



Systematic Work
Environment Management
and **Stress**

The Swedish
Work Environment
Authority

Systematic Work
Environment
Management
and Stress

This publication is intended as guidance on work environment management aimed at preventing stress in the workplace. Although not actually containing any mandatory rules, it is based on the Work Environment Authority's Provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management, AFS 2001:1, which are appended to the main text.

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Systematic Work Environment Management, AFS 2001:1,
with amendments by AFS 2003:4

Preface

We know from stress research that many aspects of the working environment can impose severe strain on employees in the form of stress. This is liable to happen when the demands and expectations to which the employee is subjected are beyond his or her capabilities, or as a result of the lack of stimulus, which goes with excessive monotony in the workplace. The potential effects comprise both reduced productivity and ill-health.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority's Provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management require the employer to investigate working conditions, assess risks and take steps to prevent ill-health and accidents and create good working conditions. Systematic work environment management must include physical as well as mental and social factors.

Through this publication we aim to show how psychosocial work environment can be addressed through systematic work environment management for the prevention of stress. The publication is intended for employers, safety delegates and everyone else working or otherwise concerned with work environment issues.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority, April 2002

Kenth Pettersson
Director-general

Looking at stress

Stress is described as the strain to which people are subjected when demands and expectations are out of keeping with their capabilities and skills. Stress results, not only from excessive demands but also from the lack of stimulus entailed, for example, by excessive monotony in the workplace.

What happens inside the body?

In acute stress reactions, the body mobilises large amounts of energy, blood concentrations of sugar and free fatty acids increase, breathing accelerates and the muscles are tensed. At the same time the digestive organs are shut off. These reactions date from a time when the body prepared itself for flight or fight in response to imminent dangers.

Acute stress reactions lead to increase muscular tension. The muscles are activated, not only by imminent danger and accident risks but also, for example, by tasks demanding concentration. If tasks of this kind are performed in an uncomfortable or static work posture or with repetitive movements, muscular involvement is intensified.

In addition, muscular stress and mental stress reinforce one another, hence the serious risk of musculoskeletal disorders occurring when ergonomic deficiencies of the work situation are combined, for example, with shortage of time, exacting qualitative requirements or small opportunities of influence. Dual strains of this kind

may constitute a health hazard if they are prolonged or recur frequently without sufficient rest intervals.

When physical muscular strain ceases, the corresponding muscular involvement ceases with it. But the muscular effects of stress take longer to subside. This being so, short breaks are not enough where stressful work is concerned.

Factors alleviating perceived stress

For the avoidance of unhealthy stress, the employee must be given scope for manoeuvre and opportunities of social support and recuperation. Experience and knowledge also help to alleviate perceived stress.

Control and room for manoeuvre

Influence and control over one's own work are an important means of coping with both excessive workloads and lack of challenge.

If we are faced with heavy demands but feel firmly in control of things, stress can contribute both to job satisfaction and to efficiency. But if we feel that we lack both control and influence in responding to heavy demands, this can be a cause of tension, displeasure and lack of commitment, in which case our experiences at work tend to affect the whole of our lives. So our scope for manoeuvre has an important bearing on our perception of a stressful situation.

Health prospects are optimised when we have scope for manoeuvre enabling us to take action and achieve a balance between external demands and our own capacity.

Support from others around us – social support

Support from other people can provide a buffer against ill-health. The possibilities and forms of human support are affected by the way, in which work is organised. The various forms of support can be described as follows:

- *Instrumental support* is hands-on support, such as getting relieved for brief moments, being able to call in extra personnel to cope with peak workloads, or being able to leave work for a short while. This form of support is important because it directly reduces the element of strain, leaving us with more energy to spare for the work itself.
- *Informative support* can mean creating a dialogue to dispel any uncertainty. It can also mean comparing notes with fellow-employees and being continuously informed about the operation.
- Provision of *evaluative support* is an important management concern. If people are to develop at work, they need to know whether they have measured up to demands and expectations and to be given constructive criticism.
- *Emotional support* can mean taking time to listen to other people's worries and taking them seriously, and also allowing people to have and show feelings.

Through human support, provision can be made for such basic needs as the sense of security, proximity and contact, the feeling of being liked and the sense of belonging. This support, then, contributes towards health and well-being. Harrowing conflicts in the

workplace can often be avoided or minimised with effective social support built into the operation.

Possibilities of recuperation

Recuperation means, for example, the employee being given the opportunity of relaxing from work. Breaks at work are one way of relieving strain.

A period of overtime need not entail any risk, but health may suffer if the job keeps on demanding overtime and looks like doing so indefinitely.

Another important source of recuperation is sound sleep, which in turn requires mental relaxation. The body has a natural circadian (daily) rhythm, governed by daylight, and working against this rhythm is both physically and mentally strenuous. During sleep, our metabolism is put on the back burner, and this is, when a good deal of the body's repair work and recuperative activity takes place.

Muscles, which have been working, also need rest and recovery. Fibre replacement has to take a back seat during periods of activity, and so the muscles have to be given the opportunity of repairing themselves afterwards, otherwise tissue damage will occur, possibly increasing as time goes on.

Many of our body functions are dependent on movement and activity. The same goes for the muscular recovery following static or repetitive work. Variation of movement, e.g. tasks involving other parts of the body and of a different character, is therefore a good adjunct to passive rest.

Physical activity in the form of exercise can dispel physical and mental tension.

Knowledge and experience

Increased learning improves our competence and emboldens us to meet new challenges, which in turn strengthens our self-confidence and reduces the risk of ill-health. If we are exposed to highly stressful situations which make us uneasy and anxious, this inhibits our normal capacity for processing information and accepting challenges. Stress then stands in the way of new learning.

Experience of previously overcoming and coping with stresses, and the security of possessing the skills which the situation demands, help to alleviate the experience of stress.

Stress and its consequences

The reactions occurring in the body in response to different demands made on us as human beings are natural reactions. Their manifestations vary from person to person. Being subjected to demands need not in itself be bad for our health and well-being.

Everyone, at some time or other, is subjected to strains at work and in life generally. If those strains are of relatively brief duration, with opportunities of recuperation in between, they need not harm us. An element of stress can sometimes improve our performance and help us to try new challenges and enjoy doing so.

When demands become too much for us – that is, when control, support and recuperation are lacking and the employee lacks the experience or knowledge to cope with the situation – he or she can be variously affected by the body's mobilisation. The effects can be physical, mental, behavioural and intellectual/cognitive. The effect of stress is not confined to the individual employee: it can also have repercussions on the group and the organisation.

Physical reactions

Prolonged stress can disrupt the balance between rest and activity on which the normal functioning of the body depends, until eventually relaxation becomes impossible. Chronic tension allows no time for the body's natural repair and recovery systems to act. The body becomes increasingly brittle, the risk of injury and illness increases.

Previous experience, as well as hereditary factors, can influence the way in which we react.

Physical reactions include:

- headache,
- palpitations of the heart,
- chronic hypertension, possibly leading to cardiovascular disease,
- muscular tension,
- reduced muscle power,
- indigestion and
- immunological defence impairment, entailing greater proneness to infection.

Mental reactions

In addition to bodily reactions, prolonged stress under adverse conditions affects people mentally.

Mental effects include:

- malaise, restlessness, anxiety,
- irritability and aggressiveness,
- concentration difficulties,
- sleep disturbances,
- dejection and
- apathy or aggressiveness.

Behavioural and intellectual consequences

Behavioural consequences include use of stimulants, withdrawal/isolation, aggressiveness and hyperactivity, carelessness and risk-taking.

Intellectual (cognitive) effects can have direct consequences at work and for achievement at work.

Intellectual effects of stress include:

- reduced creativity and flexibility,
- tunnel vision,
- impaired problem-solving capacity,
- hasty decisions and
- indecisiveness.

Consequences within the organisation

Stress does not only have human consequences. The operational and economic consequences can be considerable.

Factors affecting production and costs include:

- incidents and errors,
- disagreements and conflicts,
- scapegoating,
- work injuries and sickness absence,
- personnel turnover and competence losses, and
- other production disturbances.

Investigating and rectifying the working environment

Systematic work environment management

Work environment management needs to be systematically conducted in order to achieve good working conditions and reduce the stress, which is a potential cause of ill-health. Decisions and actions of different kinds within the operation must be accompanied by consideration of their effects on the working environment.

This means planning, conducting and monitoring activities in such a way that stress hazards can be assessed, and it also means taking steps to ensure that stress will not impair the employees' health.

A clear apportionment of tasks between management and supervisory staff is also important. Possession of safety and health knowledge for the conduct of systematic work environment management is no less vital.

The employer must regularly investigate working conditions and assess the risks of anyone incurring ill-health or meeting with an accident at work. A description now follows of *what* can be investigated, *when*, *how* and by *whom*.

What is to be investigated – what are the sources of risk?

All jobs involve a number of factors or sources of risk which demand attention. Systematic work environment management requires the sources of risk to be identified. Here are some examples of psychosocial risk sources and ways of dealing with them.

Heavy work load – fast working pace

If work with a heavy workload, a fast working pace or work against the clock is combined with small opportunities of influencing one's own work situation, this can have consequences in the form of ill-health and may be a partial cause of illness.

A heavy workload of limited duration need not result in ill-health, but prolonged work under pressure of time is detrimental to health, even if the work itself is absorbing.

Protracted overtime with little opportunity of recuperation can also affect health. Reallocating work between the workers is the manager's task, and one expedient may be to help with the prioritisation of the tasks in hand.

Physically monotonous repetitive work

Physically monotonous repetitive work affords little opportunity of challenge or of personal and vocational development. This leads to under-stimulation, which is a potential cause of ill-health. Job diversification, based on an inventory of the tasks involved, is one way of making work less monotonous. This can often be combined with skills development.

Risks of violence

Being subjected to physical violence and suffering physical harm is always a traumatic experience and can have serious mental consequences. A threat can be equally traumatic. It is important to map the risks carefully and on this basis to put in place such necessary measures as alarm installation, security routines, double staffing, information and training.

It is seldom possible, however, to prevent all risks of threats and violence. Contingency preparedness for post-traumatic care is needed for the prevention of future, permanent injury to the people affected.

Shiftwork – irregular working hours

Night work clashes with our natural circadian rhythm and is therefore, a strain on the body, added to which, it means reduced alertness and, consequently, a heightened risk of accidents.

Excessively long working spells should be avoided, and for triple shiftwork the sequence morning-afternoon-night is preferable to the reverse order. Recuperation between two shifts normally requires 11 hours' rest. After a period of several night shifts, a longer rest period is urgently needed.

Lack of sleep aggravates the negative effects of stress, and lack of sleep in itself is a stress factor capable of causing ill-health.

Insults – harassment – conflicts

Stress at work encourages primitive (regressive) behaviour such as rumour-mongering and triggers defence mechanisms, which can lead to a hunt for scapegoats. Insults and conflicts arising out of the

work situation, due to excessive work load, unclear expectations regarding work input, few reactions or none at all to the work done, and so forth, should be regarded as a consequence in the organisation but are at the same time a source of risk to employees in the vicinity. It is important for conflicts to be brought out into the open and their causes investigated and remedied.

Unclear expectations regarding work input – unclear roles

This risk factor means tasks and responsibilities not being clearly defined or else being defined in such a way that conflicting – and therefore impossible – demands are made on the person concerned. Conditions of this kind can often be due to vagueness in the objectives or in the allocation of tasks. Clear directions and a clear allocation of tasks are important for the prevention of ill-health. So tools are constructive feedback, information, introduction etc.

Perpetual changes – lack of job security

Changes are an inevitable part of working life and more often than not a strenuous experience. The consequences for the working environment and for the individual often hinge on the manner in which changes are effected and the extent to which the employee is informed and given the chance of participating in the process.

Work with people

The reference here is to jobs where one's own person is the most important tool, as for example in the case of nursing staff, social workers and caring service employees. Their duties are often absorbing

but can become destructive and, if combined with a fast working pace, can entail a risk of ill-health in the form of stress symptoms. This kind of situation can be alleviated, by adding competence and increasing professionalism at work, e.g. through tuition or mentorship.

Solitary work

Working alone can often be a severe mental strain, especially if combined with other risks, such as the risk of violence or harassment. Another potentially strenuous situation is monitoring work with great values – human or material – at stake. Solitary work can also imply an elevated risk of accidents.

It is important that the employee should be able to feel secure in having the necessary alarm devices at his or her disposal and being able, for example, to consult the supervisory staff should the need arise. For the prevention of ill-health, work sometimes has to be organised in such a way that solitary work is avoided as far as possible.

Complex tasks

Rapid changes and new working conditions are sometimes experienced as a strain. Work situations of this kind can still be found stimulating and challenging, especially if people have a good opportunity of influencing conditions themselves and their duties are meaningful.

Technical progress at work often results in the creation of new and complex duties. It can also increase the volume of information to a strenuous level. Provision of supplementary skills is a fundamental requirement in connection with changes of work procedure, such as the introduction of technology support. It is also important

for employees to be allowed to participate in the process of change and, if necessary, to be given tuition on the job.

Social contacts

The people in the workplace are also a part of the working environment. This, of course, is especially true regarding jobs where contact with other people is an essential part of the work, but it also applies concerning our relations with colleagues and superiors. The way in which we associate with and treat one another in the workplace has a very important bearing on our well-being at work. Relevant measures include making norms visible and creating good care and a good introduction for newly hired employees.

Risk of accidents

Knowledge of and fear of meeting with an accident or being seriously injured amounts to a mental strain, which can have consequences in the form of tension and stress. Pressure of time and shiftwork may be conditions augmenting the risk. Clear instructions and good skills are then vital. Firm incident-reporting routines coupled with preventive measures can help to prevent accidents.

The physical environment

The psychosocial situation is also affected by the design of the physical environment. The appearance of premises and furnishings makes a difference to our well-being and can both facilitate and impede our opportunities of contact and interaction with other employees. A high sound level makes it harder for us to communicate with each other, and disruptive sound is a stress factor in itself.

Risks from dangerous substances and machinery can make us feel that we are under pressure and cause us to worry about accident risks. Thus various factors in the physical environment can play a part in causing us to experience loads which we find stressful.

When are investigations to take place?

Regularly

The employer shall investigate working conditions and assess the risks regularly. The frequency with which investigations are to be carried out depends, for example, on the nature and extent of the activity. It is important that the employer should have an up-to-date picture of the risks to which the employees are exposed and the measures, which need to be taken. The regularity and forms of these investigations and risk assessments are best decided in consultation with the employees.

In connection with ill-health and accidents

In addition to regular investigations, it is the employer's duty to investigate the causes of ill-health, accidents and serious incidents. Investigations may, for example, be called for in connection with sickness absence, reported illnesses and incidents and accidents.

Matters which, should be investigated, may also include various stress symptoms, such as sleep disturbances, gastro-intestinal disorders, muscular tension or other effects of stress on health. Ill-health can also be manifested through other physical symptoms, such as skin and allergy disorders.

The kind of ill-health described above is often missed out in the firm's ongoing statistics. Inquiring about disorders of this kind may seem an intrusion on people's privacy, and so it should be clearly stated and agreed between employer and employees that these investigations are to be carried out, that they are to follow a certain procedure, and that a certain person, or persons, will be responsible for them. It should also be made clear that the purpose of the investigations and documentation is the early assessment and remediation of work environment conditions.

In connection with operational changes

When changes take place in the firm's activities, it is important to assess their implications for the working environment. Prior to a major alteration – a reorganisation, for example – it is important to carry out a risk assessment of the psychosocial work environment conditions. This can be done, for example, by means of a questionnaire or interview survey, the intention being to use the results for improving working conditions in connection with the change.

It is vitally important in surveys and analyses of the working environment conditions to take into consideration the balance of the sexes and to bring out the different working conditions of women and men. Women and men are usually employed in different fields, but even when they share the same occupation, there is often a difference in their job content and, consequently, the risks they incur. Women, for example, tend more often than men to have monotonous, repetitive jobs and other work of a routine nature with little scope for development and personal responsibility.

How can the working environment be surveyed and assessed?

By mapping the workplace one can obtain valuable information for assessing the risks and deciding on measures to be taken.

The way in which the risks are to be investigated and assessed will depend on the content and extent of the operation. The purpose of the assessment is to obtain supportive documentation for and knowledge of the measures needing to be taken for the prevention of ill-health and accidents. The assessment calls for a balancing together of different factors and risks. An isolated risk source may perhaps not be considered harmful, but combined with other sources of risk it may give rise to ill-health. For example, pressure of time coupled with monotonous work can mean a greater risk than each individual factor taken separately.

During the risk assessments it is important to assess and plan the measures needed in order to create a working environment with abundant job content, job satisfaction, social participation and personal and vocational development.

Investigation methods include:

- questionnaires,
- interviews,
- safety inspection tours,
- workplace meetings,
- developmental conversation,
- examination of individual workstations,
- medical checks and
- measurements and surveys of work environment conditions.

Who is to carry out the investigations?

The employer's responsibility

The main responsibility for systematic work environment management devolves on the employer. Employer and safety delegates are obvious partners in this connection. The person to carry out an investigation should be appointed through consultations between employer and employees and according to the scope and content of the operation.

The occupational health services as a resource

It is the employer's responsibility to provide the occupational health services which working conditions require. These services must be an independent expert resource in fields of the working environment and rehabilitation.

The occupational health services shall work to prevent and eliminate health hazards in workplaces and shall have the competence to identify and describe connections between working environment, organisation, productivity and health.

The occupational health services are a natural resource to rely on, for example, for surveys and risk assessments in the course of systematic work environment management. It can also be a resource for participating in the implementation of measures planned.

For an all-round assessment of work environment issues, it is essential for this expert resource to have a broad-based knowledge, for example, of work organisation, behavioural science, ergonomics and medicine. It is an advantage if the occupational health services

are used continuously – as an integral resource – and not just occasionally. In this way the quality of work environment management can be improved over a longer period and there will be better chances of health hazards being nipped in the bud.

Knowledge for work environment management

Good systematic work environment management requires managers and supervisory staff to have the special knowledge which their tasks demand. The operational management must therefore judge – on the basis of prevailing conditions – what managers and supervisory staff are in need of and see to it that they are quipped with the knowledge for their tasks.

Special knowledge may be required, for example, concerning:

- the impact of different working conditions on people's well-being and health,
- the origins of interaction and risks of conflict in groups, and
- skills in responding to people in situations of stress and crisis.

It is also important for the employees to know about the risks associated with their work. Knowledge is needed in order to draw attention to risks and incidents, observe signals and understand the connections between risks and ill-health.

Following up work environment measures

The measures taken must be followed up by the employer, who must check that they have had the effect intended. Follow-up of the entire systematic work environment management shall take place once annually. More frequent follow-ups may sometimes be necessary, for example, following big changes.

Further reading

Provisions issued by the Swedish Work Environment Authority (AFS)

AFS 1980:14	<i>General Recommendations Concerning Psychological and Social Aspects of the Working Environment</i>
AFS 1982:3	<i>Solitary Work</i>
AFS 1990:18	<i>Care and Assistance in Private Homes</i>
AFS 1993:2	<i>Violence and Menaces in the Working Environment*)</i>
AFS 1993:17	<i>Victimisation at Work*)</i>
AFS 1994:1	<i>Job Adaptation and Rehabilitation</i>
AFS 1997:8	<i>Medical Surveillance of Night-Workers</i>
AFS 1998:1	<i>Ergonomics for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders*)</i>
AFS 1998:5	<i>Work with Visual Display Units</i>
AFS 1999:7	<i>First Aid and Crisis Support</i>
AFS 2000:42	<i>Workplace Design*)</i>
AFS 2001:1	<i>Systematic Work Environment Management*)</i>

*) Available in English

Publications

*The Work Environment Act, with Commentary**). Arbetsmiljöverket.

Ordering ref. no. H234 (eng.)

The Working Hours Act, with Commentary. Arbetsmiljöverket.

Ordering ref. no. 00.

What happens to our muscles during stress? Arbetsmiljöverket. Ordering ref. no. H355.

Working hours, health and safety – summary of a current research survey.

The Swedish National Institute for Psychosocial Medicine (IPM).

Stress Research report No. 300, 2001.

Negative stress and ill-health – the impact of high demands, low self-control and deficient social support at work. The Swedish Work

Environment Authority/SCB (Statistics Sweden). Education and

Labour Market Information 2001:2.

Other material

OH series, “Stress in working life”, the Swedish Work Environment Authority 1998. Ordering ref. no. SDS 37.

*) *Available in English*

Visit the Swedish Work Environment Authority website www.av.se to keep up to date on current rules and other material published by us.

APPENDIX AFS 2001:1 (AMENDED BY 2003:4)

Provisions of the Swedish Work Environment Authority on Systematic Work Environment Management

ADOPTED 15TH FEBRUARY 2001 (AND 22ND MAY 2003)

Translation

In the event of disagreement concerning the interpretation and content of this text, the printed Swedish version shall have priority.

Provisions of the Swedish Work Environment Authority on Systematic Work Environment Management AFS 2001:1 (amended by 2003:4)

Adopted 15th February 2001 (and 22nd May 2003).

The following Provisions¹⁾ are issued by the Swedish Work Environment Authority pursuant to Section 18 of the Work Environment Ordinance (SFS 1977:1166).

¹⁾ Cf. 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 (OJ L183, 29.6.89, p. 1)

The Swedish Work Environment Authority, exercising powers conferred in Section 18 of the Work Environment Ordinance (SFS 1977:1166), resolves that Sections 6 and 7 of its Provisions (AFS 2001:1) on Systematic Work Environment Management shall be worded as given below.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority further resolves, concerning its General Recommendations on the implementation of the Provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management, that the sections headed Guidance on Section 6 and Guidance on Section 7 shall be worded as given below.

Scope of the Provisions

Section 1 These Provisions apply to all employers. Persons renting manpower are equated with employers.

Definition of systematic work environment management

Section 2 For the purposes of these Provisions, systematic work environment management means the work done by the employer to investigate, carry out and follow up activities in such a way that ill-health and accidents at work are prevented and a satisfactory working environment achieved.

Natural part of the activity, participation, work environment policy and routines

Section 3 Systematic work environment management shall be included as a natural part of day-to-day activities. It shall comprise all physical, psychological and social conditions of importance for the work environment.

Section 4 The employer shall give the employees, safety delegates and pupil safety delegates the possibility of participating in systematic work environment management.

Section 5 There shall be a work environment policy describing how working conditions in the employer's activity shall be in order for ill-health and accidents at work to be prevented and a satisfactory working environment achieved.

There shall be routines describing how systematic work environment management shall proceed.

The work environment policy and the routines shall be documented in writing if there are at least ten persons employed in the activity.

Allocation of tasks. Knowledge

Section 6 The employer shall allocate the tasks in the activity in such a way that one or more managers, supervisors or other employees are tasked with working for the prevention of risks at work and the achievement of a satisfactory working environment.

The employer shall see to it that the persons allotted these tasks are sufficient in number and have the authority and the resources that are needed. The employer shall also see to it that they have sufficient knowledge of

- rules material to the working environment,
- physical, psychological and social conditions implying risks of accidents and ill-health,
- measures to prevent ill-health and accidents, and
- working conditions conducive to a satisfactory working environment.

The employer shall see to it that those allotted the tasks have sufficient competence for the conduct of a well functioning systematic work environment management.

In addition, the stipulations in Appendix 1 shall be complied with.

The allocation of tasks shall be documented in writing if there are at least ten persons employed in the activity.

Section 7 The employer shall see to it that the employees' knowledge of the work and of the risks which the work entails is sufficient for ill-health and accidents to be prevented and for a satisfactory working environment to be achieved. Where the risks entailed by the work are serious there shall be written instructions for the work.

Risk assessment, remedial measures and follow-up

Section 8 The employer shall regularly investigate working conditions and assess the risks of any person being affected by ill-health or accidents at work.

When changes to the activity are being planned, the employer shall assess whether the changes entail risks of ill-health or accidents which may need to be remedied.

The risk assessment shall be documented in writing. The risk assessment shall indicate which risks are present and whether or not they are serious.

Section 9 In the event of an employee meeting with ill-health or an accident at work and of a serious incident at work, the employer shall investigate the causes, so that risks of ill-health and accidents can be prevented in future. Every year the employer shall compile a written summary of ill-health, accidents and serious incidents occurring at work.

Section 10 The employer shall carry out, immediately or as soon as is practically possible, the measures which are needed for the prevention of ill-health and accidents at work. The employer shall also take such other measures as are needed in order to achieve a satisfactory working environment.

Measures not carried out immediately shall be entered in a written action plan. The plan shall indicate when the measures shall be effectuated and who is to see to it that they are effectuated.

Measures effectuated shall be inspected.

Section 11 Every year the employer shall carry out a follow-up of systematic work environment management. If it has not functioned satisfactorily it shall be improved.

The follow-up shall be documented in writing if there are at least ten persons employed in the activity.

Occupational health services

Section 12 When competence within the employer's own activity is insufficient for systematic work environment management or for work relating to job modification and rehabilitation, the employer shall engage occupational health services or corresponding expert assistance from outside.

When occupational health service or corresponding expert assistance are engaged, they shall be sufficient in scope and shall have sufficient competence and resources for this work. In addition, the stipulations in Appendix 2 shall be complied with.

Entry into force

The Provisions AFS 2001:1 enter into force on 1st July 2001.

The Provisions AFS 2003:4 enter into force on 1st July 2003.

The Provisions of the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health (AFS 1996:6) on Internal Control of the Working Environment are repealed with effect from the same date.

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Employees with tasks as referred to in Section 6

The persons to whom the employer has allotted tasks relating to management of the working environment, as provided in Section 6, shall

- be given access to summaries as referred to in section 9 of these Provisions and to work injury reports pursuant to the Work Injuries Insurance Act (1976:380),
- be given access to information concerning the preventive work environment measures in the activity and concerning measures stipulated by the Swedish Work Environment Authority, and shall
- be allowed to convey viewpoints to the employer concerning
 - the selection of other employees with tasks relating to management of the working environment,
 - the selection of the employees needed to carry out first aid, fire-fighting and evacuation,
 - the engagement of occupational health services or corresponding expert assistance from outside,
 - the structuring of work environment management,
 - risk assessments,
 - measures for the prevention of ill-health and accidents,
 - personal protective equipment which may be needed,
 - summaries and work injury reports,
 - the information to which they need access concerning preventive work environment measures in the activity and concerning measures stipulated by the Swedish Work Environment Authority, and
 - the design of information concerning these matters.

Appendix 2

Occupational health services or corresponding expert assistance as referred to in Section 12

The employer shall see to it that the occupational health services or corresponding outside expert assistance engaged as provided in Section 12

- receive information concerning the factors affecting or suspected of affecting the employees' health and safety,
- have access to information concerning
 - current work environment risks,
 - preventive measures, and
 - the measures taken to appoint, train and equip the employees needed to carry out first aid, fire-fighting and evacuation.

The information shall concern both the activity as a whole and each individual workplace or each individual job.

General Recommendations of the Swedish Work Environment Authority on the implementation of the Provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management

The following General Recommendations are issued by the Swedish Work Environment Authority on the implementation of its Provisions (AFS 2001:1) on Systematic Work Environment Management.

General Recommendations have a different legal status from Provisions. They are not mandatory. Instead they serve to elucidate the meaning of the Provisions (e.g. by explaining suitable ways of meeting the requirements, giving examples of practical solutions and procedures) and to provide recommendations, background information and references.

Background

Purpose of the Provisions

Under Chap. 3, Section 2 of the Work Environment Act, the main responsibility for the working environment in the activity devolves on the employer. Chap. 3, Section 2 a describes, in general terms, how that responsibility is to be discharged.

The Provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management enlarge on and specify the procedure to be followed by the employer in discharging his responsibility. Other Provisions of the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health and the Swedish Work Environment Authority supplement the rules on work environment management, e.g. as regards routines, knowledge and risk assessment.

Provisions on Internal Control of the Working Environment came into force on 1st January 1993 (AFS 1992:6). Revised rules took effect on 1st March 1997 (AFS 1996:6). The new Provisions have been given a different name, but the basic methodology of systematic work environment management remains unaltered.

Stipulations have been added requiring persons renting manpower to conduct systematic work environment management, as have Provisions on occupational health services, and in several respects the rules have been elucidated and simplified.

The EC frame directive

As a Member State of the European Union, Sweden is required to transpose the EC Directive on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work (89/391/EEC). The Provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management transpose parts of the Directive, for example, through the stipulations concerning work environment policy, allocation of tasks, expert assistance from outside, and written risk assessments.

Guidance on individual Sections

Scope of the Provisions

Guidance on Section 1

Employer

These Provisions refer to an employer in the legal sense, meaning a natural or legal person with one or more employees.

A small undertaking can be run as a company. It can also be run without being a company, in which case it is operated in the owner's name or under a special name of its own. When the undertaking is run without a company, the employer is a natural person. When, on the other hand, it is run as a company or association, the employer is a legal person.

Partnerships, limited companies, associations, foundations, municipalities, county councils, parishes etc. are all legal persons. The state is a legal person but is, as an employer, represented by public authorities and public enterprises.

The person renting manpower

A person renting manpower is duty bound – as regards the work to which the rental refers – to comply with the Provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management. This can, for example, mean investigating working conditions, assessing risks, taking remedial measures and issuing instructions.

The person hiring out manpower

An employer hiring out manpower has no control over the place where the work is done, nor over the facilities and machinery existing there. This being so, it is important that he should plan and follow up the work carefully, e.g. as regards the choice of workplace, duties and working hours, and overall experience of the rental transaction.

The person hiring out manpower should be vigilant with regard to the total physical and mental burden on the employee when he or she is rented out to different places. The employer hiring out manpower remains responsible for the employees and is duty bound to carry out long-term measures relating to the working environment, e.g. with regard to training and rehabilitation.

Definition of systematic work environment management

Guidance on Section 2

The term “systematic work environment management”

The Provisions mean that systematic work environment management encompasses the whole of the activity, regardless of whether it is carried on in the same place all the time, is dispersed or is moveable. It also applies to teleworking, e.g. when the employee works from home.

Work environment management needs to be conducted both in the course of regular operations and in connection with changes, such as reorganization measures and construction, and also when new working and production methods are being introduced.

It is important that work environment management should not be confined to the work environment of the majority of workers but should also include conditions which perhaps affect only one or a few of them.

Ill-health, accidents and a satisfactory work environment

The purpose of the stipulations in the Work Environment Act, the Work Environment Ordinance and the rules issued by the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health and the Swedish Work Environment Authority is to prevent ill-health and accidents and to achieve a satisfactory working environment.

Ill-health can mean both illnesses defined by medical, objective criteria, and physical and mental functional disturbances of various kinds which are not illnesses in the objective sense. The latter include, for example, various forms of stress reaction and musculoskeletal disorder. Conditions of this kind can lead to illness. It is the intensity of the experiences, their duration and the ability of the person concerned to function as before which decide whether ill-health is present.

Accidents mean physical or mental injury resulting from a sudden event. An accident can lead to both slight injury and fatality.

A satisfactory working environment is characterized, for example, by the possibility of influence, freedom of action and development, variety, co-operation and social contacts.

Natural part of the activity, participation, work environment policy and routines

Guidance on Section 3

Natural part of the day-to-day activity

Work environment issues need to be handled within the activity in the same way as production, economics and quality, not as a separate system. Many operational decisions have a bearing on working conditions, and the consequences for the work environment therefore need to be assessed and considered before the decisions are taken.

Chap. 3, Section 2 a of the Work Environment Act makes it the duty of the employer to have an organization for job modification and rehabilitation. This activity should be co-ordinated with systematic work environment management.

The employer can also apply voluntary systems of quality assurance and environment management. Systematic work environment management can, where appropriate, be co-ordinated with these systems, but it is important that, when thus co-ordinated, work environment issues should continue to receive sufficient scope and attention, e.g. as regards questions concerning musculoskeletal ergonomics, psychosocial conditions, job modification and rehabilitation.

All questions with a bearing on the working environment

There are many different factors at work by which the employee is physically and mentally affected. Together these factors make up the employee's total working environment. They include, for example, noise, air quality, chemical health hazards and machinery, as well as organizational conditions such as Work load, working hours, leadership, social contacts, variation and the possibility of "rest and recovery".

The employer needs to take into account all factors potentially impacting on the individual persons' work situation. This does not only mean things capable of adversely affecting health and safety. A good work environment contributes towards good health and means more than the absence of illness and accidents.

Guidance on Section 4

Employees

Everyone employed in the activity is an employee. This includes managers and supervisory personnel, e.g. the managing director of a company and the chief executive of a local authority.

Trainees, apprentices, temporary staff, probationers and project teams are also employees. Pupils, conscripts and others serving in the total defence system,

together with inmates of penal and nursing institutions doing work they are referred to are also equated with employees.

It is important that the individual employees should participate in everyday systematic work environment management. Their tasks, for example, are to report risks, to suggest measures and to convey viewpoints on the outcome of measures taken previously. Their participation is also important in the framing of the work environment policy and of routines.

Participation

In matters relating to the working environment, the employees are represented by local and regional safety delegates. Pupils are represented by pupil safety delegates. These safety delegates and pupil safety delegates have their appointed roles in work environment management under the Work Environment Act.

It is essential for the employer, employees, safety delegates and pupil safety delegates to decide together how they are to collaborate for the purpose of systematic work environment management. It is often practical to develop the forms of co-operation already existing, such as workplace meetings, project and co-operation groups and safety committee meetings. The minuting of such meetings can serve a useful purpose.

It is important that the persons taking part in work environment management should have sufficient time for their duties and should receive the information they need.

It is essential that work environment management be conducted with reference to the risks of ill-health and accidents and the employees' aptitudes for the work. Accordingly, the employer should draw on their knowledge and experience. Women and men often have different working conditions and different aptitudes for their work. It is important that the employer should be receptive to the employees' viewpoints and pay consideration to possible ways of improving working conditions.

The employer always retains his responsibility for the work environment, but in practice the efficiency of work environment management depends on co-operation.

Guidance on Section 5

Work environment policy

The risks inherent in the activity are an important point of departure when framing the work environment policy. It is important that the policy should be sufficiently concrete to be followed up. For example, it can focus on concrete measures with a view to preventing accidents and enhancing the variety of work.

In a small undertaking, the action plans (Section 10) can serve as a work environment policy.

Routines

Routines, meaning predefined procedures, exist for the purpose of systematizing work environment management. This can avert mistaken decisions.

The routines should indicate when, how and by whom systematic work environment management is to be conducted and which people are to take part. Routines do not have to be complicated. In a small firm, advance planning of the next steps in work environment management may be sufficient. It is particularly important to decide in advance when and how working conditions are to be investigated.

General remarks on written documentation

There is more to systematic work environment management than just drawing up documents. What matters is the practical improvements achieved in the working environment. There is no law requiring a special file or handbook on the subject.

Written documentation is intended as an aid to work environment management, for the use of both employer and employees, and so it is appropriate that they should join together in drawing up the necessary documents.

Risk assessment, summaries of injuries and incidents and action plans always have to be in writing, also in small activities (Sections 8, 9 and 10).

Written documentation of the work environment policy, routines, allocation

of tasks and follow-up of systematic work environment management are not required in activities where there are less than ten persons employed.

Documentation always needs to be adapted to the preconditions and needs of the activity and must be clear and easy to understand. To enable the employees to participate in work environment management, the documentation must be easily available. It also needs to be constantly updated, and the reader must be able to see when it was updated last.

Summary of documentation requirements

Risk assessment, summaries of injuries and incidents and action plans always have to be in writing. (Sections 8, 9 and 10)

Written documentation of the work environment policy, routines, allocation of tasks and follow-up of systematic work environment management is required if there are at least ten persons employed in the activity. (Sections 5, 6 and 11)

When the risks of the work are serious there shall be written instructions for the work. (Sections 7)

Allocation of tasks. Knowledge

Guidance on Section 6

Tasks

The employer always retains his responsibility for the working environment, even if different tasks of work environment management have been distributed.

In a small undertaking it is easy for the employer to make clear who is to do what in connection with systematic work environment management. The employer may also opt for performing tasks himself. In larger undertakings the allocation of tasks primarily concerns managers and supervisory personnel. They carry on work environment management as a natural part of their day-to-day activities, e.g. in connection with decision-making and work supervision, and in their turn can often entrust tasks to other employees.

The tasks need to be allocated to specified persons or positions. It is important that a task should not fall between two stools, be forgotten or be allotted to several persons. It is also important to decide what will apply, for example, during sickness absence and holidays. The tasks should be described as clearly as possible, especially when the activity is a mobile one or is conducted in different places. At any given moment it should be clear to all the employees concerned who is to do what in connection with work environment management.

Powers and resources

Powers concern the right of take decisions and to take action.

Resources are finance, availability of personnel, equipment, facilities, time and knowledge.

If an employee's powers, knowledge or time are insufficient for a task allotted, it is important that he or she should turn to his/her manager and ask for a change to be made. It may become necessary for the employee to resign the task. This can be done quite informally but needs to be expressed clearly and distinctly. If the allocation of tasks is made in writing, it is often important for the employee also to resign the task in writing.

Knowledge

Managers and supervisory personnel have a decisive role to play in creating satisfactory working conditions and preventing ill-health and accidents. To this end, they need to have a thorough knowledge of the work itself, the risks which it entails and measures for the prevention of injuries. It is important for them to have good insight into people's reactions in different situations and to be thoroughly apprised of the health implications of, for example, heavy workload, overtime, victimisation, violence and menaces, and substance abuse. This in turn should make it easier for them to provide necessary support to the employees.

Managers and supervisory personnel need to know the stipulations existing in this field and how to apply them within the activity. Rules with a bearing on the working environment mainly comprise the Work Environment Act, the

Work Environment Ordinance and Provisions issued by the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health and the Work Environment Authority. The Provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management are fundamental, describing as they do how the employer is to approach the working environment. Measures which the employer can take for the prevention of ill-health and accidents are also indicated by other Provisions on the work environment. Collective agreements applying to the activity may also include rules with a bearing on the working environment.

Other rules of importance for the working environment are the Working Hours Act, anti-discrimination enactments, the Equal Opportunities Act and the Tobacco Act. Depending on the nature of the activity, other legislation may also be relevant, e.g. the Electricity Act, the Maritime Safety Act, the Rail Safety Act, the Flammable and Explosive Products Act, the Carriage of Dangerous Goods Act, the Civil Aviation Act, parts of the Environment Code relating to chemical products and biotechnological organisms, the Planning and Building Act, the Rescue Services Act, the Seveso Act and the Traffic Ordinance.

Risks commonly occurring in the working environment are set forth in the Provisions issued by the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health and the Work Environment Authority. Those Provisions refer to physical, psychological and social factors alike. In order for an assessment to be made of the risks present in a particular activity, working conditions there need to be regularly and systematically investigated. Managers and supervisory personnel should have a knowledge of the connection between hazards of the working environment and their potential consequences in the form of ill-health and accidents.

Competence

Tasks to do with systematic work environment management are usually distributed by the employer between managers and supervisory personnel. In order for them to be able to discharge these duties properly, the duties themselves should form a natural part of their work.

Managers and supervisory personnel should be capable of taking measures in keeping with their personnel and work supervision responsibilities, e.g. providing introduction and instructions, elucidating tasks, assisting with the prioritisation of employees' duties and providing support and feedback.

Managers and supervisory personnel should be capable of carrying out investigations of working conditions through one-to-one interviews, personnel meetings and safety inspection tours. In this way it can be ascertained whether working conditions need to be altered. One-to-one interviews should be carried out frequently in order to assess the need for job modification and rehabilitation. Managers and supervisory personnel should be capable of carrying out a preliminary, approximate risk assessment after these interviews and meetings.

As a general rule, managers and supervisory personnel also need to know about other common survey and risk assessment methods.

Allocation of tasks and responsibilities

The employer needs to continuously ascertain that the allocation of tasks is working well and to make changes in the allocation when necessary.

The allocation of tasks does not mean that the person incurring tasks will be automatically punished in the event of a work accident or a work-related illness. Thus it does not mean that the employer can decide who is to be punished, for example, if there is an accident. That liability is decided by a court of law.

If an accident leads to prosecution and court proceedings, the court's assessment can to a great extent hinge on whether the accused had sufficient knowledge, powers and resources for his or her tasks.

The stipulations in Appendix 1 are a transposition of articles in the EC framework directive.

The Provisions of Section 6 and Appendix 1 do not refer to safety delegates.

Guidance on Section 7

General remarks concerning knowledge

The employees can acquire knowledge of the working environment by taking part in special training and by occupying themselves with work environment issues in the course of their work.

Even if the work in itself is not particularly risky, human errors or inappropriate handling can lead to ill-health and accidents, both to the employee herself/himself and to other personnel. If the employee does not feel herself/himself to have sufficient knowledge of the avoidance of ill-health and accidents, it is important that he or she notify the employer to this effect.

Employees need to know what personal protective equipment and what technical aids can be necessary at work. It is important for the employer to devote sufficient time to motivating them to use the equipment and technical aids and for the employees to make use of these things.

Existing knowledge often needs to be supplemented for changes in duties, working equipment, working methods, activities and organisation or after prolonged absence. It is important that the employer should all the time see to it that knowledge is kept up to date.

It is essential for the employees to be informed in good time of alterations planned to the scope, emphasis and organisation of the activity, and that they be given the opportunity of participating in the process of change. This is especially important when cutbacks and closures are pending, so that physical and mental strains at work can be averted.

Risks at work

It is absolutely necessary for the employee to be clear about the risks entailed by his own duties and about things which have to be done for the avoidance of ill-health and accidents. It is also essential to know about other risks which the employee may come up against in the course of work. It is especially important for the employee to have a basic knowledge of the risks at work in places over which her or his own employer has no control, e.g. work involving more than one employer, and teleworking.

Introduction

The employer should introduce the employee to the work as early as possible, especially in cases where the employee has had no previous experience of working life.

The introduction should convey an idea of the employee's own tasks and how they are connected with other people's, an insight into the general scheme of operations and a knowledge of the risks which the activity entails. The introduction should also describe systematic work environment management, e.g. to whom the employee should turn in matters relating to the working environment.

Written instructions

It is important that there should be written instructions on what to do in the event of machine failures, technical hitches, incidents and accidents. Often written instructions are needed for repairs, maintenance and other servicing, and also for difficult situations when working, for example, for clients and patients. It is essential that the instructions should be available at the workplace and that they should be readily intelligible. It is also important that they should be kept up to date and for the reader to be able to see when they were updated last. Written instructions may need to be combined with verbal ones.

The employer should adapt introduction and instructions to the employee's age and experience, familiarity with the task and with working life, knowledge of languages, cultural background and, where applicable, functional impairment. The employer also should make sure that the instructions have been correctly perceived.

Risk assessment, remedial measures and follow-up

Guidance on Section 8

Risks at work

The word risk as used in the Provisions refers to the likelihood of ill-health or accidents at work occurring and the consequences of such occurrences. Risks at work can lead to injury in both the short and long term. The gravity of the risk has to be decided in each particular instance.

Everyday vigilance

It is essential for managers and supervisory personnel in their everyday activities to exercise vigilance concerning the well-being of employees at work. High short-term absenteeism, discontent and relational problems can be signs of risks at work. The employer should be observant of the effects of overtime and heavy workloads, for example.

Survey and risk assessment

Risks at work need to be systematically investigated and assessed. This can be done by means of daily surveys or, for example, through safety inspection tours, work environment inspection tours and other problem inventories. The employer needs to be clear about the risks prevailing, so that ill-health and accidents can be prevented. The frequency with which surveys need to be carried out will depend on the risks which the activity entails. The assessment should always result in the proposal of measures for eliminating or reducing the risks.

The rules issued by the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health and the Swedish Work Environment Authority can supply important information for the mapping and assessment of risks. Failing Provisions for a given sector, the general stipulations of the Work Environment Act apply.

The assessment of risks needs to be undertaken in the light of the general experience present within the activity and the routines applied. It is important to obtain knowledge from summaries of ill-health, accidents and incidents and of previous job modification and rehabilitation measures. Information can be derived from research in the field and from general statistics, e.g. concerning work injuries.

Survey methods

Occupational-hygienic and other measurements, as well as medical checks, may be needed as part of the risk assessment process.

In undertakings with chemical risks or fire or explosion risks, special methods of risk analysis are often necessary. The same goes for activities involving the use of automated or complex machinery.

Questionnaires and interviews can provide a picture of conditions entailing physical and mental strain. Employee interviews are an important means of gaining a clearer picture of conditions.

Risks at work usually come about through a combination of circumstances. It is also essential to consider how human beings function in different working situations. One needs to ask how people react, think, behave and interact with others.

Risky working situations

Repair work, e.g. in connection with disruptions and breakdowns affecting machinery and other technical devices, is often risky. So too are unexpected situations occurring in work with other people, e.g. in nursing and other forms of care.

Risks to employee groups

Minors, immigrants, persons with functional impairment and pregnant women are examples of groups which for various reasons may be exposed to special risks.

Changes to the activity

It is essential to pay consideration to the working environment before the activity has got started, and also when contemplating changes to current operations. It is important to find the risks and remedy them before they get "built into the system".

Personnel can sometimes suffer as a result of re-organization measures, especially where there are cutbacks and closures involved. It is important to identify the risks early on, so that negative consequences of the adjustment process can be averted.

It is essential to pay consideration to the working environment, for example when inviting tenders or signing contracts, in the course of planning and technical design, and in the outsourcing of goods and services. Tenders, for example, can be framed in such a way that the equipment and services provided will meet the stipulations of Provisions issued by the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health and the Swedish Work Environment

Authority. It is also important to verify that the supplier's/contractor's own systematic work environment management is satisfactory.

Written risk assessments

The written risk assessment refers to the risks revealed by the regular surveys and in connection with the planning of changes to the activity. These can very well be co-ordinated with the action plan (Section 10). Risks which are remedied immediately also need to be included in the risk assessment. They constitute important information for continuing systematic work environment management.

Guidance on Section 9

Serious incidents

An incident is an undesired occurrence which could have led to ill-health or an accident. Serious incidents are occurrences which in themselves imply serious danger of ill-health or accidents. There need not be any personal danger in the particular situation, as for example in the case of an explosion on premises where nobody happens to be present.

Incidents are due to deficiencies of work environment management.

Investigation

The duty of investigation applies if there is a connection between what has happened and conditions at work. It may also be worth while for the employer to investigate incidents of a non-serious nature.

An accident, for example, is often the combined product of technical factors, human action, organizational conditions and the direction of the activity. The employer should therefore find out all underlying causes of the occurrence, as far as is practically possible. The investigation needs to be both thorough and systematic. It can contain observations at the work station, interviews with personnel concerned and scrutiny of plans, allocation of tasks, instructions and routines.

The investigation should be focused on the occurrence and on the circumstances which have led to it. It should be carried out with a preventive purpose in mind and should not dwell on the question of blame.

Sickness absence can also be due to ill-health or accidents caused by conditions in the work environment. This makes it important to find out whether the absence is connected with working conditions. A summary of total sickness absence often holds up a mirror to the working environment of the activity concerned.

Annual summaries

The purpose of these summaries is to facilitate the assessment of risks at work, so that new injuries and incidents can be prevented.

It may be appropriate to use the work injury report form when making notes on the subject of ill-health and accidents. Ill-health at work which is not reported as a work injury may also need to be noted down, as may serious incidents. These data may have a very important bearing on the prevention of ill-health later on.

Since women and men can be exposed to different risks at work, it is important to compile separate accounts for the sexes regarding ill-health, accidents and incidents. The account may show that separate measures are called for.

Guidance on Section 10

Remedial measures

When measures are to be taken, the point of departure is the risks of ill-health and accidents which the surveys have revealed. Often one needs to prioritize according to the gravity of the risks. These risks may sometimes be so grave that work has to be suspended immediately.

It is essential for risks to be eliminated or reduced "at source". If a risk cannot be avoided completely, it is important that the employees should be protected in some other way, e.g. through instructions, support and guidance or personal protective equipment.

Different solutions may sometimes need to be tested in order to arrive at suitable measures. Where negative stress and repetitive stress syndrome are concerned, for example, changes can often be necessary in the organization and conduct of education and training, so as to achieve a satisfactory work environment and meaningful, developmental tasks.

Action plans

The measures which are not taken immediately, i.e. on the same day or within the next few days, are noted down in a written action plan or entered in a revised plan. It is often practical for the risks to be entered in conjunction with the remedial measures.

Unremedied risks at work can be a sign of inefficiency in work environment management.

Inspection of measures taken

To make certain that the risks have been dealt with, the employer should check the result immediately, or else as soon as is practically possible. If the measures taken have not been sufficient, they may need to be added to. The new measures in themselves may generate risks and therefore need to be checked.

Guidance on Section 11

Follow-up methodology

The purpose of the annual follow-up is to investigate whether work environment management is being conducted in accordance with the Provisions on Systematic Work Environment Management.

Follow-up may need to be carried out more than once a year, for example following a reorganization and after accidents and serious incidents.

The follow-up can be effectuated by comparing the content of the Provisions and general recommendations with the work environment management that is actually conducted. By interviewing managers, supervisory personnel, other employees and safety delegates, the employer can find out, for example, whether the allocation of tasks is working well.

Occupational health services

Guidance on Section 12

The meaning of occupational health services

Health can be affected by a number and variety – and sometimes a combination – of factors in the working environment. Individual factors can also have a bearing on health. Chap. 3, Section 2b of the Work Environment Act defines occupational health services as an independent expert resource in the domains of the working environment and rehabilitation. It shall have the competence to identify and describe connections between the working environment, organization, productivity and health. Accordingly, occupational health services require a broad knowledge, for example, of work organization, behavioural science, ergonomics, medicine, rehabilitation and technology.

Occupational health services can be outsourced or arranged as an independent part of the activities of the undertaking. It is important that this care should occupy a neutral position in relation to the labour market parties. It is essential that employees and safety delegates should be given the opportunity of participating in the procurement of occupational health services and in decision-making on the structuring and discharge of the assignment. Questions concerning occupational health services are discussed within the safety committee.

Engagement of occupational health services

Occupational health services shall be at the disposal of both employer and employees. To ensure continuity and an all-round assessment of work environment conditions, it is appropriate for these services to be engaged as a coherent resource, not just in the form of occasional services.

The expert knowledge of the occupational health services often necessary both for the investigation and assessment of physical and mental risks and as regards proposing remedial measures and assisting with

their implementation. Occupational health services also are an important resource when rehabilitation inquiries are to be carried out, and in connection with job modification measures for individual employees and groups of employees, e.g. when there are employees who are especially sensitive to risks of the working environment concerned.

If there are particular problems of the working environment involved, it can sometimes be appropriate for the employer to subscribe to occupational health services with specialist competence in the field concerned.

Sometimes resources may be needed which are not available from occupational health services, in which case the employer may need to engage other expert assistance.

It is important that the employer should co-operate with the occupational health services, but she or he always retains her or his responsibility for the working environment.

The stipulations in Appendix 2 are a transposition of articles in Directive 89/391/EEC.

