

Health and safety: priority for the European Union

The European Commission

Thanks to the adoption and application in recent decades of a large body of Community laws, it has been possible to improve working conditions in the EU Member States and make considerable progress in reducing the incidence of work-related accidents and illnesses. The 1989 Directive on the protection of health and safety at work (89/391/EEC) lays down basic principles for all sectors of activity – in particular the general responsibilities of employers for the safety and health of their workers. Supplemented by a series of specific rules laid down by ad-hoc Directives, this policy :

- encourages improvements in occupational health and safety in all sectors of activity, both public and private.
- promotes workers' rights to make proposals relating to health and safety, to appeal to the competent authority and to stop work in the event of serious danger.
- seeks to adequately protect workers and ensure that they return home in good health at the end of the working day.

EU-OSHA :

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) is committed to making Europe a safer, healthier and more productive place to work. side-by-side with governments, employers' and workers' organisations, EU bodies and networks, and private companies, the Agency promote a culture of risk prevention to improve working conditions in Europe :

- by raising awareness and disseminate information on the importance of worker's health and safety for European social and economic stability and growth;
- by designing and developing hands-on instruments for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to help them assess their workplace risks, share knowledge and good practices on safety and health within their reach and beyond;
- by identifying and assessing new and emerging risks at work.

CEETTAR: Dynamic force of Land-based Contractors (LBCs)

The Confédération Européenne des Entrepreneurs de Travaux Techniques Agricoles, Ruraux et Forestiers, established in 1961, represents about 100.000 companies and about 500.000 workers. It aims to represent the interests of land-based rural contractors at the European level.

EFFAT is the European Federation of the trade unions of the agriculture, food and tourism sectors

Representing 120 national trade unions from 35 European countries, EFFAT defends the interests of more that 2.6 millions members towards the European institutions, the European trade unions' federations and companies' management. EFFAT is an independent trade unions' federation.

The European social partners of the sector of agricultural rural and forestry services, EFFAT and CEETTAR, are involved for many years in an active and autonomous social dialogue. This dialogue is an essential condition for sustainable development of businesses and employment. More information is available at: www.rural-services.eu

CEETTAR and EFFAT are regular partners of the campaigns initiated by EU-OSHA and wish, by doing so, to contribute to the improvement of working conditions in Europe .



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Working together for risk prevention



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What is it about ?

Health at work, more broadly seen as quality of working life, turns on three different objectives:

1. preservation and promotion of the worker's health and his working capacity;
2. improvement of the environment and work;
3. development of an organisation and a work culture developing health and safety at work.

A difficult case to control

Health and security at work are facing multiple demands that have to be taken into account:

- human: evaluation of the risks, personnel training;
- organisational: responsibility, delegation of authority;
- economical: productivity, contribution, operating losses;
- technical: respect of standards, job creation and ergonomomy.

Green sector's professions and their risks !

Agricultural, rural and forestry works are physically highly demanding. Health problems can arise as a result of the repetitive nature of the work and the exposure to weather conditions, noise and dust.

Moreover, workers have to work with machinery, vehicles, potentially dangerous chemical products, and this often alone, in a difficult environment, at a height, on slope, nearby pits and silos...

Which risks do we have to take into account in the sector of agricultural, rural and forestry works ?

- risks tied to the off and on-road use of agricultural and forestry machinery;
- risks tied to the maintenance of agricultural and forestry machinery;
- objects falling or contact with moving objects (constructions, packages, tree trunks);
- falls from a height (from a tree, a roof...);
- electrocution;
- drowning (in water reservoirs, manure tanks, grain silos);
- handling of animals.

Health and security at work is a matter managers and workers have to actively take care of, because an accident has serious consequences:

For an employer (or a self-employed person), this results in costs:

- medical and pharmaceutical costs (first aid included);
- insurance costs;
- legal costs (civil or criminal steps);
- costs linked to the interruption of the activities and/or the loss of production;
- costs linked to the employment and training of new workers and temporary workers;
- costs linked to image loss.

For a worker (or a self-employed person), an accident means :

- suffering, pain and injuries;
- admittance to a hospital;
- medical costs;
- work incapacity (temporarily or permanent);
- permanent disability;
- loss of livelihoods.

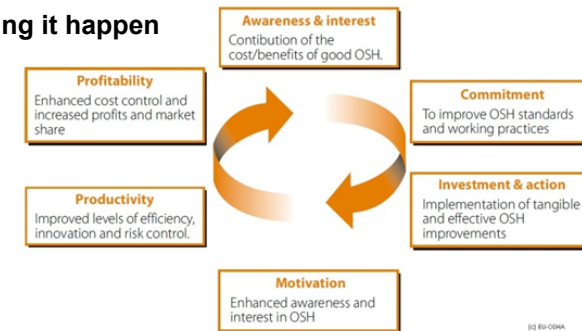
The social partners of the sector of agricultural, rural and forestry works give a great deal of importance to the prevention of work accidents. They think:

1. health and security at work play a great role on economical level for the industry;
2. contractors have to keep providing not only high-performance machinery for the agriculture and the rural zones, but also a high-level professional know-how with a constant concern for the work quality leaning on a specific responsibility concerning health and safety of workers;
3. Health and safety at work are at the heart of the challenges linked to the qualification of services and jobs of the companies. Since 2008, questions of hygiene and security are part of the reference frame of CEETTAR for the certification of agricultural contractors' services.
4. In order to promote health and security at work, the social partners commit themselves to set up actions in the scope of their European social dialogue.

Take action regarding health and security at work is essential for small companies wanting to improve their performance level. They are the ones who risk losing the most to the risks regarding bad health and safety standards.

Moreover, health and security at work plays a bigger and bigger role in the conquering of new clients who require more and more guarantees from the companies with which they work. Likewise, health and security at work performance standards are very often part of the conditions to receive calls for tenders on the public and private markets.

Making it happen



Initiatives

Even though it's essential to keep aiming at the best, contractors of these green sectors are totally aware of what's at stake regarding health and security. At European level, they invest yearly 5 billion euros in material, important factor for improving the working conditions of their workers. National and regional representative organisations fully commit themselves to implementing the legal provisions. Moreover, they are highly active for high-quality and qualifying jobs. On a regular basis we find training programmes aiming on the one hand at qualifying the workers but on the other hand also on guaranteeing them being able to exercise a profession with the necessary knowledge regarding health and safety. Some examples illustrate this commitment:

- In France, FNEDT set up together with the training structures a qualification as on-site manager in agricultural contractors' companies. The organisation also created 'Qualiterritoires' which hands out specific qualification credentials relating to agricultural, rural and forestry contractors' activities, in which the challenges for health and safety at work are integrated.
- In Germany, BLU created Fachkraft Agrarservice, a specific course to qualify the personnel and managers of the agricultural contractor companies.
- In the Netherlands, CUMELA has set up www.groengrondinfra.nl, a web portal allowing information exchange between employers, students and trainers.
- In the United Kingdom, the code of behaviour and the service quality guarantee programmes of the NAAC have an obligatory chapter on health and security...