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PROMOTING WORKPLACE HEALTH IN GERMANY: A STRATEGIC INVESTMENT FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

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In recent years, promoting workplace health has gained significant traction in Germany as an effective strategy for addressing employees' health and wellness needs in an ever-changing work environment. The goal is to identify workload factors that impact wellness and to enhance employee competencies and resources in this area. Various strategies exist to promote employee health, performance, and well-being, ranging from behavioral changes to improving working conditions and organizational structure. You should note that in Germany, health insurance companies are legally mandated to advise and support companies through the BGF Coordination Office, helping them identify suitable measures, regardless of the organization's size. But for companies operating in Germany, understanding and implementing the Workplace Health Management System (BGM) is not just about meeting legal obligations — it is also a strategic investment in long-term success. Here's what foreign companies doing business in Germany need to know.

What is the Workplace Health Management System?

Ideally, workplace health promotion is an integral part of broader occupational health management. This comprehensive approach includes occupational safety and health, reintegration management, and personnel and organizational policies, encompassing all measures that

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strengthen wellness resources within the company. Even small steps can make a significant difference.

The Workplace Health Management System (BGM) is a comprehensive system designed to maintain and promote employees' health, integrating:

- Occupational safety and health
- Reintegration management
- Workplace health promotion

The concept of health promotion, as understood by the World Health Organization (WHO), was developed in the 1980s and formalized in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion in 1986 — a guiding document still relevant today. Since then, Germany has actively adopted and promoted these policies, influencing both state and non-state actors.

Currently, BGM is based on three pillars:

1. Occupational Safety and Health (*Arbeitsschutz*)

This legally mandated pillar focuses on ensuring that working conditions are safe and minimize risks to employees' health. The legal framework in Germany includes the Occupational Health and Safety Act (*ArbSchG*) and various other regulations, which require employers to assess workplace risks and implement necessary protective measures.

2. Reintegration Management (*BEM*)

Also legally required, BEM helps employees who have been ill for extended periods gradually return to work. It is regulated by Section 167, Paragraph 2, of the Social Code IX (SGB IX).

3. Workplace Health Promotion (*BGF*)

Unlike the previous two, BGF is a voluntary measure by employers aimed at improving employees' overall well-being through physical activity programs, nutrition, and stress management. Although traditionally seen as less critical, its importance has grown due to its positive impact on the work environment.

The vision for occupational health policy is “healthy work in healthy organizations.”

Why is BGM Important?

Implementing BGM offers significant benefits for both employees and employers. Beyond improving workplace health, it can improve organizational culture and attract more talent to the company. A successful BGM strategy requires careful planning and monitored execution, ensuring the involvement of HR managers and company leadership.

The Core of BGM

The process begins with a detailed analysis of the company’s specific challenges and needs. Based on this analysis, clear objectives and concrete goals are defined. After implementation, the effectiveness of these measures is systematically evaluated. This cycle of analysis, action, and evaluation is repeated regularly, allowing BGM to evolve and adapt continuously to the business’s unique demands.

Key Focus Areas

BGM covers a broad range of topics, including:

- Mental health-oriented corporate culture
- Occupational safety and health
- Health promotion
- Human resource management and development
- Organizational development
- Employee participation
- Employee-oriented leadership
- Work-life balance
- Demographic change
- Diversity and inclusion

The Value of Employee Participation

A key factor in BGM’s success is active employee participation. Employees should be involved not only in the

initial analysis but also in the implementation and review phases. Their involvement ensures that the measures adopted are relevant, effective, and aligned with their needs, thus increasing their commitment and the overall impact of BGM.

Why Invest in BGM?

For foreign companies in Germany, integrating BGM into operations not only helps meet legal obligations but also offers numerous benefits. Beyond enhancing workplace health, it can lead to a more positive work environment, improve organizational performance, and help build a stronger employer brand.

Ultimately, a well-executed and well-advised BGM strategy is essential for creating a healthier, more engaged workforce and a stronger, more resilient business, ensuring sustainable growth in the German market.

Conclusion

We will monitor developments in this area and provide updates as warranted, so make sure you are subscribed to [Fisher Phillips' Insight System](#) to get the most up-to-date information directly to your inbox. Please contact your Fisher Phillips attorney, the author of this Insight, or any attorney in our [International Practice Group](#) to learn more.