

Inspection and supervisory activities

Socio-economic changes significantly influence the state of labour protection. Reforms, restructuring processes in many sectors of economy, and the end of protection period guaranteed in social agreements – all these result in the rise of the number of collective dismissals from work. A high unemployment rate generates pathological phenomena in the sphere of working conditions. The predominance of employers over employees evidently increases, and the latter ones accept any conditions of work in order to have a job. As a result of changes connected with the transformation from the centrally-managed to the market economy, execution of tasks imposed upon the labour inspectorate has become more difficult. If in the year 1989 the labour inspectorate covered about 465 thousand enterprises with its supervision, this number increased to over 1 million in the years 1999-2000. When calculated per one labour inspector, it amounted to 589 companies in 1989, and about 1000 companies in 1999-2000. This has created new challenges for the National Labour Inspectorate and it requires innovative work strategies. Due to such reasons, the Programme of the NLI's Activity, a basic document defining the directions and types of actions, comprises both annual and long-term tasks. Their objective is to achieve a better level of labour protection in Poland and the improvement of the NLI's functioning.

Priorities in the Labour Inspectorate's work comprise:

- focusing of inspection on the sectors of economy and enterprises which have the highest level of occupational hazards and accident risks;
- monitoring the processes of ownership transformation, restructuring of economy and system changes from the point of view of labour protection;
- inspection of the observance of labour law and OSH regulations in supermarkets;
- inspection of work safety in companies with a high risk of a major industrial accident;
- inspection of the observance of labour law in small enterprises (employing up to 20 individuals);
- promotion of the OSH management systems and assistance in their implementation by Polish enterprises;
- involvement in the drafting of labour law, taking into account the latest developments in knowledge and technology, as well as regulations which are in force in the EU;
- promotion of labour protection, with particular attention to the private agriculture sector.

In order to increase effectiveness of our supervision, it was indispensable to extend reconnaissance activities concerning the present situation in the field of labour protection. They are carried out in companies selected on the basis of specific criteria, which allows for analysis and making Generalisations while assessing them and drawing conclusions. An identified unsatisfactory level of labour protection is the basis for focusing inspection activities whose objective is to eliminate or at least limit the most significant irregularities. The scale of problems is conspicuous by statistical data – 67.1 thousand companies were inspected in 2000, and only in 5% of them no infringements of labour law were identified.

Moreover, diagnosis enables the NLI:

- to carry out an in-depth analysis of negative phenomena existing in the selected areas of labour protection and specification of the most urgent needs in this respect,
- to implement a flexible response to the emerging, earlier unforeseen problems and circumstances – without the necessity of introducing major changes to the work plan.

A new inspection methodology based on checklists has been introduced. The checklists, developed for different types of economic activities, make it possible for employers to control the state of conformity to labour law and work safety in their companies.

The National Labour Inspectorate, carrying out its statutory tasks, cooperates with governmental bodies, bodies for inspection and supervision over working conditions, trade unions, employers' organisations, and research-development centres.

