



# Dutch vision and strategy for occupational safety and health

## Introduction

**Having a sound health and safety system creates a healthy and safe working environment, which enables employees to work healthily and productively until retirement. Work should never lead to damaged health, short or long term. Employers, employees and Dutch society have an interest in healthy and safe work environments, and they also contribute to our welfare.**

It is therefore important for the government, in cooperation with social partners, to create strategic and targeted goals to achieve sound working conditions. Attention on health and safety remains vital, not only because of the health risks, costs and economic interests involved, but also because of the latest developments in the area. People work longer now and more and more people no longer have fixed locations and times where and when they work. There are also technological developments, such as robotisation. In part due to these developments, policies should continue to focus on healthy and safe working environments.

Health and safety policies are drawn up from an open mind towards society and in good consultation with the social partners.

## Vision

Employers are responsible for working conditions. In 2012, the State Secretary for Social Affairs and Employment sent a letter to the House containing [the ministry's vision of healthy and safe working conditions](#).

No one should become sick from work, and every employee who dies in a work-related incident is one too many. Having sound working conditions at every workplace in the Netherlands is the ultimate goal. It is important to create a level playing field, both at a national and international level, in order to prevent competitive advantages through bad working conditions.

## Targets

One of the most important pre-conditions for having healthy and safe workplaces is knowledge of health and safety on the shop floor, so that risks can be properly assessed and required measures can be taken. Furthermore, behaviour in the workplace is important.

The most important policy goal is to reinforce knowledge and improve a culture on the workplace to prevent work-related illness.

## System

The Working Conditions Act contains goal oriented regulations, which describe the general rights and duties for employers and employees. The Working Conditions Act has been detailed further in the Working Conditions Decree and the Working Conditions Regulation, which contains practical regulations. Employers and employees on sectoral level are free to detail the regulations further in a sectoral working conditions catalogue (OSH Catalogue). The working conditions catalogue is an instrument used by employers and employees which contains methods and techniques, good examples, standards and practical manuals related to various risks. The labour inspectorate (SZW Inspectorate) assesses the catalogue. Sectors are not obliged to draw up a working conditions catalogue.

The SZW Inspectorate checks whether a company meets the statutory working conditions regulations. The Inspectorate uses the working conditions catalogue and its own sectoral working conditions brochures during the inspection. In case of a violation, the SZW Inspectorate can impose a fine without the intervention of the court. The SZW Inspectorate also has the authority to shut down a workplace in order to prevent a repetition of a violation.

Employers in the Netherlands are obliged to pay the wage of a sick employee for two years after sickness commences. Illness and work-related illness can therefore be costly for employers. This is an extra stimulus for employers to ensure good working conditions in addition to their responsibility under the Working Conditions Act and in the context of good employment practices.

## Strategy

Strategic actions are deployed to achieve the aforementioned vision and goal. The starting point is always responsibility of employers and employees. The actions are focused on setting the agenda and stimulating, supporting, standardising, maintaining and monitoring.

## 1 Setting the agenda and stimulating

The government sets the agenda and stimulates a healthy and safe working environment with the sustainable employability programme, self-regulation programme, commissioning project, a focus on corporate culture and the 'healthy and safe working conditions educational subject in vocational and other education.

### 1a Sustainable employability

The long-term sustainable employability programme focuses on a cultural change in the Netherlands. Changes on the labour market and continuing technological and global developments require flexible employees and companies. It is primarily the task of employers and employees to maintain the employability of the working population. Communication campaigns and sharing scientific knowledge and good practice experiences raise awareness among employers and employees and prompt them to take action.

The sustainable employability programme has two main points: tackling work-related psycho-social risks and raising awareness of sustainable employability, especially in SME.

#### *Psycho-social risks*

Work-related stress is the number one occupational disease. One in seven employees indicates to have burn-out symptoms. Therefore, a four-year campaign on work-related stress was launched in May 2014. In addition, the Week of Work-Related Stress is organised every November. There are also campaigns with a focus on the causes of work-related stress, such as workload, bullying at work, aggression from third parties and unwanted behaviour. The goal of the campaigns is to put the subject on the agenda and make it a topic of discussion, so that employers and employees can take measures in time.

#### *Sustainable employability in SME*

The entrepreneurs organisation MKB Nederland has organised a project, with a subsidy of the ministry, in which consultants to industry, sector and national organisations support at least 500 SME entrepreneurs with improving sustainable employability of their employees. The Week of the Entrepreneur also pays attention to sustainable employability in SME.

#### *Other activities*

- Research has been conducted into the sustainable employability of employees with a low socio-economic status.
- The good practices of the SME project as well as Learning on the Job ('Werkend Leren'), and knowledge of the increasingly rapid developments on the labour market, and the attendant demands placed on low-skilled employees are actively brought to the attention of employers and employees.

- In the Week of the Entrepreneur meetings and Pay it Forward. With partners AWWN, De Baak, SBI Formaat and CAOP, we reach out to HR employees and works council members. In addition, we also use our online channels: news, announcements for meetings, tools, good examples on Facebook, Twitter and website.
- In 2016, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work launched a Europe-wide campaign focusing on sustainable employability. Together with the Netherlands Focal Point, this campaign is given further shape. The European theme is 'Healthy Workplaces for All Ages'.

### 1b Self-regulation

Good working conditions are created in the workplace. Self-activation and personal responsibility of employers and employees are the main focus. The associated activities of this priority ensure that parties do their parts and take concrete measures. The distinguishing feature of this aspect is the cross-sectoral approach; an exchange of knowledge and good examples between sectors ensure there is an effective and inspiring cross-pollination.

The multi-annual Self-Regulation programme focuses on making information available to all industries, and sharing knowledge, experience and tools from previous projects. Areas of attention are:

- The programme targets 10 focus sectors, including hairdressers, transport and construction, and launches 5 projects in which the sectors act as the initiators. Themes are healthy and safe working conditions in the chain, and the impact of the changing labour market on healthy and safe working conditions and sustainable employability.
- The website [www.gezondeneiligewerkt.nl](http://www.gezondeneiligewerkt.nl) continues to be developed into a digital meeting point for parties involved and for rolling out the exchange concept, in which employees and employers take a look behind each other's scenes.

### 1c Responsible commissioning

Healthy and safe working conditions can be ensured better when the entire chain takes responsibility. It all starts with the commissioning party. If at the beginning of a project sufficient attention is paid to health and safety aspects and planning, this will reduce workplace risks. A project has therefore been started that focuses on the responsibility of commissioning parties. The project has the following focal points:

- A further detailing of regulations for employers in the construction sector and in the asbestos removal industry in order to have the adjusted regulations enter into effect.

- A stimulating project for responsible commissioning, which will be aimed at the development of a model for responsible commissioning, inspirational meetings, information campaigns and pilots in sectors, a monitoring study into the influence of commissioning parties on working conditions and the effect of a voluntary approach to employer behaviour.

#### 1d Improvement of corporate culture

Thanks to the use and development of various tools, awareness among employees will be raised and corporate culture will be improved. With the consent of employees, employers are responsible for assessing workplace risks and taking appropriate prevention measures. In order to achieve a truly sustainable participation of people, it is important that knowledge and awareness of workplace risks are actually present at companies' shop floor. Experience has taught us that this is highly dependent on an open and safe corporate culture. Companies that display high levels of employer commitment to the shop floor and vice versa, a great deal of personal responsibility and social support do better in this aspect. In the Sustainable Employability and Self-Regulation programmes, knowledge of a healthy and safe corporate culture is encouraged via, for instance, an exchange of good practices. In the network 'Sustainable Physical Work', companies exchange their approaches according to the Pay it Forward principle, whereby organisations at no charge divulge their knowledge and experience in the area of sustainable employability in the area of hard physical labour. These programmes also aim at communication about specific risks and themes. One example is the four-year campaign of the Sustainable Employability programme regarding work-related stress which focuses on 'open dialogue in the workplace'.

#### 1e Health and safety educational programme in vocational and other education

Teaching about health and safety at work at an early age creates a solid foundation, reducing the risk of work-related disease later on in life. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment is exploring ways how to promote the incorporation of health and safety at work and awareness of this subject in vocational education and recognised training companies. Specifically, this includes:

- options to support vocational education schools in incorporating health and safety as part of the Healthy School ('Gezonde School') concept;
- the development of a theme certificate 'health and safety at work' as part of the Healthy School vignette, with which the school concerned can demonstrate to meet the criteria set in the area of health and safety at work as part of workmanship;
- options to enrich or deepen regular curricula by developing an optional part on health and safety at work.

## 2 Supporting employers and employees in creating healthy and safe work environments

This support is rendered via the Self-Regulation programme, responsible commissioning project, certification project, Steunpunt RI&E-instrumenten, prevention employee project and the OSH portal.

#### 2a Support centre risk assessment tools (Steunpunt RI&E-instrumenten)

The Support centre risk assessment tools consists of a working group of the Labour Foundation and an executive secretariat, incorporated in TNO. The support centre's core activities are:

- The support centre promotes the development of digital sectoral risk assessment tools by making a tool available to the sectors.
- The support centre acknowledges risk assessment tools and by doing so exempts small businesses from external reviewing and ensures tools stay up-to-date.
- The support centre helps sectors with communicating about risk assessment tools and to implement such tools.
- The support centre promotes the use of risk assessment tools by providing information to companies on their website [www.rie.nl](http://www.rie.nl), via newsletters, publications and events/conferences.
- Companies, sectors and stakeholders can visit [www.rie.nl](http://www.rie.nl) to find answers to their risk assessment-related obligations and drawing up their own risk assessment.

Furthermore, the ministry makes extra means available every year to promote creating and updating risk assessment.

The support centre's working group consists of representatives from employers' and employees' organisations.

#### 2b Prevention employee project

TNO has launched the prevention employee project, with the aim is to reinforce the position of the prevention employee in companies and to improve the quality of the advice of prevention employees. This increases the impact of prevention employees. More and better qualified prevention employees who have clearly defined tasks and time and space will increase the focus on prevention in companies.

*Reinforcing the position of the prevention employee*

- Improving cooperation with the works council. Inform works council members and prevention employees of each other's tasks under the Working Conditions Act.
- An initial exploration of a register for prevention employees.

*Improving the quality of the advice of prevention employees*

- Organising regional meetings
- Reinforcing consultative skills in training programmes. Based on a study, a proposal is drafted to devote more attention to consultative skills in training programmes.
- Improving cooperation with health and safety experts. Drafting a diagram of health and safety experts and a visualisation of the work of several health and safety experts.

### 2c OSH portal

The government manages the website OSH portal (Arboportaal) with current information about various subjects in the area of health and safety at work. The portal has information on working conditions legislation and regulations, useful tools, tips, news and links to relevant sources and current programmes. The aim of the website is to inform employers, employees, prevention employees and health and safety experts and to provide direct links to other relevant sources.

## 3 Establishing frameworks

The principle is to create an equal level of protection for all employees. Legislation, regulations and the working conditions catalogues provide normative preconditions for health and safety at work. The system for work-related care and the certification system will be improved in the coming period. The Netherlands also strives to set more and better limit values for hazardous materials and a level playing field in the EU.

### 3a Improvement of the work-related care system

Several bottlenecks in the current private system of occupational health care have been detected. They relate to, among other things, the independent position of the company doctor, attention for prevention and cooperation with regular curative health care. The government pursues a two-pronged strategy. The first is to review the Working Conditions Act and the second concerns the promotion of cooperation between occupational health care and regular health care, as well as the promotion of regional or sectoral occupational health care, of which self-employed persons can also become members. This programme will run until 2020, after which it will be subject to a final evaluation in which the programme will be compared to the benchmark of 2015.

Stimulating activities will be held over the next few years for the promotion of the implementation of the new act, which will focus on improving the practice of occupational health care. On the one hand, this will run along the line of cooperation between occupational health care and regular curative health care. Thanks to the

development of multi-disciplinary guidelines for health care providers, for instance, medical professional groups will be included in a dialogue on effective diagnosis or treatment of occupational diseases, which will include the labour aspect. On the other hand, sectoral and regional initiatives of employers and employees to meet the new obligations are promoted and supported. This will include, but will not be limited to, the dissemination of good practices of (sectoral) social partners, working methods to improve the procurement of occupational health care, including good practices in sectoral working conditions catalogues which can be used by individual companies, and formulating prevention activities at the sectoral level. In the coming period, the government will implement an active communication programme to bring the new regulations under the attention.

### 3b Certification

Certification and accreditation are tools that reinforce personal responsibility. Certification-related activities focus on making the certification system future-proof and more robust.

The focus will be the enhancement of self-activation in quality assurance with the help of:

- a thorough revision of several existing certification schemes, including one on asbestos;
- the transition from four personal certification schemes to registration systems;
- the transfer of responsibility for scheme management to the scheme managers in the area of product certification and examination;
- support of scheme managers in making choices for accreditation, registration or other forms of quality assurance;
- deepening and detailing future quality assurance systems.

### 3c Working conditions catalogue

In a working conditions catalogue (OSH Catalogue), employers and employees describe at their own initiative how they will meet the goal oriented health and safety regulations of the government. The SZW Inspectorate assesses the catalogue. The government makes the approved working conditions catalogues available on the OSH portal. In the policy rule on working conditions catalogues 2010, it is stated which goal oriented working conditions regulations are met when companies work according to the working conditions catalogue applicable to their industry or sector. The policy rule is updated regularly but does not contain working conditions catalogues of individual companies.

### 3d Hazardous substances

Special attention is devoted by the EU to working with carcinogenic substances. The Netherlands strives to

establish more limit values and a level playing field in the EU in this particular area. The following focal points have received extra attention during the Dutch EU presidency:

- an effort to establish more and, if possible, better limit values for carcinogenic substances at a European level;
- preparation and execution of a three-day European conference (23-25 May 2016) regarding the prevention of risks of exposure to carcinogenics at work;

The Netherlands has also taken the following initiatives: An asbestos-related study will be launched into the functioning of the certification system regulating the healthy and safe listing and removal of asbestos. This study will also examine schemes in neighbouring countries.

An effort has been made to harmonise the REACH Directive and the EU OSH guidelines, and this is starting to bear fruit. There is a close national cooperation between the policy departments Infrastructure and the Environment, Health, Welfare and Sport and Social Affairs and Employment and their regulators in the implementation of the REACH Directive. The RIVM agency on REACH is working towards a national and European support system for the implementation of the REACH Directive, which will result in an active role of the Netherlands in Europe in this area. Finally, the Netherlands is firmly represented in the European scientific institutes that assess substances: SCOEL and RAC/SEAC.

We are also working towards a lowering of Dutch limit values for asbestos to 2,000 fibres/m<sup>3</sup>. This has already been implemented for chrysotile asbestos.

#### 4 Enforcement

The government is responsible for establishing the occupational health and safety system and for the enforcement policy. The SZW Inspectorate monitors compliance with legislation and upholds the law. The ministry's activities are mainly centered on the leaders and middle group of companies. Notorious violators who refuse to comply require a firm enforcement by the Inspectorate.

Equity is the key value: a level playing field, good working conditions and safe workplaces for all. The Inspectorate focused on tackling companies and institutions - and the associated individuals - which structurally violate the rules. But 'new' violators are also tackled if and when they are revealed in the risk analysis. The Inspectorate constantly analyses whether new risks occur that might lead to adjustments to the Inspectorate's efforts.

This analysis is based on all findings, signs, studies, monitoring and results of reactive inspections.

#### 5 Monitoring

There is a system for systemic monitoring of working conditions, which yields plenty of information every year about the state of affairs of and developments in the quality of work, including

- exposure to work-related risks and other quality aspects related to work (working hours, employee participation, etc.)
- the effects on the workforce (accidents, occupational disease, employee satisfaction, etc.)
- the consequences for their employability (absence, productivity, ability to perform)
- policy and measures of companies and compliance with legislation and regulations.

The system covers a periodic implementation by TNO and CBS of large-scale questionnaires among employees (NEA: annual), employers (WEA: bi-annual) and self-employed persons (ZEA: bi- or tri-annual). TNO also conducts panel studies into the sustainable employability of the workforce (STREAM). The SZW Inspectorate monitors compliance with statutory stipulations. Every two years, Arbobalans is published, documenting the main points of the findings from these and other data collections.

The Dutch Centre for Occupational Disease (NCvB) registers and analyses occupational diseases in the national reporting and registration system.

A feasibility study is conducted into the options to map the underlying causes of occupational diseases, similar to the database with work-related accidents. In conjunction with the known underlying causes of work-related accidents, such a database offers the potential possibility to pursue a more efficient prevention policy. The information gathered through monitoring enables us

- to keep an overview of the situation,
- identify risk groups,
- establish compliance levels,
- provide periodic accountability information,
- answer evaluation questions,
- contribute to information, detection and facilitation of the field.

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