

Social dialogue at OHIM regarding health and safety



Risk prevention and the promotion of safer and healthier conditions in the workplace are essential to improving job quality and working conditions. This is why a body of E.U. legislation exists to implement and enforce statutory health and safety standards in workplaces across the E.U.

At OHIM members of staff are recently being encouraged to 'get interested in safety' and to ask questions or make suggestions about health, safety and accessibility. Staff members are also obliged to undertake online health and safety training in order to comply with the ISO health and safety certification. There is no requirement to have such ISO certification, but the possession of a certificate purports to confer excellence status on an organisation.

However, what is a vital requirement under E.U. legislation is that employees are informed and consulted about health and safety matters; the applicable Spanish law requires the establishment of health and safety committees in workplaces employing over 50 workers.

Health and safety committees consist of staff and management representatives who meet on a regular basis to deal with health and safety issues. They form an essential part of the social dialogue between management and employees which has been E.U. policy for 30 years and is currently being promoted by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, who has dubbed himself the 'President of social dialogue'.

In OHIM at present there is no Health and Safety Committee (HSC) in operation. Not since the chairperson of the HSC retired several months ago. The OHIM Staff Committee has twice politely drawn this matter to the attention of the President of OHIM in writing and stressed the urgency of sorting it out. The Staff Committee has however been met with silence. The HSC had been very active recently in identifying safety issues at OHIM and requesting action in relation to OHIM's recently completed additional building. Health and safety is also becoming a major issue at OHIM as the work environment seems to become more stressful, sometimes toxic. The health and well-being of staff, wisely managed, can greatly increase morale and efficiency in an organisation, as well as tackling the organisational issues and attitudes that cause unnecessary and counterproductive anxiety. A well-functioning HSC is a vital part of the interface between staff and management regarding staff welfare. U4U considers it important that OHIM has an active HSC headed by a professional and robust chairperson, who will not postpone a debate with the administration when the evidence demands action.

The absence of a functioning Health and Safety Committee breaches a basic E.U. standard. Moreover, the lack of any response from the President of OHIM to the Staff Committee reflects a disregard for OHIM's democratically elected staff committee. It is certainly not what Mr. Juncker seems to have in mind when he talks about social dialogue between management and employees.

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