



Page 2: Firefighters are often insulted and attacked – Interview with Karl-Heinz Banse, President of the German Fire Services Association

Occupational diseases: Three times as many recognised cases

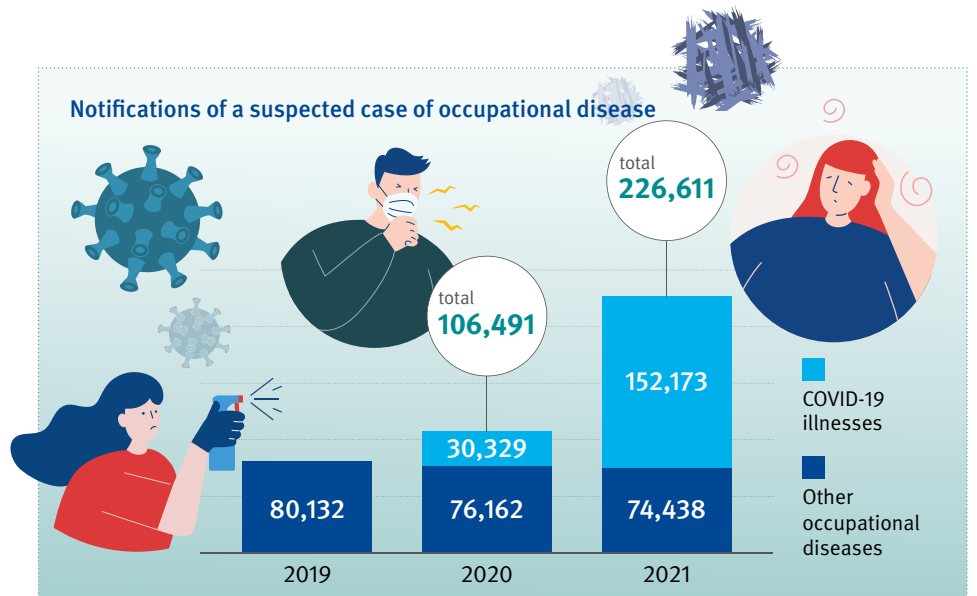
The pandemic continued to affect the amount of insurance claims recorded by social accident insurance institutions in 2021. The newly published provisional figures make this clear. The high number of recognised cases of occupational disease due to COVID-19 stands out in particular.

In the previous year, 226,611 cases of suspected occupational diseases were reported to the German social accident insurance. This is more than twice as many cases as in 2020. Around 67 percent of these, 152,173 to be exact, were linked to a suspected COVID-19 infection at work. This infection can be recognised as an occupational disease, especially for individuals working in the health sector, in social welfare and in laboratories. This is also true for insured individuals that are exposed to a comparable risk of infection as part of their job. In all other groups, an infection can be recognised as an occupational accident.

In terms of the number of recognised cases of all occupational diseases, there were three times as many recognised cases in 2021 compared to 2020, with a total number of 123,228. Around 100,000 of these cases were linked to COVID-19.

Documenting infections

“The overwhelming majority of COVID-19 infections have no serious consequences. And staying up to date with vaccinations plays an important part in this”, explains Dr Stefan Hussy, Director General of the



More than twice as many suspected cases of occupational disease were reported in 2021 as there were in 2020.

German Social Accident Insurance. It is important to verify and document the illness, so that it can be recognised as an occupational disease or an occupational accident. The most reliable way of verifying the illness is with a PCR test. The result of the test and the situations surrounding the infection that occurred during the insured activity should also be recorded in the first-aid log/reporting form of the company or educational institution – if it has not already been reported as a occupational accident or as a suspected occupational disease.

The challenge of long COVID

A COVID-19 infection can have long-lasting consequences. This is a major challenge for those affected, and also for medical personnel. Since the symptoms of people affected by long-COVID or post-COVID syndrome are very unspecific, taking an interdisciplinary approach to diagnostics and treatment is very important. “We will continue to support our insured individuals with their recovery in the best way possible. The Post-COVID Programme of the BG Hospitals, which includes consultation, diagnostics, in-house rehabilitation and outpatient aftercare is an important part of this”, explains Hussy.

Although the general protective measures have largely been lifted, companies are still

responsible for protecting their employees from infection to the best of their ability. After the new SARS-CoV-2 Occupational Health and Safety Ordinance, employers have a greater individual responsibility for defining which measures are suitable, in order to protect their employees. “We must continue to be cautious, because even infections that are generally mild can have long-term consequences. The pandemic is not over”, states Hussy.

... Press release – Provisional figures for 2021
www.dguv.de, Webcode: dp1319452
 (in German only)

Potsdamer Berufskrankheiten-Tage (Potsdam Occupational Diseases Congress)

At the medico-legal congress on 13th and 14th May 2022, occupational diseases, occupational hazards to health and their prevention will be the focus of the discussion. The event will cover rehabilitation in cases of post-COVID and long-COVID, as well as further developments in the legislation concerning occupational diseases. The Occupational Diseases Congress will be a hybrid event. Information and registration:

bk-tage.dguv.de (in German only)



Interview with Karl-Heinz Banse,
President of the German Fire Services Association

Insults and attacks have fatal consequences on the motivation of voluntary public service workers

Dear readers,

We look on with fear and concern as we watch the development of the war in Ukraine and its consequences. Lots of refugees need to be taken in and supported. This is taking place with an impressive sense of solidarity and naturalness all across Europe. We can all play our part in ensuring that those people in need get the help and support they need. For example, the German Social Accident Insurance has made the process for housing refugees unbureaucratic and quick. The BG Hospitals in Ludwigshafen and Halle are helping out with deliveries of medicines and medical supplies.

Providing supplies and assistance is one side, but the experiences of flight and war can be highly traumatic. The German social accident institutions for the public sector offer information in a range of different languages for those directly affected, their relatives and also people providing support. These information booklets explain in simple language what happens during a traumatic event, lists some typical reactions and provides advice for the different phases of trauma recovery.

We are also not out of crisis mode when it comes to the COVID pandemic. The current events have pushed COVID into the background and general pandemic fatigue is also playing its part. Nevertheless, we must continue to be careful, despite the easing of restrictions. Due to the extension of the SARS-CoV-2 Occupational Health and Safety Ordinance, companies are still required to continue to implement hygiene concepts and basic protective measures. Up to this point, companies have done an exemplary job with this task and they will continue to do so – in all of our best interests of us all.

We must remain optimistic, even in these difficult times.

Best regards

Dr Stefan Hussy

Director General of the German Social Accident Insurance (DGUV)

More than one million people in Germany are actively involved in voluntary fire services. Along with the emergency services, they are the first on site in car accidents, fires, medical emergencies or when a hurricane strikes. They provide support on a voluntary basis. However, they are often verbally abused or physically threatened while carrying out their work. This was proved convincingly by a survey carried out by the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Fire Services in Lower Saxony (FUK). DGUV Kompakt spoke with Karl-Heinz Banse, President of the German Fire Services Association (DFV), about the impact this has on the volunteer firefighters.

Mr Banse, the survey carried out by the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the Fire Services in Lower Saxony showed that more than a third of the individuals surveyed have experienced violence in the last two years while carrying out their work. Did that surprise you?

This study provided a comprehensive, valid result for the first time and includes findings that we can use in the future. I was shocked and dismayed to find out that violence doesn't just occur in metropolitan areas, but also in rural areas. This is an important finding!

Colleagues are often attacked verbally and with offensive gestures. What do you think of this?

Almost every firefighting operation is associated with specific stresses for the fire service workers. When they also have to deal with insults and even actual attacks, this has a terrible effect on the motivation and willingness of the volunteer workers. In most cases, the volunteer workers are not able to resolve these personal attacks on their own. The low probability of a

successful court case – from the perspective of the voluntary worker affected – frustrates the fire service workers and makes them less likely to formally report incidents of verbal abuse or physical attacks.

Voluntary fire brigades in particular are very present and visible in municipalities and are not anonymous. So why is there still a lack of respect?

I see it as a problem with the way society is developing. There is an increasingly self-absorbed attitude among many people. As I see it, unfortunately, people are often much more concerned with achieving an outcome that suits them rather than an outcome that is good for the community as a whole.



In most cases, emergency workers are not able to resolve these personal attacks on their own.

It is the biggest societal challenge of our time, changing the way of thinking back to that of a community in which the people serving their community are given an appropriate level of respect while providing a public service. When there is a conflict, these must be resolved with a cool head and through trained actions. Clear communication can reduce the problem and help to contribute to a successful operation.

Around 20 percent of those surveyed indicated that they have been insulted and threatened on social media. What options do you think could combat this?

Because of its anonymous nature, social media can foster a climate of hostility. When it comes to social media management, clear communication about the work that firefighters do is key to dispelling any festering conflicts.



Firefighters want to help. However, they are regularly threatened and even attacked while carrying out their work. They need regular training on how to handle such incidents.

Many attacks are not reported, because they did not result in physical injuries requiring treatment. How can firefighters process these experiences and are verbal attacks taken seriously by management?

Making time to all have a conversation together after a deployment is extremely important. Managers must take all aspects seriously and handle them sensitively. The possibilities of psychological support are very helpful in their current approaches, but they must be continuously developed.

” Making time to all have a conversation together after a deployment is extremely important.

What needs to be done so that assaults on rescue and emergency workers become isolated incidents again and not the rule?

We take this topic very seriously. Civil society must return to respectful behavioural norms. This year, the German Fire Services Association (DFV) is appealing to the public in various events to raise awareness of the topic of violence against emergency responders. This includes a large symposium on 24 June during the 29th German Fire

Service Day in Hanover. Threats via social media must also be stopped and the digital separation from society must be ended. We need cultural and social organisations to bring people together with a real, communal activity after these difficult times. In addition, emergency responders must receive more training about how to handle attacks. Management should support documentation of incidents and the reporting of such incidents to the police or legal recourse.

→ <https://forum.dguv.de> › Issue 11/21 › Contribution: “Insults, abusive language and threats – What voluntary firefighters are experiencing” (in German only)

→ Selected findings from the survey carried out by the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the fire services in Lower Saxony can be found on the infographic on page 4.



Karl-Heinz Banse,
President of the German Fire Services Association

Card for first aiders

Anyone that helps other people in an emergency is covered by social accident insurance. Whether it is treatment for injuries, support for post-traumatic stress or material damage – the costs are covered by the social accident insurance. A small card provides a great deal of help.

People that help others in the event of an accident, common hazards or emergencies, or who rescue them in situations where there is a serious hazard to health, are covered by social accident insurance. This could be first-aid services at road accidents, a fire or natural disasters.

This insurance cover is not well known amongst the population, and it is difficult to provide a clarification in advance of any incidents that may occur. Who knows when they may become a support volunteer? First aiders are also exposed to extreme situations that can be emotionally disturbing. It is difficult to describe the services offered by social accident insurance institutions in this situation. This is where a little card comes into play. It was created by The German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the public sector in Berlin and has been adapted for the majority of federal states in Germany. The card for first aiders is small like a business card. It provides information about the insurance cover for individuals providing support services and contact information for the responsible German social accident insurance institutions. The card is handed out by knowledge multipliers such as firefighters, police or the Notfallseelsorge (emergency pastoral care organisation). This is because members of these organisations often meet responders as the first people on location at an accident and can assess whether the responder needs help themselves.

The concept has been successful so far: While previously voluntary support workers came into contact with the German social accident insurance institutions for the public sector via circuitous routes, they can now contact them directly. The small card has also improved the level of networking between the German social accident insurance institutions and police, firefighters and other parties involved. The card makes it easier for first aiders to make contact. It also thanks them for their work. Because even though there is a legal requirement to provide assistance, thanking them for their efforts is an appreciative gesture.

→ www.unfallkasse-berlin.de/erstthelfer (in German only)

→ www.dguv.de › Webcode: d1557 (in German only)

Insults, verbal abuse and threats

Violence experienced by firefighters in Lower Saxony

In a survey carried out by the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the fire services in Lower Saxony (FUK), more than one third of the individuals surveyed indicated that they have been confronted with violence in the last two years while carrying

out their duties. Verbal insults and abusive gestures were the most common forms of abuse by far. This doesn't just happen on location, but also on social media.

→ www.fuk.de > Prävention > Keine Gewalt gegen Einsatzkräfte (in German only)

Did you report the worst incident?

51.5%



Yes, to management/the team

15.5%



Yes, to the police/local authority

Did you experience violence over the last two years while working as a firefighter?

34.5%

Yes

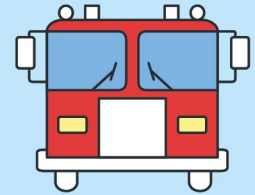
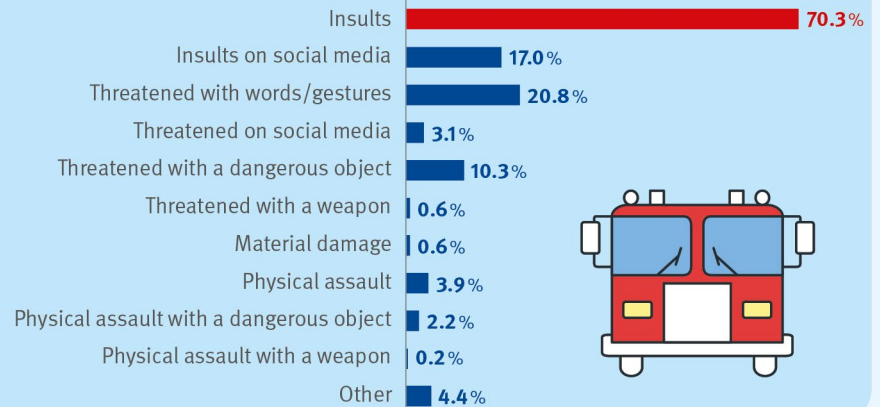
More than one third of the firefighters surveyed have already experienced violence.

65.5%

No



Which forms of violence have you experienced?



In October 2020, 2,668 voluntary fire service workers took part in an online survey.

Helping refugees – who is insured?

Lots of people are volunteering to help refugees. Those people that volunteer to help refugees on behalf the local authority are covered by social accident insurance. This means that those people have reported to the local authority first and offered their help. If a private organisation, such as a sport club or music club, offers to help on behalf of the local authority, then their volunteers are also covered by social accident insurance. Anybody who works with support or charity organisations on a voluntary basis or provides help as a member of a church is also covered by social accident insurance.

This insurance cover applies to the voluntary activity itself but also the journey to this activity and back home. In the event of an accident, the social accident insurance will cover the costs for treatment and rehabilitation and will pay benefits where appropriate. Activities with refugees that are carried out by private individuals that have not been organised on behalf of the local authority are not covered by social accident insurance, such as private trips and sporting activities.

You can find more information for volunteers, local authorities, schools, preschools and companies in the portal of the DGUV:

→ www.dguv.de > d1151666 (in German only)



Volunteer helpers supporting refugees on behalf of the local authority are covered by social accident insurance.

Photo: Hallpoint/stockadobe.com

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Editorship: Gregor Doepke, Kathrin Baltscheit, DGUV, Glinkastraße 40, 10117 Berlin

Editorial team: Kathrin Baltscheit,

Arlén Buchholz, Katharina Braun, Katrin Wildt

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