

# Harmonisation of EU directives in the field of OHS in Estonia

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## Introduction

Along with other EU applicant countries Estonia is undergoing a rapid change and development that influences both policy and implementation levels in key areas that also affect social and economic development and health sectors. Changes in work life have been a challenge to the occupational health and safety sector in several ways, i.e. through enterprise structures, introduction of new technologies, growing mobility of people, and growing economic competition. With the following we would like to give a short overview about situation in the OHS field today, on the first half-year of 2003.

## General information about the Occupational Health and Safety system in Estonia

The main political and administrative authority in the area of working environment in Estonia is The Ministry of Social Affairs (*MoSA*) that is responsible for the co-ordination and management of the activities in the field of occupational health and safety (*OHS*). Within the MoSA there is also the Advisory Committee on Working Environment making proposals for the development and implementation of the working environment policy and the Chemical Safety Commission dealing with chemical safety issues.

There are four different agencies of Ministry of Social Affairs dealing with OHS matters: the Occupational Health Centre, the Labour Inspectorate, the Chemicals Notification Centre and the National Institute for Health Development. There are also three Universities dealing with OHS matters: Tallinn Technical University, Tartu University and Estonian Agricultural University. In Estonia medical services are provided by private and national occupational health services that have contracts with employers. Also we have the Clinic of Occupational Diseases where occupational diseases are diagnosed in Estonia.

The main responsibility to ensure safe working environment at workplace is delegated to employer who is responsible for training the personnel concerning OHS matters as well as for arraigning the risk assessment at the workplace and taking appropriate measures to eliminate the OHS risks at workplace. The main tasks of employee are to follow the safe working rules and to inform employer about dangerous occurrences and accidents at work.

## National approach concerning the harmonisation process

Estonia began accession negotiations with the European Union in March 1998. In the chapter of Social Policy and Employment Estonia is ready to adopt in full and implement the *acquis* with no transitional measures. Estonian Occupational Health and Safety Policy is based on two documents: program document "National Policy on Working Environment" and „Occupational Health and safety act“ that is harmonising the OHS framework directive 89/391/EEC. A new program document "Occupational Health Development Programme until 2007" has been drafted.

There has been conducted several PHARE-programmes in order to strengthen the capacities in the occupational health and safety field. The most important programmes

have been "Estonian-Finnish Twinning Project on Occupational Health and Safety 2000-2002" and Estonian-Danish Consensus III project to strengthen the Labour Inspection capacities. Occupational Health Centre was established with the aim to improve the implementation of different OHS programmes in Estonia and also to gather, analyse and disseminate the OHS information as well as to train OHS specialists.

Although Estonia is prepared to adopt and implement the *acquis* with respect to social policy and employment in full on accession to the European Union and Estonia does not request any additional period or derogation to the *acquis* in this chapter, it should be recalled that incorporation of the *acquis* into the legislation is not in itself sufficient, it is also very important to ensure that it is actually applied. The problems Estonia is now dealing with at the national level are: insufficient coverage with occupational health services as well as underreported occupational diseases and occupational accidents.

### **Country profile**

The population of Estonia is around 1.3 million people. According to the report 2002 of Statistical Office of Estonia, the labour force participation rate and employment rate of population aged 15-74 is 55.9% (0.68 million), of which employed 0.59 million (51.6% men and 48.4% women); 394 400 are inactive and unemployment rate is 10.3%. Population and health statistics: live births per 1000 population is 9.1; deaths per 1000 population – 12.8; life expectancy at birth: men – 65.1 years and women – 76 years; infant mortality per 1000 live births – 8.4. Only 10-15% of workers are covered by the occupational health services in Estonia.

### **Labour Inspection and the Accident Insurance system in Estonia**

The supervision of the working environment is the responsibility of Estonian Labour Inspectorate. The Labour Inspectorate consists of 14 local inspectorates and the Headquarter. 51 labour inspectors and 17 lawyers are arranging for the state supervision in the enterprises over compliance with the requirements of legislation regulating OHS and labour relations. There are approximately 574 employers (enterprises) per inspector. Labour Inspectorate has developed and is maintaining some databases, such as: Register of accidents and occupational diseases and Register of the enterprises' working environment.

929 occupational accidents were registered in 2002 in Estonia, 35 fatal accidents at work were reported and 129 occupational diseases were diagnosed. The main hazards causing occupational diseases are physical hazards (67), psychological (48) and chemical hazards (9) [Labour Inspectorate 2002]. At the moment we do not have a Compulsory Insurance Act of Occupational Accidents and Diseases. The system of occupational disability and accidents insurance is voluntary and is not effective.

### **Collection and dissemination of information. Networking**

Occupational Health Centre (OHC) is the agency of the Ministry of Social Affairs, which is collecting and disseminating occupational health information in Estonia. According to the Act of Occupational Safety and Health amendment Act (July, 2003), occupational health physician has to inform OHC about cases of work related diseases and Labour Inspectorate about occupational diseases. Information about work related diseases are collected and analysed at the OHC and all relevant data about occupational diseases in Labour Inspectorate.

In order to reach the full potential of the Governmental structure, exchange of

information and experience dissemination between different authorities is very important. For that reason we have several expert information networks in Estonia. At national level there is established decentralized *Estonian Occupational Health and Safety Network* for collaboration by strengthening communication between OHS organisations. *Baltic Sea Network* (BSN) on OHS is a regional network of ten countries around the Baltic Sea, which purpose is to strengthen peer-to-peer networking and collaboration of expert institutions between and within countries in the Baltic Sea region. Estonia is also a member of *Information Network of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work* which aim is to bring together and share the region's knowledge and information on OHS-related issues [<http://osh.sm.ee/systems/estonian-network.htm>].