



Need for Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) - Research cooperation in Europe

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European Union labour market, work organizations and work environment - all having a major impact on workers health - are undergoing rapid changes due to globalization and enlargement of European Union. There are more than 400 million workers in the European region. No nation can be successful in any sector of socioeconomic development without a healthy workforce. A further argument for emphasizing occupational health is the fact that the health of the workers is the first and the foremost prerequisite for the maintenance and promotion of all other health components, such as motivation and work ability of ageing workers, mental health at large, and health promotion in general.

How about the research collaboration within occupational safety and health field? The progress done has been mixed. The changing globalized world of work and the ageing European workforce brings up new challenges for companies and employees to protect and promote health, to improve well-being at work places, and, as a consequence, to increase economic performance and productivity in Europe.

We have yet to put in place effective structures needed to anticipate and manage better the changes in the workers' well-being and control of risks at work. As a response to this demand for systematic OSH research promotion in Europe, European Union OSH research organizations have initiated an active collaboration and networking. An important opening was a joint submission of an application NEW OSH ERA to obtain European Union funds to support integration of OSH research in Europe. This undertaking has proven to be successful, as the European Commission recently granted 2.6 M € for this purpose. The project will be launched at the beginning of 2006 and will include most of the leading OSH research organization in European Union member States. Another successful example of responding to new OSH challenges in European Union is the collaboration within the Topic Centre framework funded by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work. It has created an effective network for OSH promotion since 1995, and this collaboration -to distribute important OSH information within European Union and beyond - will continue also in the future.

Some of the European OSH research institutes have founded a Partnership for European Research in Occupational Safety and Health (PEROSH). PEROSH has been in function for about two years now, and it is too early to make any definite evaluation of its successes and usefulness. But it is clear that the need for effective cooperation at the European level has only been increasing these two years. The situation in many national OSH-institutes in Europe has become more and more tight, with efforts to cost-cutting and requirements for more cost-efficiency and for reduction of staff. Sometimes international (European) collaboration is not necessarily seen as beneficial and questions are raised as to potential conflicts between national and international obligations.

What we need is a real new start for the European collaboration and cooperation in OSH research.