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Quick support after a traumatic event

The mission of social accident insurance is to help insured individuals by restoring them to good health after occupational accidents. This also includes psychological disturbances after a traumatic event. Ten years ago, the *Psychotherapeutenverfahren* (Psychotherapist Procedure) was introduced to ensure that individuals that have suffered an occupational accident are able to access high-quality support quickly. This procedure set a new standard for the German healthcare sector.

An occupational accident or commuting accident, such as a machine accident with severe physical injuries or a serious traffic accident, can also be traumatic for employees and can trigger psychological issues. However, psychological problems can be caused even when no physical harm occurs. For example, when employees witness an accident, provide first aid or are subject to violence and aggression at the workplace. If this trauma triggers psychological disturbances, then quick support is essential. This prevents the psychological problems from becoming chronic and enables the affected individuals to continue participating in professional and social life.

Therapy appointment within one week

The Psychotherapist Procedure of the German social accident insurance regulates the provision of psychotherapy and aims to ensure a uniform and transparent process and good cooperation between all parties involved. As part of this procedure, the German social accident insurance institutions



have access to a network of around 800 psychotherapists with specialist knowledge of techniques to overcome trauma.

“The Psychotherapist Procedure is firmly established in the outpatient care system and in our rehabilitation management and has been a consistent success story”, states Dr Edlyn Höller, Deputy Director General of the German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV). “It allows us to provide insured individuals with fast and unbureaucratic support within just one week. This early and intensive treatment pays dividends. “Most therapies achieve positive results quickly”, explains Höller. For example, around 45 percent of all those affected only require five so-called probationary sessions, while around 30 percent require fewer than 10 further hours of treatment. Of the remaining 25 percent, only around 11 percent are long-term cases with more than 30 treatment units. In 2019, more than 10,000 insured individuals successfully completed a course of treatment, and in the following year of the pandemic, this figure stood at around 8,800.

High amount of unreported cases suspected

In practice, events are not always reported. This can be the case when the occupational accident does not result in incapacity to work and when no physical harm is visible.

This means that an occupational accident can also be traumatic for witnesses or for first-aiders. Verbal abuse at the workplace in the form of threats or insults is also frequently minimised. “We assume that there is a high number of unreported cases and hope that information campaigns and public discussion about mental stress and its consequences result in increased awareness of this issue”, explains Höller.

By offering its insured individuals the ability to start a course of psychotherapy at short notice, the German social accident insurance has established a unique position in the German healthcare sector. Despite the general increase in the number of people requiring therapy, this is a feature that the organisation would like to maintain by strengthening and expanding its network. Instruments tested during the pandemic, such as video therapy, should be firmly established and help to ensure that the necessary level care is available even in rural areas. The last ten years have shown that investing in early, intensive therapy is a crucial factor in allowing people affected by occupational accidents to quickly return to fully participating in professional and social life.



An interview with Michael Kirsch, Deputy Director General of the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Building Trade (BG BAU)

“Vision Zero needs the support of everyone in the company”

Dear readers,

At the beginning of the year, Germany took over the G7 presidency. The war in Ukraine shows us that strong partnerships built upon common values are more important than ever. The role of G7 as a bridge builder and mediator for peace and security will therefore be the focus of the summit in June.

However, topics relating to statutory accident insurance will also have their place on the G7 agenda: Safety and health protection at the workplace, safeguarding employability and creating international labour and social standards have been defined as areas of focus. The foundation for this was laid in 2015 during the last German G7 presidency. The German social accident insurance was able to play an important role in embedding Vision Zero – a world without serious occupational accidents and occupational diseases – within the objectives of G7, and launching the Vision Zero Fund, which was designed as a prevention instrument. It has also been successful in keeping Vision Zero on the agenda until today. However, it is an idea that we must work on every day. The interview presented here shows this clearly.

The challenges in occupational safety and health are also changing. This includes issues such as climate change and new risks, such as strong UV radiation, extreme heat or heavy rain. The use of new technologies in another important new challenge. These will be increasingly important topics for statutory accident insurance and for G7. That is why we provide our expertise for projects and initiatives and support research projects. We do this because we believe that work must be a healthy and safe pursuit – today and in the future.

Best regards
Dr Stefan Hussy
Director General of the German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV)

The aim of vision zero is a world without serious and fatal occupational accidents and occupational diseases. This is a particularly big challenge for the construction industry. This is why it will be an area of focus at the 31st symposium of the International Social Security Association (ISSA). The conference, which is set to take place in June, is co-organised by the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Building Trade (BG BAU). BG BAU is responsible for occupational safety and health and accident insurance for more than three million insured individuals and around 567,000 companies in the construction industry and construction-related services. DGUV Kompakt spoke with Michael Kirsch, Deputy Director General of BG BAU, about the key factors for successful implementation of Vision Zero.

Mr Kirsch, what does Vision Zero mean for the building sector?

Occupational accidents and occupational diseases are not a matter of destiny – they are always caused by something. By adopting an effective culture of prevention, we can eliminate these causes and prevent a lot of suffering. The Vision Zero strategy of ISSA is an approach that enables companies to practically apply safety and health at the workplace. The key factors for success are that company management must take responsibility, the principles of occupational safety and health must be implemented systematically, and employees must be made aware of the strategy and must get involved. This is also true for the construction sector, which is characterised by constantly changing working conditions, depending on the progress of the construction work, and frequently involves different companies working together. For this reason, a comprehensive overview of the topic of prevention is necessary.

How high are the figures for occupational accidents and occupational diseases in the building sector in Germany and worldwide?

In 2020, the number of occupational accidents subject to mandatory reporting per 1,000 full-time equivalent workers in the German building sector was slightly below 50 for the first time. This represents a success for us, yet it is still twice as many accidents as the average figure across all German businesses. Although the global statistical evaluations are not always comparable, figures from other countries display a certain level of agreement in terms of occupational accidents. The figures for occupational diseases in the German building sector have increased in recent years. This increase is largely due to skin cancer as a result of exposure to natural sources of UV radiation. A global comparison is difficult in this case, as the statistics around the world are very different.



To improve safety and health in the company, you do not necessarily have to increase expenditure.

What are the biggest risks in the building sector?

The biggest risks in the construction industry are fall accidents. Falling, whether from roofs, ceilings or ladders, is generally associated with serious health consequences and personal suffering for those affected. Accidents caused by falling or tipping parts and machine-related accidents are also areas of focus. The most frequent occupational diseases are noise-induced hearing impairment, skin cancer due to UV exposure and lung cancer caused by asbestos.

What is BG BAU doing to reduce the number of serious accidents or occupational diseases?

To promote awareness of safety-conscious behaviour, we created the “BUILD ON SAFETY.”



Photo: © Smileus/stock.adobe.com

Working conditions at construction sites change constantly. Prevention must be holistic and comprehensive.

BUILD ON YOURSELF” programme. The aim of this program is to encourage everyone to work safely together. Important elements of the programme include the “Vitaly important rules” for various trades as well as various media and campaigns aimed at increasing the level of awareness of special risks, such as the risk of falling, amongst insured individuals. Furthermore, companies that invest in occupational safety and health can also receive funding from BG BAU. We also support companies with the implementation of an occupational safety and health management system. All of these measures contribute towards the ultimate goal of Vision Zero.

In terms of prevention, the construction industry is organised very differently throughout the world. In your opinion, what are the crucial factors for the success of Vision Zero?

To improve safety and health in the company, you do not necessarily have to increase expenditure. It is much more important that management approaches the issue of occupational safety and health sensitively, takes a consistent management approach and promotes a climate of trust and open communication at all levels. In order to introduce the Vision Zero prevention strategy, the active support and participation of all stakeholders within the company is needed. One thing is clear, successful implementation of the strategy ultimately depends on engaged and motivated employers and managers and attentive employees.

Which objectives is BG BAU involved in as part of the International Section of the ISSA on Prevention in the Construction Industry?

BG BAU takes part in the section in order to advance a reduction in the number of serious accidents and occupational diseases at construction sites around the world and to promote uniform occupational safety and

31st symposium of the International Social Security Association (ISSA)

**Berlin
8-10 June
2022**

“How do we achieve Vision Zero in the construction sector?”

→ ww1.issa.int/de > Events > Events on Prevention

health standards and fair economic competition. The section collects best-practice examples for exemplary occupational safety and health from all over the world. In this way, it offers companies and organisations practicable solutions to improve safety and health protection at construction sites. In addition to the “classic” topics such as prevention of fall accidents or handling of hazardous substances, these examples also include topics such as digitalisation in the context of occupational safety and health, e.g. in relation to the use of robots or drones. This year, we are also actively supporting the work of the ISSA Construction section by taking a leading role in the organisation of the symposium in Berlin. This international exchange can help to improve our own work practices and allows us to present new approaches. After all, Vision Zero is our common goal.



Michael Kirsch,
Deputy Director General of the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Building Trade (BG BAU)

Increased protection against asbestos

Since 2005, a Europe-wide ban on the manufacture and use of asbestos and materials containing asbestos has been in place. Nevertheless, such materials can still be found in buildings that were constructed before the ban. The EU Commission is aiming to reduce exposure to carcinogenic substances at the workplace. A legislative proposal with a new exposure limit value is expected in the third quarter of 2022.

Due to its durability and robustness, asbestos was a preferred material, especially in the construction sector. Even today, employees can be exposed to asbestos fibres during demolition work, renovation work and maintenance work. There is an average latency period of around 38 years between exposure to asbestos and onset of the disease. This means that we are still seeing the effects today: In 2020, 1,542 of the 2,380 cases of death associated with a recognised occupational disease were linked to asbestos. Therefore, the fact that the EU Commission intends to lower the exposure limit value to protect workers is a welcome development.

However, it remains to be seen how high the occupational exposure limit value will be. The same is also true with regard to the question of whether an instantaneous value that must always be maintained will be defined. In its Resolution, the EU Parliament requires a very low workplace limit value of 1,000 fibres per m³ that must be maintained at all times. Instantaneous values have previously only been defined for substances that are either acutely toxic or corrosive. Asbestos is neither. Furthermore, the limit value is currently not measurable and reliable compliance with the value would only be possible in a few work processes. Therefore, the DGUV does not view the suggested limit value as useful. In addition, the DGUV points out that the approach of graduated protective measures for different risk areas pursued in German OSH is not compatible with the proposal. Instead, it suggests a gradual lowering of the EU workplace limit value in a first step to 10,000 fibres/m³ and deadlines to verify compliance. If the limit value cannot be achieved through the work process alone, protecting workers should be ensured through a protective measures concept graded to the actual risk.

→ www.dsv-europa.de > Statements > Labour and Social Affairs

Preventive healthcare beyond working life

Workers that have been exposed to hazardous dusts such as asbestos during their work can continue to rely on the support of the German social accident insurance after their working life has come to an end. This is because they are still at a high risk of developing lung diseases or cancer. For 50 years, the GVS preventive healthcare service has ensured that these diseases are

identified at an early stage. As a result, in 2020, 253,866 people registered with GVS for follow-up preventive healthcare as a result of contact with hazardous dust. 95.26 percent of these cases were due to contact with dust containing asbestos.

→ gvs.bgetem.de/gvs-in-zahlen (German only)

In 50 years,
around **2.6**
million insured individuals have received the preventive healthcare service.

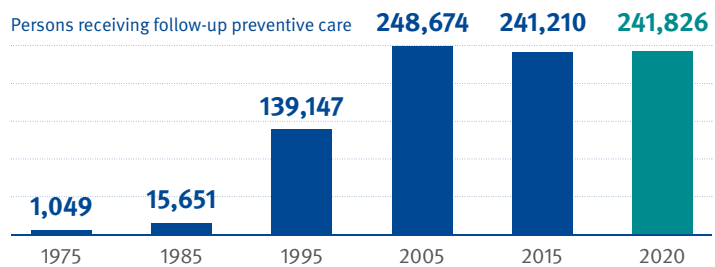
Around **95%** of the individuals had contact with dust containing asbestos.



The average latency period of occupational diseases caused by asbestos is **38.5** years.

Source: GVS

50 years of follow-up preventive care



Workers can be registered for the free preventive care service via the DGUV Vorsorge (DGUV preventive healthcare) registration portal

→ www.dguv-vorsorge.de > Meldeportal (German only)

Media award for disability sports

After a hiatus last year due to the pandemic, the German Paralympic Media Award will be handed out once again in July of this year. With the biggest media award in the area of disability sports, the DGUV recognises journalistic content covering topics such as rehabilitation sports and sports for people with disabilities. For each of the five categories (Articles, Photos, TV/Film, Audio and Online/Social Media), all journalistic content published between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021 can be submitted. Despite lots of cancelled sporting events during the

GERMAN PARALYMPIC MEDIA AWARD



pandemic, there were 133 noteworthy submissions. The best features, background reports, interviews and other forms of reporting covering sports for persons with disabilities will be honoured on 6 July from 11 am as part of an attended in-person event

in Berlin. The award winners will be selected by an independent jury. A special award will also be handed out again.

→ www.dguv.de/gpma (German only)

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