



The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, its network and its importance for the new Member States

Hans-Horst KONKOLEWSKY

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
Gran Via 33, ES-48009 Bilbao

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, which is located in Bilbao (Spain), was set up by the European Union in order to serve the information needs of people involved in occupational safety and health (OSH).

The Agency's main role includes to collect, disseminate and analyse technical, scientific and economic information about safety and health at work.

The Agency's goal is to improve the lives of people at work by stimulating the flow of this information between all those involved in OSH issues.

To achieve this, the Agency has decided to set up a Global Network with partners (focal points) in 30 European countries as well as with international organisations, such as the ILO, WHO and, for the Americas, the OAS. This Internet-based Network also includes leading health and safety institutions from the USA (OSHA, NIOSH), Canada (CCOHS), Australia (NOHSC) and Japan (JISHA).

The Agency's network portal represents the most comprehensive multilingual information resource for OSH-practitioners available on Internet. During the presentation the network and its impressive knowledge base and navigation facilities will be demonstrated. The Agency's global network can be seen at <http://osha.eu.int/>.

The new Member States (new MS) have been fully integrated into all the Agency's activities (Work Programme 2005 and Corporate Plan 2005-2008), but it has not been possible to address all the specific needs for the new MS. The Agency has therefore launched an Enlargement Action Plan (EAP) to contribute to the development of a preventive culture in the new MS and support the implementation of the European Community Strategy 2002-2006 on Health and Safety. This Plan will focus on 2 main issues, 1) knowledge transfer in particular to meet the specific needs of SMEs and 2) raising awareness of "OSH" Essentials", the basic principles of the prevention at workplace level.

In addition, the enlargement of the European Union meant that the information on the Agency websites are now also available in all 20 official languages of the EU.

The new MS have been preparing for their membership of the EU as they participated in the work of the Agency over the last 4 years up to their membership thanks to financial support from PHARE Programmes. They have built up a national network including the social partners, national Agency websites, and they participated in Agency projects such as the European Weeks.