

Actors in the field of health and safety at work

Background

Denmark has a long tradition for co-operation between public authorities and the social partners on solving working environment problems. This applies when the working environment rules are drawn up and is also reflected in the way in which working environment measures are organised in Denmark. The Working Environment Act lays down provisions concerning the organisation of these measures and the role of the various actors.

The Minister for Employment

The Minister for Employment has the supreme authority in working environment matters and has the authority to lay down more detailed rules on safety and health at work.

The Danish Working Environment Authority (WEA)

The WEA is an agency under the auspices of the Ministry of Employment. The WEA is the authority which contributes to the creation of safe and sound working conditions at Danish workplaces. The WEA supervises the enterprises by drawing up rules and providing information on the working environment. The WEA has authority to penalise enterprises, which do not comply with the working environment rules.

The appeal system

Complaints against decisions made in compliance with the working environment Act by the WEA may be brought before a working environment appeal board. These boards include representatives of the social partners.

The social partners

The social partners have significant influence on research and information work, drawing up of rules, development of the working environment in the various sectors and on safety work in the enterprises.

The enterprises

A vital element in the working environment legislation is the enterprises' own efforts to improve safety and health conditions. It is a statutory requirement that all enterprises with 10 or more employees shall be organised in a special safety organisation. The safety organisation includes representatives of the employees and management, and carries out daily working environment tasks in the enterprise. It is also a requirement that all enterprises shall work out a written workplace assessment, which include both the physical and psychosocial working environment.

The Working Environment Council

In the Working Environment Council, the social partners influence the making of new rules and plans for the working environment through their central organisations. The Council draws up rules and informs the Minister for Employment on developments in the field of safety and



health at work and works out proposals for improvements. The Working Environment Council also plays a central role in drawing up of initiatives to be dealt with by the Danish Parliament (the Folketing).

The trade safety committees

The purpose of the trade safety committees is to strengthen the sector and enterprise oriented activities of the social partners. The task of the trade safety committees is to assist the enterprises at sector level in connection with the solution of working environment problems, through information and guidance.

The National Research Centre for the Working Environment (NRCWE)

NRCWE is a government research institute under the Ministry of Employment. NRCWE is obligated to contribute to a safe, healthy and developing working environment in accordance with technical and social development. NRCWE is also a national centre for working environment research, and NRCWE monitors international working environment research and the environmental development nationally as well as internationally. (www.arbejdsmiljoforskning.dk).

Occupational health consultants

The Occupational health consultants are private consultancy firms that provide professional assistance to enterprises on the design of the workplaces and analyses of the working environment.

Regulations on psychosocial working environment

In 1994, the Minister of Labour set up a "Methods Committee", which had the task of looking more closely at the role and working methods of the WEA with regard to the psychosocial working environment. The Committee was made up of representatives of the social partners and the Ministry of Labour, including officials from the WEA.

The Methods Committee made proposals about how establishments, employers' and employees' organizations, the WEA and others involved in the field of the working environment should deal with problems concerning the psychosocial working environment. In making its recommendations, the Committee divided these factors into two main groups based on their root causes.

The first group comprises psychosocial factors which are linked to the working situation of the employees and whose cause must be sought in working processes or methods, the products used or the psychosocial context in which work is performed. These factors include

- *Work related violence, incl. traumatic experiences*
- *Emotional demands (work with people under certain conditions)*
- *Quantitative demands (heavy workload/ workspace on a more than temporary basis)*
- *Working alone*
- *Night- and shift work*
- *Monotonous, repetitive work*



The second group encompasses the psychosocial problems which are a direct result of managerial decisions or the relations between management and workforce, as well as factors arising from situations outside the establishment. These factors thus do not arise directly or indirectly from an employees working situation. They include e.g. wages, salaries and pensions, promotion, influence on managerial decisions and job uncertainty when a company is scaling down as a result of market conditions.

If the WEA considers that a psychosocial risk factor in an enterprise belongs to the first group, it may investigate with a view to requiring the enterprise to find a solution to the problem.

Concerning matters on *bullying, including sexual harassment*, WEA are allowed to handle these no matter what the reason to the problem is.