



## Effects of testing and certification on safer products and competitive workplaces

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For many decades, the testing and certification bodies of the German statutory accident insurance institution have been exerting influence in order for safety and health aspects to be taken into account in the design of work equipment. Products have thus been improved considerably with regard to safety and health. This influence on products already at the design stage has proven a very effective method. It encourages technical innovations and does not only improve occupational safety and health, but also has a positive impact on competitiveness.

The high potential of testing and certification lies in its ability to reveal weak points in products. Manufacturers often lack the extensive experience and knowledge that testing and certification bodies have, which makes the latter's input a valuable tool for safety and health. This "anticipated market surveillance" can constitute an effective safeguard, protecting manufacturers from product liability claims and complaints by market surveillance authorities.

The testing and certification bodies act as European notified bodies, but also carry out voluntary certification. A clear distinction must be drawn between these two areas:

- In the context of European directives, notified bodies carry out mandatory testing. Co-ordination groups of notified bodies are established at European level which ensure uniform procedures by means of "Recommendations for Use". It is essential, however, that high quality criteria are applied for the notification and monitoring of testing bodies, and that all bodies become involved in the pooling of experience. The EU's New legislative framework has introduced some improvements in this area.
- A further field of activity is voluntary type examination that leads to the awarding of test marks. The GS mark plays the most significant role in this area. It enables manufacturers to demonstrate to the market the high quality of their products with regard to safety and health and provides customers with a valuable aid for the selection of products. This confidence-building approach proves to be particularly beneficial for innovative products and for small and medium-sized enterprises who cannot rely on a well-known brand name.

Testing and certification are however not the only means of exerting influence. Research and development, testing and certification, and standardization make an excellent combination, provided that a systematic pooling of experience takes place between them. The German Social Accident Insurance has laid down this pooling of experience in its mandate addressed at the testing and certification bodies. The result is an improvement of occupational safety and health and an increase in productivity.

All this shows that testing and certification present a real added value to manufacturers, enterprises and occupational health and safety. This should be taken into account in the current political discussions concerning the future of test marks in the EU.