The health and safety of transport workers in the European Union: findings of the EU-OSHA

Introduction
The European Community Strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work (1) notes that the transport sector, along with construction, agriculture, fishing and health and social services, continues to be a sector which is particularly dangerous. For this reason the Governing Board of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) gave the Agency the tasks of providing an overview of the OSH situation in the transport sector in the EU Member States and collecting good practice information on occupational risk prevention in road transport. This work is still in progress although some preliminary results of these tasks are now available (2, 3, 4).

Employment
Employment - 2006, EU-25: about 6 million workers
• Share within the whole economy: about 3%
• Variations between the MS: about 1.9% in Germany - about 6% in Estonia and Latvia.
• The land transport is by far the largest sub sector (88% of the workers).
• Focus in research on health and safety aspect.
• Transport sector is a small company sector (<50 employees).

Work Accidents in the road transport sector
Although rates have been decreasing, workers in land transport in the EU-15 have a much higher accident rate than an average (almost 5-fold for fatal accidents, 1.7 times higher for serious accidents).

Data from EU Member States
Germany: Consistently higher absenteeism rates were observed in the transport sector.
Development of sickness absence 1993-2005 (in %) in the branch Traffic/Transport, Germany

Spain: Most common type of accident due to physical stress on the muscular system.

Conclusions
• Transport workers are highly exposed to a number of physical and organisational risks, including emerging risks such as increasing violence to drivers.
• Conditions of work must be improved for a more diverse working population, with an increasing proportion of women.
• Transport workers require high levels of professional skills and competence. They have a major responsibility on the road.
• If society wants motivated and skilled transport workers, more attention must be paid to the working conditions in this sector.
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Good practice to prevent risks to road transport drivers

EU-OSHA work programme 2008-10 (publication of results 2010)

Objectives:
To support the exchange of good practice information in the sector and the sharing of experience by providing examples of:
- Preventing occupational risks in road transport
- How to promote OSH good practice and raise awareness of OSH issues within the sector

Activities:
- Web feature and database of links to good practice
- Case study reports on preventing occupational risks in road haulage
- Preventing occupational risks to bus drivers
- General information on good practice
- Fast drivers
- Motorcycle and bicycle couriers

Case 2: Development of knowledge sharing

Some initial conclusions from the good practice case reports

Case 2: Development of knowledge sharing among drivers to prevent non-traffic related work accidents – Denmark

Background
The vast majority of work accidents which goods transport drivers experience are related to loading and unloading e.g. non-traffic related.

Aim
To use workers' experiences in the prevention of loading and unloading accidents.

What was done

Working conditions in loading areas are frequently poor and responsibility for the safety of drivers in these situations is uncertain. Experienced drivers are familiar with the problems that exist but their knowledge has been previously unrecognised. In this example, the company has, therefore, sought to increase organisational learning in relation to hazards connected to loading areas. Managers (and collaborating with drivers) have developed a scheme (participatory design) that was subsequently used to gather information about working conditions in over 500 different loading areas. This information has been integrated into the IT system within the company so that the information is available to drivers when they print out their daily route.

Results

The use of participatory methods both enabled the use of the drivers' wealth of experience and meant that they also gained a sense of ownership of the project.

Case 3: DocStop, Germany.

Background
The medical support for drivers of heavy goods is a problem. Heavy goods vehicle drivers are often for a long time on the road and have limited possibilities to consult a doctor, which can lead to the driver driving with health impairments or taking medicines which is not strictly prescribed.

Objectives

The aim of Doc Stop is to improve medical care of haulage drivers in transit on European transportation routes by building up a medical Information and supply network for drivers. Drivers who need medical attendance should have the possibility to consult a doctor while being on the road.

Case 3: DocStop, Germany.

What was done

DocStop was established as a pilot project in 2007, based on a survey carried out in Germany, in which suggestions to improve the situation were made. A network of contact points at truck stops has been established. These are located within 4 kilometres of medical facilities. Good support for the project has enabled the provision of a medical care system for haulage drivers throughout Germany. Information and communication methods to promote the project such as TV, radio and print media, as well as personal dialogue with drivers are used. The project was initially run in Germany and is now being implemented at the European level. Dr. Dieter-L. Koch, Member of the European Parliament, is chair of the organisation. DocStop is supported by many organisations and statutory accident insurance companies as well as other parties, such as Statutory Accident Insurance for the vehicle operating trade, BGF, BGL, ADAC, MAN, Mercedes Benz, swissdrivers etc.

Results

At the time of publication, about 200 contact points had been created, situated at rest areas along the highways. Docstop appears to be well accepted by drivers and has support from the sector.

References

- (2) Thematic report – transport, unpublished draft results, EU-OSHA Topic Centre Work Environment
- (3) Preventing risks to drivers in road haulage, unpublished draft results, EU-OSHA Topic Centre Work Environment
- (4) Good practice to reach and influence drivers: OSH programmes and campaigns in the road transport sector, unpublished draft results, EU-OSHA Topic Centre Work Environment

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Resources that EU-OSHA had developed on road transport prior to starting these activities include:
- EU-OSHA factbooks are freely downloadable from EU-OSHA website in various European languages. FACTS18 was produced jointly by EU-OSHA and European Commission Directorate General for Energy and Transport. It provides simple guidance aimed at employers and drivers.

Further information: