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## OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY IN TRANSITION: AI, PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND THE ROLE OF DGUV, German Social Accident Insurance

Occupational safety has never been a static set of rules. It evolves continuously instead, just like the world of work itself: Today, smart helmets replace simple headgear, exoskeletons relieve muscles and joints, and AI supports risk assessment processes. There's always one central question: How can these innovations be implemented so that employees truly benefit in their day-to-day work, while ensuring companies can keep track?

Statutory accident insurance services play a key role in this context. Occupational accident insurance associations, insurance funds and their umbrella organization, the German Social Accident Insurance DGUV, closely monitor developments in smart PPE and its application in work environments. **At the same time**, AI has emerged as the top trend, with DGUV consolidating the expertise in the **Competence Centre AI & Big Data**, providing companies with practical advice. In addition, **mental health** is being increasingly integrated into prevention strategies by DGUV and accident insurance services as a central topic in workplace safety and health.

Since 2025, Dr. Stephan Fasshauer has been serving as the new Director General of DGUV. Ahead of A+A 2025, we asked him which topics are shaping occupational safety today and where the field is headed in the coming years.

**A+A:** Dr. Fasshauer, personal protective equipment is the foundation of occupational safety. DGUV closely follows the development of smarter PPE and its implementation. According to you, which innovations have the most practical benefits?

**Dr. Stephan Fasshauer:** I'm fascinated by innovations that, on top of being technically brilliant, truly make the everyday work easier. Smart helmets that monitor vital functions or issue warnings in case of heat or gas exposure are one example. Intelligent



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protective clothing documenting physical strain also opens new perspectives for prevention. Crucial is that technology should never be an end unto itself, yet provide employees with tangible support – uncomplicated, reliable and safe.

**A+A:** Artificial intelligence is considered a game-changer in the world of work and in occupational safety. Also, DGUV has identified AI as a top trend in its Risk Observatory and offers consulting through its Competence Centre AI & Big Data. Will AI become the safety net of the future, or does it carry new risks?

**Dr. Stephan Fasshauer:** AI is both an opportunity and a challenge. It can make work safer, for example, by detecting hazards faster or analyzing complex data for prevention. At the same time, new risks emerge, from dependency on algorithms to ethical concerns. We need to be cautious, for instance, that AI does not lead to a gradual loss of qualification, which could backfire if technology fails. DGUV sees its role as providing guidance: Instead of becoming a black box, we want AI to be transparent, comprehensible and fairly implemented. We want to shape the future with AI, and given our unique position, we have the responsibility to do so.



**A+A:** In companies, innovations like exoskeletons or smart PPE often meet skepticism...

**Dr. Stephan Fasshauer:** Skepticism is natural – new technologies disrupt routines, and both employees and employers want to know whether the investment is worthwhile. Therefore, we support innovations practically: Through studies, pilot projects and on-site consulting. Trust also builds when we, as a neutral advisor, provide feedback on whether a new technology meets the expectations.

**A+A:** Mental strain is no longer a trend, yet it is the reality for many employees. DGUV is increasingly integrating this issue into its prevention concepts. How do you succeed in incorporating this topic equally alongside the traditional physical risks?



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**Dr. Stephan Fasshauer:** It's of utmost importance to treat mental strain not as a special issue but as an integral part of safety and health. Whether it's noise, dust, or stress – all of these are burdens we take seriously. Therefore, we develop tools that capture psychological factors just as systematically as physical risks. And we trust in communication: Employees must feel that they can freely address mental strain and its impact on their health. Prevention only succeeds when the invisible becomes visible.

**A+A:** Looking ten years ahead, what is your vision on occupational safety in Germany, and what role will DGUV play?

**Dr. Stephan Fasshauer:** Our vision is occupational safety that thinks forward instead of following. Ten years from now, I see companies where safety and health are integral parts of all processes – digitally supported yet shaped by humans. DGUV will act as a driver, bridge builder and shaper – between innovation and practice, economy and politics, people and technology. Our goal remains clear: to design work that strengthens people, instead of making them ill. That is the future we're working for at the statutory accident insurance.



Occupational safety is at a turning point – between tradition and disruption, analogue risks and digital opportunities. DGUV clearly supports the change, whether for smart PPE, the implementation of AI or the growing importance of mental strain. The vision is „clear and compelling: **The occupational safety of tomorrow is an intelligent, flexible and integral system.** It will not only prevent accidents but also foster healthy, resilient and future-ready working environments with tailored recommendations for companies.

**A+A 2025 is the platform where this vision becomes tangible, providing fresh ideas for shaping occupational safety in the decade ahead.**

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