

Stoffenmanager[®] Implementation Evolutionary Ladder

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Introduction

Workers handling hazardous substances might be at risk of developing acute or chronic adverse health effects. Companies are often insufficiently aware of the various risks involved, have difficulties in understanding the complex chemical substance legislation and lack expertise in performing a systematic risk assessment of the chemicals that are being used. Over the years different tools have been developed to assist and empower companies to perform a qualitative or quantitative risk assessment. Although intended to be self-explaining, in practice this is not always the case. Therefore a project was started, funded by ZonMw, to actively assist companies with the risk assessment of chemical substances using Stoffenmanager and with sustainable chemicals management in general.

Methods

In total 45 companies were invited to join the project. Companies were selected via the consortium parties network and with active support from the Paint and printing ink manufacturing industry and the Rubber and Plastics (-composites) manufacturing industry. A 7-steps implementation evolutionary ladder was developed. Participation was free of charge, only investment of time was required. The project consisted of different phases:

- 1) Pre-implementation phase to discern at what point on the implementation evolutionary ladder companies at the start were;
- 2) Implementation phase where a mix of active individual and collective support was offered providing joint training and exchange meetings, site-visits by a personal coach and an online platform with background information and a LinkedIn community;

- 3) Post-implementation phase to discern what progress companies had made on the implementation evolutionary ladder.

Results

During the project 4 joint meetings were organized and approximately 40 company visits were made by personal coaches. Most of the companies moved one or more steps up the implementation ladder. Intrinsically motivated OSH-professionals proved to be of vital importance for a company to improve. Also (active) management support, the acceptance of Stoffenmanager under REACH and by the Dutch Labour Inspectorate and external incentives like audits or visits by authorities were identified as factors for a successful implementation of chemical substance management. Identified barriers for a successful implementation were the significant time investment needed, lack of a manual in the tool and the unavailability of data (in the MSDS) needed to perform the risk assessment.

Conclusions

Using both a general (joint meetings) and individual approach (site visits) most participating companies clearly improved on the implementation ladder. It can therefore be concluded that active training and coaching helps companies to improve their chemical risk management and also helps to avoid making mistakes when using and applying Stoffenmanager. Use of validated tools embedded in a community platform support companies to organize and structure their chemical risk management in a business-wise way. However, much depends upon motivated OHS-professionals, management support and willingness to invest time.