Webcode: d2022)

The Joint German OSH Strategy stands or falls with the implementation of the work programmes in the individual German regions. The DGUV regional associations and their joint regional departments (GLS) face challenging controlling and co-ordination tasks in this area. Being involved in this process is an exciting opportunity.

Dr. Sven Timm, Central Prevention Division of the German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV)

