

A sea-change in attitudes

Vision Zero was among the key elements of the World Congress 2014. The members of the Zero Accident Forum discussed how the strategy could be put into practice.

Professor Reinert, you supervise and moderate discussion in the Zero Accident Forum, ZAF. What lies behind this network?

The ZAF was formed in autumn 2013 as a voluntary association of companies, institutions and industry associations. Its members regard occupational safety and health as a topic of primary importance, and are willing to be pioneers in the area of safety. The ZAF aims above all to engender greater receptiveness for the topics of behaviour-based safety and a safety culture. Its members discuss suitable methods for further reducing the number of occupational and commuting accidents, in line with the Vision Zero. The idea originated in Finland, where a Zero Accident Forum had already been founded in 2003. A similar network has also existed in the Netherlands since 2012.

How has the network in Germany progressed since 2013?

The number of companies actively participating, of all sizes and from all sectors, has now grown to 27. Companies represented include personnel service providers and temping agencies, companies in the chemical and pharmaceuticals industries, and retail businesses, banks and insurers. The workforces of these companies range in size from seven to 75,000 employees. Besides companies, the German Road Safety Council (DVR) is active in the ZAF, as are representatives of the accident insurance institutions and industry associations. An application for membership form and a membership contract have been created for members. Through these, the members undertake to develop occupational safety further in conjunction with their company management and their workforce. The aim is that of preventing accidents altogether. Health and safety at work are regarded as a part work itself. Information relevant to OSH, comprising at least the number of reportable accidents per 1,000 employees, is also sent by the network members each year to the ZAF. We therefore receive feedback on how the measures taken are influencing the accident occurrence in the companies. In the next phase, we aim to extend the network.

What are the advantages of membership?

Members can contact each other directly and learn from each other, across all sectors. An Internet platform is in place for the transfer of expertise: in a private area, members can access more detailed information and examples of good practice. To date, meetings have been held on an annual basis at the prem-

ises of one member company. In future, we intend to formulate topics for these meetings, and to offer seminars.

What subjects do the members primarily discuss?

We concentrate on the accident occurrence. Trip, slip and fall accidents account for a relatively large proportion of these. Further topics are falls from a height and accidents involving fork-lift trucks, and the safe use of ladders. The members note time and again how important it is for discrete measures to be co-ordinated and made part of the system as a whole. We are also introducing a process of continual improvement, to enable us to learn from mistakes made in the past.

Human error is often found to be the cause of accidents. What experience do members have with the “human factor” in implementing the Vision Zero?

Many companies find that the accident rate stagnates at a certain level, despite all the prevention measures taken. Behavioural aspects are often the reason for this stubborn residual level. Further reduction of the accident rate, as envisaged by the Vision Zero, is possible only by the creation of a safety culture. The ZAF includes companies that have geared their operations to a model promoted by Dupont in the mid-1990s. According to the Bradley curve, a company’s safety culture depends upon the aspect of responsibility. If responsibility is not taken seriously or is observed only out of fear of possible disciplinary measures, a sustainable reduction in the accident rate is virtually unachievable. Only when all employees begin to accept responsibility for themselves and for others is an accident rate of zero possible. Other companies opt for behaviour-based safety strategies. One method for example comprises nine steps for raising the topic of unsafe behaviour in companies and eliminating it. This method becomes routine, and violation of rules is not tolerated.

What factors therefore obstruct attainment of the Vision Zero, and what factors promote its attainment?

The experience shared to date in the ZAF shows that attainment of the Vision Zero is hindered when a safety culture is dependent upon disciplinary measures. This includes regarding occupational safety and health as a cost driver, and assigning a supervisory role to prevention experts and superiors. By contrast,



trailblazing companies aim for a sea-change in thinking and the creation of an independent safety culture in which senior management leads by example. Within this philosophy, safety and health are not cost drivers, but business functions and investments in the workforce. A clear parallel can be drawn here between the World Congress 2014 and the pooling of experience in the ZAF: both show the importance of creating a culture of safety and prevention for reduction of the accident rate. The crucial question of how the concept of Vision Zero can be implemented successfully in companies is also being addressed at present by an international research consortium, with the support of the DGUV. Needless to say, we intend to make use of the study results in the ZAF.

Information on the factors for success in implementing the Zero Accident Vision can be found at www.dguv.de (Webcode ep82177).



**Professor
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Dietmar Reinert has been Director of the Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the DGUV (IFA) since 2013. He completed his studies of physics and Catholic theology with a doctorate from the University of Bonn. This was followed by a research assignment at the University of Dalian (China). Reinert has worked at the IFA since 1988. After completing several research projects concerning safe computer-controlled devices on machinery, he became head of the Interdisciplinary services division. He assumed the post of Deputy Director of the institute in 2008. Since 2000, he has held a teaching post in the Information department of Bonn-Rhine-Sieg University, and was appointed Honorary Professor in 2003.

Zero Accident Forum (ZAF): Policy and principles

- 1 The ZAF is a network open solely to companies, institutions and industry associations. It may not be exploited for advertising purposes, for example by consultants.
- 2 The ZAF is expressly open to small and medium-sized companies and institutions who are willing to accord priority to occupational safety and to adopt a pioneering role in the area.
- 3 Discussion between members from different sectors and of different sizes is expressly welcomed.
- 4 The forum is a voluntary network and does not pursue commercial interests.
- 5 The most important objective is the creation of greater acceptance for the topics of “safety culture” and “behaviour-based safety”.
- 6 The pooling of experience within the network enables members to learn from each others’ examples of good practice. Priority is given to the development and communication of such examples.
- 7 All participating companies state their number of reportable accidents per 1,000 employees each year. The traditional OSHA accident rates (incident rate, lost time case rate, lost work day rate and severity rate) may also be stated.
- 8 All members of the forum subscribe to the following principles:
 - ▶ Every accident is avoidable.
 - ▶ Accidents do not occur at random.
 - ▶ Learning is the key to success.
- 9 All member companies and institutions in the forum undertake to adhere to the following principles:
 - ▶ They wish to improve safety and health at their own workplaces with the aim of “zero accidents”, in order to be pioneers in safety at work.
 - ▶ They undertake to furnish other members openly with information on effective OSH practices.
 - ▶ They improve safety at their own workplaces with the involvement of the workforce and management.
 - ▶ Safety and health are inseparable from their corporate success.
 - ▶ They undertake to furnish the ZAF project group with the occupational safety information stated in Point 7 on an annual basis.