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CLOSING EVENT EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN ON RISK ASSESSMENT

KRIS DE MEESTER, CHAIR OF BUSINESSEUROPE HEALTH & SAFETY WORKING GROUP

There are many tools that contribute to good safety and health performance in business and together they can give an enterprise a competitive edge when they are aligned with the business objectives. Among these, risk assessment is a key tool for companies to manage their occupational safety and health risks in the same way as they manage other business risks. A risk assessment and management approach provides a single framework to demystify the range of occupational safety and health requirements that companies have to consider.

Risk assessment is not an objective or a goal in itself. It is a tool, an instrument, an exercise to achieve the goal of protection of workers and safe and healthy workplaces. It is in fact the motor of any OSH-policy and OSH management system. Too often however it is approached from a legal point of view: Does the company have a risk assessment, often a written risk assessment? This legalistic approach leads a large number of companies to focus on collecting and drafting documents. Whereas, the focus should be on the action a company takes to assess and deal with the risks. It is not a one shot event but a continuous exercise; not just theoretical but also on the shop floor. Risk assessment is not for lawyers but for OSH-practitioners. This means prevention officers, supervisors and the workers themselves.

In this context I would like to refer to the ongoing discussion on the proposals of the High Level Group on reduction of administrative burdens. Although the reduction of administrative burdens is highly desirable, the written risk assessment is not the only issue to take into account. What we should be putting more focus on is how to get every business going with risk assessment as a management tool and on a daily basis. Employers should be encouraged to see risk assessment as part of the whole management process of acting on information, reviewing it and improving it.

The challenge is to seek ways to demystify risk assessment and to make it normality. That is what this campaign is doing. I am pleased and proud to see that a lot of companies are getting this right – we need only look at all the good practices that have been gathered throughout the campaign. These do not only come from large multinationals; a lot of SMEs have shown that they are capable of assessing risks, most of the time in a very creative, often quite simple way and involving everyone in the company, including management, supervisors and workers.



There is still a long way to go. Although providing businesses with the best tools, paper based or digital, is a crucial element, alone it is not sufficient. Another key element is the attitude of all those in the company, from the managers to the workers. The key is to be aware of business activities, know what the risks are related to these, know how to protect from them, and to think about the impact before taking any future actions.

Sensible risk management is not about:

- Creating a totally risk-free society
- Focusing on generating paperwork rather than practical measures

It is about:

- Gathering and evaluating information to prevent harm to people and damage to goods
- Avoiding loss of profit
- Ensuring business continuity

A risk assessment is an important step in protecting businesses and employees. It should help businesses focus on the risks that really matter in their workplace – the ones with the potential to cause real harm. The more complex the risk, the more complex the thinking and methodology should be to find ways of managing it. For employers, a risk assessment is simply 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. A good working environment is a competitive advantage.

In conclusion, although this is the closing event of the campaign, it should be seen as just another step forward in mainstreaming risk assessment in business management. As European employers organisation we give this process our full support and we will continue among industry and together with the other stakeholders to seek new ways and levers to promote and practice risk assessment.