

**Fighting a leading killer: how the German TÜV promotes health at the workplace and beyond**

**It is estimated that one million people worldwide develop colorectal cancer every year. In 2008, the German TÜV, a private-sector regulatory and safety inspection body, launched a colorectal cancer screening campaign reaching tens of thousands of employees. This week, the initiative was presented at an international ILO occupational safety and health conference in Düsseldorf<sup>\*/</sup>.**

DÜSSELDORF (ILO Online) – In industrialized countries, 30 to 35 people out of 100,000 are diagnosed with colorectal cancer every year, which makes this cancer one of the most frequent malignancies accounting for around 15 per cent of all cancer-related deaths.

In Germany, it is the second most frequent type of cancer. Every year, over 70,000 people in Germany develop bowel cancer and the disease accounts for around 27,000 deaths per year. The earlier the disease is detected, however, the better the chances of a cure.

Last year, TÜV SÜD Life Service GmbH, a subsidiary of the Munich-based TÜV SÜD AG, launched a bowel cancer screening campaign covering small- and medium-sized enterprises with 50 to 700 employees. Experience shows that these companies have only limited human resources and budget allocations for corporate health measures.

TÜV SÜD developed an easy-to-implement campaign package which was distributed to over 4,000 companies reaching tens of thousands of employees. The package included covering letters, flyers, posters, forms and information on procedures to implement the campaign.

In addition, TÜV SÜD established the “Bowel Health Information Centre” as a first contact point for interested companies providing tips and materials for corporate health screening. These measures made it possible for companies to provide an effective health promotion campaign for their staff at little effort and low cost. By choosing this approach, the campaign particularly reached individuals who shied away from regular health screening.

A total of several hundred companies contacted the information centre, which answered numerous questions about the procedure and sent out thousands of campaign packages. 2,327 employees performed the bowel cancer screening test and sent the test to the laboratory. While 95.6 per cent of these tests were negative, 4.4 per cent unfortunately proved positive. Individuals whose tests were positive could, at their own discretion, discuss the result and further options with the company doctor.

“An evaluation of the campaign shows the significance of bowel cancer screening. The issue is now increasingly moving into the focus of companies, which are starting to recognize that healthy staff are their most important capital in these economically difficult times,” says Dr. Axel Stepken, CEO of TÜV SÜD AG.

TÜV SÜD AG advises almost 10,000 companies on occupational health and safety matters to protect the safety and health of people at work, and to reduce the cost of occupational accidents and diseases. The German regulatory and inspection body looks back at a long corporate history beginning in January 1866, when it was founded with the objective of minimizing the risks of technology.

At that time, numerous serious steam boiler explosions had caused many fatalities and high damage to buildings leading to the establishment of an association which focused on steam-boiler inspection and monitoring. The predecessor of today's TÜV SÜD Group set itself the task of

“protecting people, the environment and property against the adverse effects of technology” – a principle still anchored in the statutes of TÜV SÜD AG today.

In line with technological progress, the company gradually expanded its activities to include electricity, motor vehicles, fire safety and a host of other potential risks. Today, TÜV SÜD and its roughly 14,000 staff operate at a global level to promote health and safety at work.

The activities of TÜV SÜD were presented by its CEO at the ILO Conference “Implementing Occupational Health and Safety Standards Globally”, which was held in Düsseldorf from 3-6 November 2009. This year, the annual event which draws some 300 participants from 60 countries worldwide examined the impact of the global economic crisis on safety and health at work.

It is expected that the number of workplace accidents and diseases and ill health due to unemployment will rise in light of the present economic crisis”, says Dr. Sameera Al-Tuwaijri, Director of the SafeWork Programme. “The decrease in public spending will also compromise the capacities of labour inspectorates and other occupational safety and health services. Precarious working conditions will increase, adding to the risk of accidents and ill-health.”

Addressing the conference, Dr Axel Stepken, CEO of TÜV SÜD AG, and Gabriele Sommer, CEO of TÜV SÜD Life Service GmbH, appealed to companies not to cut investments in the physical and mental health of their workforce and in safe workplaces in times of economic crisis.

“It is now more important than ever to strengthen health and safety at work and ensure comprehensive implementation of occupational health and safety standards globally, to ensure sustainable corporate performance and competitiveness”. Dr. Stepken also signed the Seoul Declaration on Safety and Health at Work adopted last year by some 50 high-level decision makers from around the world as a major new blueprint for constructing a global culture of safety and health at work.

The Declaration encourages Governments to consider the ratification of the ILO Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) as a priority, as well as other relevant ILO Conventions on safety and health at work and ensure the implementation of their provisions – including by a strong and effective labour inspection system – as a means of improving national performance on safety and health at work in a systematic way.

Noting that high safety and health standards at work go hand in hand with good business performance, the Declaration calls on employers to ensure that prevention is an integral part of their activities, to establish effective occupational safety and health management systems to improve workplace safety and health, and to guarantee that workers are consulted, trained, informed and involved in this process.

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<sup>\*/</sup> “Implementing Occupational Safety and Health Standards Globally”, Düsseldorf, 3-6 November 2009. For further information, please visit the conference website on <http://www.ilosafetyconference2009.org/index.html> which includes the programme and other background documentation prepared for the event.