

Focus on IFA's work

Edition 12/2013

617.0-IFA:610.1

Indoor workplaces – investigation of the working environment

Problem

The health complaints of employees at indoor workplaces are often considered expressions of sick building syndrome – sore eyes, sore throat, blocked nose and headaches being the symptoms. The causes of complaints at indoor workplaces are complex and pinpointing them is usually difficult. The supposed causes subjectively expressed by the persons concerned often lead in the wrong direction. In some cases, costly air pollution measurements may be commissioned although the cause of the complaints may, for instance, be inadequate lighting.

Activities

With the participation of numerous experts of the social accident insurance institutions, a fully revised and updated third edition of the report “Innenraumarbeitsplätze – Vorgehensempfehlung für die Ermittlungen zum Arbeitsumfeld” [Indoor workplaces – procedure for investigation of the working environment] was published in 2013. The procedure encourages the systematic investigation of health issues and unwellness at indoor workplaces and the finding of solutions that will work in practice. The numerous enquiries to the publishers and the strong demand for the printed version and downloads from the IFA's Internet site are an indication that the guidelines are highly effective in the field.



Report on indoor workplaces

Results and Application

The guidelines contain a graded modular analysis and assessment strategy. It is geared to practical application and addresses all significant factors which in the light of current knowledge are to be considered possible causes of problems in indoor areas.

In addition to the air quality, at least indoor climate, noise, lighting, electromagnetic fields, and ionising radiation should be taken into account. Consideration must also be given to mental and ergonomic factors that can often be regarded as concealed causes of complaints.

To make effective use of the only limited instruments and means of identifying causes, it is necessary to conduct investigations systematically and objectively. As the first step, the recommended procedure envisages recording the type and frequency of complaints. At the same time, initial investigations of the working environment are necessary in order to narrow down the probable causes of complaints. This is also the point at which an on-site inspection and discussions with the persons concerned are advisable. After this, based on the findings, separate, more specific investigations into certain issues can be carried out. The associated chapters supply background information, investigation aids, measurement strategies, and assessment principles for various parameters that may be the cause of complaints at indoor workplaces. There are links between different factors which are mentioned within the chapters concerned.

Area of Application

Businesses in all sectors, social accident insurance institutions, public authorities

Additional Information

- von Hahn, N.; Kleine, H.: Innenraumarbeitsplätze – Vorgehensempfehlung für die Ermittlungen zum Arbeitsumfeld. Report der gewerblichen Berufsgenossenschaften, der Unfallversicherungsträger der öffentlichen Hand und des Instituts für Arbeitsschutz der Deutschen Gesetzlichen Unfallversicherung (IFA). Published by Deutsche Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung (DGUV), Sankt Augustin, 2013
www.dguv.de/webcode/d650356

Expert Assistance

IFA, Division 3: Hazardous substances: handling – protective measures

Literature Requests

IFA, Central Division