Good Practice Information Provided by EU-OSHA

While EU-OSHA is not responsible for the content of external internet sites to which it links, it aims to ensure that it only links to good practice information that is reliable and meets identified criteria for prevention.

WHAT IS GOOD PRACTICE INFORMATION?

The definition of “good practice” varies between Member States due to the different occupational safety and health systems and legislation, culture, language, and different experiences. In addition, different groups with different interests and levels of knowledge have different points of view related to good practice at workplace level.

The United Kingdom’s Health and Safety Executive uses the following phrase in its publications: “This guidance represents what is considered to be good practice… Following this guidance is not compulsory and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow this guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and Safety Inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance as illustrating good practice.”

The BKK Bundesverband (Germany) similarly stresses the need for fulfilling statutory provisions in the introduction to one of its good practice publications relating to workplace health promotion.

The Dutch Solbase Project used the term “successful solutions to occupational safety and health risks” rather than “good practice information”. This is perhaps a slightly more narrow definition. The Solbase Project identified two types of solution – “guideline” and “applicated solution”. These two broad categories cover the full range of information available – both information from sources in the form of guidance and other documentation, and information showing the actual application of control measures in Enterprises. Two alternative terms could be “guidance” and “case studies”.

CRITERIA FOR OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH GOOD PRACTICE SOLUTIONS

The following have been consistently identified as criteria for a good practice solution:

- A reduction of the whole potential to cause harm to workers or other persons affected by the enterprise arising from an identified cause of harm;
- an improvement of working conditions in general and should be effective in promoting health, safety and efficiency;
- the achievement of a permanent and identifiable reduction in the risk of harm to workers.

Further, it should:

- demonstrate steps and methods that can be taken within a workplace or within an organisation to improve working/living conditions or/and reduce health and safety risks at enterprise level;
- focus where possible on preventing the identified risk at source;

- be effective and ethically tolerable;
- meet the relevant legislative requirements of the Member State in which it has been implemented. (This may mean that the good practice information is not directly transferable between Member States);
- be current and relevant to intended users and existing work practices within the European Union;
- contain sufficient information such that it can be applied where relevant to other European Union Workplaces;
- include the strong involvement of all relevant parties; in particular those workers and their representatives who will be directly affected by the action taken.

SOURCES OF GOOD PRACTICE INFORMATION

Sources of good practice information on the EU-OSHA site include:

- Labour Inspectorates, accident insurance companies, or other inspection bodies,
- social partners (employers associations and labour movements),
- industry associations or tripartite bodies,
- · practitioners associations,
- · other information or training providers,
- enterprises
- non-governmental organisations

TYPES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Types of good practice information and examples collected by EU-OSHA include:

- guidance and guidelines from inspection authorities or others,
- case study examples (in particular, those assessed by a credible organisation or by another credible review procedure and demonstrate a real (not theoretical),
- identifiable intervention to prevent risks in a workplace),
- product information (including information on physical, chemical and biological factors, personal protective equipment, work machinery and tools that can be used in the workplace),
- some standards produced by national or international standard organisations,
- checklists (for example, recurrent activities at workplace level),
- data sheets (for example, on dangerous substances and noisy equipment),
- reminder or pocket cards,
- training information for use in the workplace (for example, a training video for workers on manual handling)

THE IMPORTANCE OF RISK ASSESSMENT

It is most important that before good practice information is implemented in the workplace, a suitable and sufficient assessment of the hazards and risks in the workplace must be carried out. This assessment should consider all the risks and hazards in the workplace to ensure that there is a real reduction in the exposure of workers and other to harm rather than merely replacing one risk with another.

The following is one simple description of a risk assessment. “A risk assessment is nothing more than a careful examination of what, in your work, could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. The aim is to make sure that no one gets hurt or becomes ill. A risk assessment involves identifying the hazards present in any undertaking (whether arising from work activities or from other factors, e.g. the layout of the premises) and then evaluating the extent of the risks involved, taking into account existing precautions.

The results of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment should help users choose which good practice measures are most appropriate.”

A risk assessment should always be carried out before good practice is applied in the workplace. It has to be adapted to individual circumstances and needs. EU-OSHA cannot be held responsible over how the information is implemented.

More information on risk assessment can be found at:
http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/riskassessment

GOOD PRACTICE AND LEGISLATION

The “Framework Directive” Council Directive 89/391/EEC of 12 June 1989 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work and the legislation to implement it in the Member States contains a hierarchy of control measures to be followed:

1. Are risks preventable or avoidable. Is it possible to get rid of the risk? This can be done, for instance, by:
    - considering whether the task or job is necessary,
    - removing the hazard,
    - using different substances or work processes.

2. If risks are not avoidable or preventable, how can risks be reduced to a level at which the health and safety of those exposed is not compromised. the following additional general principles of prevention should be followed:
    - combating the risk at source

- adapting the work to the individual, especially as regards the design of work places, the choice of work equipment and the choice of working and production methods, with a view, in particular, to alleviating monotonous work and work at a predetermined work-rate and to reducing their effect on health
- adapting to technical progress
- substituting the dangerous by the non-dangerous or the less dangerous (replacing the machine or material or other feature that introduces the hazard by an alternative)
- developing a coherent overall prevention policy which covers technology, organisation of work, working conditions, social relationships and the influence of factors related to the working environment
- giving collective protective measures priority over individual protective measures (e.g. controlling exposure to fumes through local exhaust ventilation rather than personal respirators)
- giving appropriate instruction to workers.

More information: http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/riskassessment/step3

The hierarchy means that there may not be a single “correct” good practice approach.

For example, where dangerous substances are being used, to fail to substitute a substance when a replacement is available and to instead use other control measures (e.g. Personal Protective Equipment) is not good practice, yet those same control measures may constitute good practice when there is no substitute available.

Bilbao, September 2009