

The Spanish proposal for a European standard

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The Spanish Prevention of Occupational Risks Act 31/95 of 8 November 1995 transposing the European Framework Directive in accordance with the Spanish Constitution and European legislation based on article 118A of the Union Treaty makes prevention in the workplace a fundamental principle. Section IV of the Act, through Decree 39/97 of 17 January 1997, specifies what type of preventive measures must be taken.

Broadly-speaking, the regulation requires preventive measures in the workplace to be integrated into all the company's activities and decisions, technical processes, organization of work, working conditions, and management structure.

I would argue that this requirement for integration into the organizational structure places a clear responsibility on management to make preventive measures a part of all proposed activities and decisions. Prevention in the workplace must be seen as a management system which complements general management and be given equal treatment with quality and environmental management systems.

Companies with a successful record on health and safety management commonly have hazards under control and are progressively reducing the incidence of accidents and occupational diseases, with beneficial effects on the bottom line.

Risk prevention means eliminating or minimizing the causes of accidents or disease. And that means giving a high level of risk prevention equal priority with the other fundamental objectives of business management.

Managing health and safety at work in this way means taking a structured approach based on:

- a written statement of policy which promotes company objectives, takes into account its responsibilities towards its employees and the environment, and satisfies both the letter and spirit of the law;
- a written statement of the duties of those responsible for preventive measures which promotes a positive culture, starting with transparent and active governance by top management. This policy must be rooted in participation and commitment at all levels, effective communication, and the promotion of capabilities enabling all workers to make a full and responsible contribution;
- a written list of planned, coherent actions designed to eliminate or minimize the risks resulting from activities by evaluation methods which address the priorities and objectives to be attained;
- evaluating, controlling and assessing the effectiveness of measures by reference to pre-set standards. This entails an analysis of the workplace, production shops and materials as well as employees, production systems and procedures, and checking and investigating the causes of accidents and sickness.

- an evaluation of the prevention management system via audits which give a structured and independent analysis of its reliability, effectiveness and ability to meet the company's objectives.

These were the guiding principles followed by AENOR's Technical Committee AEN/CTN 81 "Collective and individual means of prevention and protection at work"ⁱ in drafting and adopting three standards in June 1996 initially for an experimental period of three years. They are designed to address the need for operational quality criteria by all parties involved in health and safety management. Three further draft standards, also experimental, should be published in June 1997 (see inset).

UNE 81900: 1996	Prevention of occupational risks. General rules for implementation of an occupational safety and health management system.
UNE 81901: 1996	Prevention of occupational risks. General rules for the assessment of occupational safety and health management systems. Audit process.
UNE 81902: 1996	Prevention of occupational risks. Vocabulary.
PNE 81903	Prevention of occupational risks. General rules for the assessment of occupational safety and health management systems. Qualification criteria for prevention auditors.
PNE 81904	Prevention of occupational risks. General rules for the assessment of occupational safety and health management systems. Management of audit programme.
PNE 81905	Prevention of occupational risks. Guidelines for the implementation of UNE 81900: 1996.

These standards work to the same general principles as ISO 9000 quality management standards and UNE 77801:94 environmental management standards, i.e., they complement and take the same approach towards meeting management objectives.

However, not only is compliance with these two sets of standards no guarantee of compliance with the UNE 81900:1996 standards, but firms with ISO and UNE 77801 compliant systems will probably find it hard to develop the type of health and safety management system defined in the UNE 81900:1996 standards, considered by some as creating a presumption of compliance with the statutory requirements of Act 31/95.

AENOR's work is not strictly confined to Spain, but acquired a European scope at the end of 1996 with the proposal to set up a CEN Technical Committee. A questionnaire (CEN Document N1086) was sent out to CEN members for their remarks before 5 May 1997.

To conclude: it is obvious that an effective health and safety management system should broadly run on the proven principles of management practice supported by the advocates of excellence in quality and business, particularly as success in the marketplace often goes together with successful health and safety management precisely because good business management experience is applied in the same way to health and safety management. The general principles of sound business management are therefore a solid foundation for measures to improve health and safety.

ⁱ The following participated in AENOR's Committee: the National Institute for Safety and Hygiene at Work (INSHT), the Spanish Federation of Employers' Organisations (CEOE), the Spanish Federation of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (CEPYME), mutual accident insurance companies, private prevention organisations, the Ministry for Industry and Energy, the Ministry for Health and the Spanish trade union, UGT (which only participated in one meeting).