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2020 results: workplace accidents at all-time low

Changes to working conditions during the coronavirus pandemic have reduced workplace accidents to an all-time low. However, the number of reported occupational illnesses has risen sharply. This outcome was revealed by the key figures from the German social accident insurance institutions for 2020, which the German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV) recently published.

According to DGUV statistics, the number of reportable workplace accidents fell from 871,547 in 2019 to 760,492 in 2020, a drop of almost 13%. The number of reportable commuting accidents fell by around 18% to 152,823. The numbers are similar for fatal workplace and commuting accidents; in 2020, 399 workers died as a result of a workplace accident, 98 fewer than the previous year. The number of workers who had a fatal accident on their way to or from work fell by almost 23% to 238. However, the particularly large decrease in fatal accidents at work is not only due to the pandemic, but also to late submissions from the 2019 statistics.

Increase in occupational diseases

The German social accident insurance institutions received a total of 106,491 reported cases of a suspected occupational disease, almost 33% more than in the previous year. 30,329 of these reports were related to an illness associated with COVID-



One effect of the pandemic: working from home has led to significantly less workplace and commuting accidents.

ID-19. Insured persons who work in inpatient or outpatient medical facilities and in laboratories can have an illness from COVID-19 recognised as an occupational disease under certain conditions. Excluding coronavirus-related illnesses, the number of suspected cases of other occupational diseases decreased slightly. 'We have a responsibility to the people who have suffered an occupational disease or workplace accident involving COVID-19. They should receive the best possible care. The social accident insurance institutions already offer those affected an interdisciplinary post-covid check', said Dr Stefan Hussy, Director General of the DGUV.

101,206 suspected cases were adjudicated in 2020 (up 29%). Evidence of an occupational disease was confirmed in 52,956 cases (up 50%). Of these, an occupational disease was officially recognised in 37,181 cases, an increase of more than 100% com-

pared to 2019. In terms of suspected covid-related cases, 18,065 were officially recognised by the end of the year, and some of these reported cases will continue to be processed in 2021. In 2020, a total of 2,380 people died as a result of an occupational disease, which is 175 fewer than in 2019.

Contributions remain stable

The key figures also show trends in the contributions paid by companies to the social accident insurance system. 'Due to the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic, earnings subject to contributions fell by two percent. Despite this, the average contribution for companies could be kept stable. It remains at 1.14% of earnings subject to contributions', explained Dr Hussy.

➔ www.dguv.de > Webcode: dp1318633 (German only)

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Talking with Karl-Sebastian Schulte,
Managing Director of the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts

‘Optimism in the skilled crafts and trades sector is on the rise again’

Dear Reader,

The 3rd period of the Joint German Occupational Safety and Health Strategy (GDA) kicked off on 27 May. As part of the preparations, we carried out a series of in-depth discussions on occupational safety and health in Germany. Which of the outcomes from these discussions will accompany us over the next five years?

We believe risk assessments are a core instrument of occupational safety and health. However, only 52% of all companies use a risk assessment. In order to increase this percentage, the GDA is focusing on coordinated company inspections. 200,000 inspections with system assessments by the federal states and the social accident insurance institutions are planned. This will allow us to produce a comprehensive overview of the current state of occupational safety and health. It also means that we can show that everyone involved speaks with one voice. This creates trust and increases the visibility of our presence. We want to make the most of the increased importance of safe and healthy work in the pandemic and ensure its importance is maintained. Effective occupational safety and health must become the new normal.

Close cooperation between the Federal Government, the federal states and the social accident insurance institutions during the pandemic has shown that we can work together to strengthen awareness of occupational safety and health. Together we can strengthen the public's perception of occupational safety and health. This is also being helped by a change in values that is emerging in our society. The well-being of people is gaining prominence, with profit remaining important, but not at any price.

Let's seize this momentum, because every accident prevented is a win – for companies and for us.

Dr Stefan Hussy
Director General of the DGUV

The effects of the pandemic on crafts and trades are as varied as the trades themselves – some have a steady supply of orders, others fear they will lose their livelihood. However, all of them have had to deal with amended OSH regulations, hygiene concepts and the obligation to offer tests. What helped companies to implement all these regulations? Where were there issues? DGUV Kompakt spoke about this with Karl-Sebastian Schulte, Managing Director of the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH).

Mr Schulte, the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts represents around one million skilled crafts and trades businesses. What shape is the skilled crafts sector in after more than a year of the pandemic?

The economic situation in the skilled crafts and trades sector as a whole is largely stable despite the ongoing pandemic. However, there are very clear differences between the various sectors. Business continues to be good in the building and renovation trades. These businesses have so far coped best with the coronavirus pandemic, although shortages in raw materials and an explosion in material prices are currently marring the situation. The industry-related trades, as suppliers, are gradually benefiting from the recovery of production and export figures. The automotive trades are suffering from the closure of salesrooms. As a result of contact restrictions and partial closures, the services sector and food sector in particular have been working under considerably more difficult conditions for months. In some trades, such as trade fair construction or textile cleaning, a number of businesses are fighting for their survival. Many business owners have even drawn on their own personal savings to get their businesses through these difficult times. For some people, their last reserves will soon be exhausted – and I am talking specifically about personal funds, which are often used to keep the business going somehow.

An OSH standard was adopted in April 2020 to protect employees in the workplace. The social accident insurance institutions have refined this standard with sector-specific and target group-specific guidance. Were your member companies able to use this and was it helpful?

Yes, the sector-specific and target group-specific guidance and tools are usually very helpful for our member companies. This is certainly also due to the fact that the relevant social accident insurance institutions have closely coordinated with our professional associations and thus specific practical requirements could be taken into account. Pandemic-related occupational safety and health in companies has meanwhile become firmly established.



Strong, practice-oriented cooperation with the social accident insurance institutions has made it easier to implement OSH requirements.

What was difficult?

The differing requirements set out in the COVID-19 regulations of the various federal states and the Federal Government have caused legal uncertainty for companies. In addition, the new SARS-CoV-2 Occupational Safety and Health Act came into force at the end of January 2021. This contains additional occupational safety and health measures that are stricter and legally binding. Although these are in principle perfectly valid, we nevertheless consider them superfluous, because the SARS-CoV-2 OSH regulations of August 2020, in conjunction with the guidance provided by the social accident insurance institutions, already guarantee an effectively high level of protection for workers.



Photo: © ZDH

Interview with Karl-Sebastian Schulte, Managing Director of the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts: 'Businesses in the skilled crafts and trades sector have shown a great deal of commitment and dedication. It is now the duty of politicians to follow suit with a comprehensive vaccination programme'.

What is your overall assessment of the role of the social accident insurance system during the pandemic?

Cooperation between the social accident insurance institutions and our professional associations, which is generally strong and practice-oriented – especially at the beginning of the pandemic – has made it easier for many businesses to implement the occupational safety and health requirements. In addition, it has been a real relief for many businesses that most social accident insurance institutions have made it possible for businesses facing financial hardship to defer payment of contributions or pay them in instalments.

What issues do you see are relevant for the social accident insurance system in the long term with regard to the skilled crafts and trades sector?

OSH requirements and the level of detail of the regulations have been increasing for many years. We must reverse this trend in order to help improve acceptance of occupational safety and health and thus of the social accident insurance system among the skilled crafts and trades. The way social accident insurance contributions are trending is another important topic. Given that the number of workplace accidents has been falling for a long time, our businesses not only expect that contributions remain stable, but are also reduced. In terms of legislation related to benefits, we should therefore concentrate more on its original purpose, namely, to discharge employers from liability towards their employees. In occupational disease law, we need evidence and sound judgement instead of



Given the drop in workplace accidents over time, our businesses expect contributions remain not only stable, but are also reduced.

policy shifts in favour of health insurance. I see further issues related to solo self-employment and new forms of employment as well as support for moving towards a climate-neutral circular economy.

What do you expect in the coming months?

Optimism in the skilled crafts and trades sector in terms of further economic development has recently increased again. Most businesses expect their own financial situation to improve starting in the summer months or earlier. We currently assume that the domestic economy in particular will receive a strong boost in the second half of 2021 when private consumption picks up again when businesses reopen. However, it is also clear that the skilled crafts and trades that have been hit particularly hard will probably not be able to make up for their losses from the current year. Many individual service providers in the trades, such as hairdressers, beauticians, photographers, tailors and goldsmiths, are struggling to survive. For skilled crafts and trades as a whole, we expect a slight increase in turnover of about one percent in 2021. However, this assumes that the prospect of businesses reopening remains and is guaranteed by vaccinations.

Working together to make work safe

The Federal Government, the federal states and the social accident insurance institutions have once again agreed on common OSH goals. This marks the start of the third period of the Joint German OSH Strategy (GDA). For the next five years, the GDA will focus on risk assessment as the core instrument of occupational safety and health.

Under the motto 'Making work safe and healthy – prevention with the help of risk assessments' the GDA will be especially targeting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the coming years. SMEs will be encouraged to systematically carry out risk assessment and to organise occupational safety and health better. As part of company visits from July onwards, the inspection services will advise and monitor companies with system assessments. They will apply the GDA guidelines and coordinated basic and technical data sheets.

The GDA will also be focusing more on three other issues. The programmes of the second period for preventing musculoskeletal strain and mental stress are being further developed. There is also a new focus on the safe handling of carcinogenic hazardous substances in the workplace.

Over the next five years, inspectors and managers will be trained with these three aspects in mind. They will be provided with information and guidance as well as tips and examples of good practice that will help them to recognise and reduce stress. The exchange of experiences is also to be further encouraged. The GDA is thus also coordinating the joint approach of the inspection services of the Federal Government, the federal states and the social accident insurance institutions for the next five years. This improves their cooperation when advising companies and monitoring compliance with OSH regulations. Each period is evaluated and the results of this evaluation are incorporated into the next period. This means that OSH is continuously modernised and the importance of safe and healthy work is further strengthened.

➔ gda-portal.de › About the GDA › Occupational safety and health objectives

Iga focus: New Work and values

New Work is the current buzzword in research on work. It describes the interrelated changes in the world of work and the way work is changing. The drivers are demographic change, globalisation, the digital transformation and changes in values. In the context of New Work, other values are gaining in importance compared to traditional organisation; for example individualisation, job security, equality, and communication on an equal footing. Rewarding and meaningful work activities are also becoming more important and social aspects are increasingly influencing decisions. What New Work means for

leadership, the organisation of work, health and changes in values in companies is summarised by the Initiative Health and Work (iga) in a special publication on its website. The iga is a collaboration between the Association of Company Health Insurance Funds (BKK Dachverband), the Federal Association of Local Health Insurance Funds (AOK-Bundesverband), the Association of Substitute Health Insurance Funds (vdek) and the German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV). Its aim is to promote a healthy working life.

→ www.iga-info.de › Themen › New Work (German only)



Which values does a company live by? This guide helps to identify them.

Photo: © iga

Number of the Month

3.2 million

reports are written by accident insurance doctors every year following accidents at work. The accident insurance doctors' procedure celebrates its 100th anniversary in June.

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Entries for the kommitmensch Film & Media Festival

The 2nd kommitmensch Film & Media Festival at the A+A Congress is ramping up for 2021. German companies, educational institutions and individuals have until 7 July 2021 to enter films or other media such as podcasts, websites, e-learning courses or posters on occupational safety and health to the competition. All media produced between 1 September 2019 and 7 July 2021 is eligible. The award ceremony will take place virtually on 29 October 2021 as part of the A+A Trade Fair.

As the organiser of the campaign, the DGUV will award a total of six prizes worth a total of 10,000 euros. New for this year is the Special Prize for Crafts, Trades & SMEs worth 1,000 euros, donated by the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts as partner of the festival.

Entry conditions and further information is available at:

→ www.kommitmensch-festival.de (German only)

Newly opened: House of the Future at the ukb

With the motto 'Self-determined living, learning, caring', the Haus der Zukunft am ukb (House of the Future at the ukb) run by the BG Hospital Berlin was opened on 1 June 2021. The house combines the hospital's own emergency training centre, the Smart Living & Health Center and a long-term care unit under the auspices of the state of Berlin and AOK North-East under one roof. The facility brings together innovations in medical training and long-term care. It also shows how people with disabilities can lead a self-determined life in

their own homes. 'The state of Berlin, the municipality of Berlin, the statutory health insurance funds, the social accident insurance, the BG Hospital Group and BG Hospital Berlin have made a powerful statement with the "House of the Future at the ukb" project', stated Professor Axel Ekkernkamp, Medical Director and Managing Director of the BG Hospital Berlin. The DGUV contributed to the financing of the project.

→ www.haus-der-zukunft-am-ukb.de (German only)



Governing Mayor of Berlin Michael Müller and Federal Health Minister Jens Spahn talking with hospital staff on opening day (left to right).

Photo: © BG Hospital Berlin

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