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THESEIS Project Training on Health and Safety for workers in the Environment Industrial Sector

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- Federation of Industries of Northern Greece
- Hellenic Institute for Occupational Health and Safety
- PREVENT
- Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung
- Occupational Safety Research Institute
- Finnish Institute of Occupational Health
- Swedish TelePedagogic Knowledge Centre
- Institute Of Environmental Protection National Research Institute
- Umweltcluster Bayern
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Training on Health and Safety for workers in the environment Industrial Sector

1. Questionnaires on Health and Safety Issues for Waste Water Treatment Operators and Solid Waste Management

Two, separate, new questionnaires were compiled aiming to identify the training needs and gaps of workers occupied in:

a) wastewater treatment and

b) solid waste management facilities

Both questionnaires were compiled based on the THESEIS project partners experience in surveys on Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) topics and a thorough analytical literature research and analysis of similar proposed questionnaires from Occupational Health and Safety organizations in other EU and overseas countries, (USA, Canada, Australia).

The **Wastewater treatment operators' questionnaire** comprises questions on:

•Safety Procedures and respective plans developed and implemented within the facilities' site (i.e. company safety manuals, emergency response plans, site safety operating procedures)

•Personal Safety guidelines and means (i.e. notification of supervisor/co-workers of their daily work plan and activities, appropriate clothing for harsh weather/environment conditions)

•Hazards related to the activities undertaken by the operators, such as:

- Accident Hazards related to working conditions, use of materials and equipment, etc
- Chemical Hazards (i.e. chronic poisoning by inhalation or ingestion of chemicals)
- Physical Hazards (i.e. excessive noise, vibrations, low illumination level, etc)
- Biological Hazards (i.e. diseases caused by infectious agents, insects or rodents)
- Ergonomic, Psychosocial and Organizational Factors (i.e. musculoskeletal injuries caused by overexertion, discomfort and psychological problem related to the bad smell of wastewater)

•Safety guidelines when working in confined spaces (entry permits and hazardous working conditions)

•Safety guidelines for use and handling of hazardous materials

•Fire Safety guidelines.

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Within the context of the questionnaire responders can also propose other Health and Safety topics in which they would like to be further trained and document OHS training they had during the last 3 years.

The **questionnaire for the workers in Solid Waste Management** comprises the same set of questions as in the case of the Wastewater Treatment operators. Especially, the questions, asked for the Hazards (Accident, Chemical, Physical, Biological, Ergonomic, Psychosocial and Organizational Factors) related to the workers' operations, were diversified, based on the different working conditions and activities carried out by the following three specialties:

a)Refuse Collection Workers
b)Incinerator Operators
c)Land-Fill Operators

Both questionnaires, initially, were compiled in English and then translated by THESEIS partners in Greek, German, Finnish, Bulgarian Polish and Czech language.

Questionnaires can be downloaded by THESEIS project webpage and used by interested stakeholders (OHS managers and workers occupied in pollution management facilities, OHS advisors, etc.). For example a Greek, private company, offering Health and Safety services to Municipal Wastewater facilities uses the respective questionnaire for the identification of workers' training gaps, during the compilation of Occupational Health and Safety studies in these facilities.

Within the context of THESEIS project and especially for the conduction of a survey for the identification of the training needs, in OHS issues, of workers occupied in pollution management (wastewater, solid waste) facilities, all project's partners, contacted the identified target groups and stakeholders in Greece, Germany, Finland, Sweden, Belgium, Poland, Czech Republic and Bulgaria, informed them about the compilation and release of the questionnaires and asked them to fill them on-line. In case that a stakeholder could not fill in the questionnaire, electronically, then they were sent to him/her via e-mail and/or in hard copy. More than 4000 contacts were made, by all partners, and at the end of August 2012 more than 800 answers have been received. It is worthwhile mentioning that answered questionnaires keep on coming from other interested stakeholders.
The received, so far, answers are analyzed in order to map the OHS training needs of professionals occupied in wastewater treatment and solid waste management facilities per country.

2. THESEIS e-Learning Service Development Models and Tools

The article presents, in brief, an overview of:
a)the proposed development models and
b)the design tools

that have been introduced and will be implemented during the THESEIS project for the development of the THESEIS e-Learning services in Occupational Health and Safety topics of the pollution management sector and especially workers occupied in wastewater treatment and solid waste management facilities.

An important starting-point for the formulation of a learning service development strategy, for e-learning services, is that the learning services:

a)should be adapted and respond to the needs of the context(s) in which the performance improvements are to take place,

b)makes concrete value-added contributions to the performance system

c)being developed as an enabling service for the performance system, and not as an independent educational activity or just for diploma-generating purposes.

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Performance-based training is most successful as one part of a workplace development initiative that aims for collaboration and participation across the spectrum of the workplace.

With this role defined it is also possible to designate instructional design strategies, actions and tools.

Having adopted a performance improvement orientation for the development of the e-learning services it is possible to formulate a design model for the incremental construction of such a learning service. In the centre of such model should be a participative approach which is capable to involve in the training services development process the full project partnership as well as the stakeholders and end-users affected by the products (training modules, delivery methods) that is being developed and prepared for.

The participative learning service design process could be seen as progressing from an initial performance verification where the present competence levels and competence gaps are identified and prioritized.

Once the potential problem areas have been identified a process analysis is initiated in order to describe the Key Performance Areas (KPAs), where the prioritized performance gaps exist, and being followed by an analysis of the competence requirements that are related to those KPAs.

The competence requirements is at this stage will be converted into specifications of the expected Learning Outcomes (LOs), Learning outcomes together with contextual information and target group profiles, will constitute the core input to both the overall instructional design process, e.g. as 'learning scaffolds, which is subsequently providing the structural inputs to a more detailed module and learning scenario design.

This phased learning service design process will then be followed by both a learning service production phase, where the actual learning services and associated learning materials are being constructed and prepared for, followed by a usability validation during early implementation parts of the delivery phase for the learning services. This delivery phase can in itself be carried out as a staged process, going from prototyping to mainstreaming, or be a direct market introduction process. For the THESEIS project it is planned for that the delivery procedure will take place as a staged process.

For each of the above stages and developmental actions it is also required to have a set of tools which both enables collaborative work and that such collaborations can take place online, not only in delivery of the e-learning services but also for early analysis/design as well as for service production.

Most of the needed learning design tools are already available within the Virtual Community Platform (VCP) already linked in THESEIS project web-site and used by the project partners. The same stands also for the case of the training material production process, depending on the learning services modalities to be adopted and the online media solutions intended to be used.

Depending on the formality to be adopted for the e-learning services it can be used either a LMS-based learning service platform, or in case of less formal learning, an online learning community platform, as the VCP.

For the initial data collection and analytical stages, including the formulation of KPAs and LOs we have in the THESEIS project adopted a combined tool approach where the involved project actors can either document their KPA/LO specifications for respective modules to be developed on either a print-based/electronic form or directly input them into an online database, depending on the

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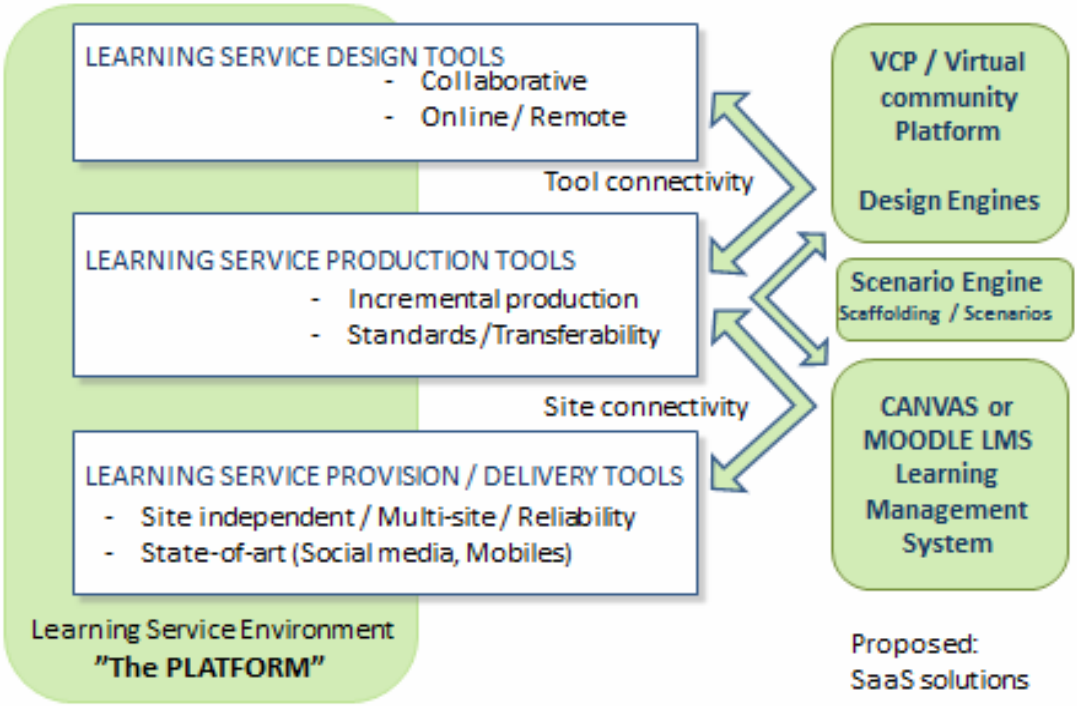

individuals' level of ICT maturity.

Later stages of the design and production processes will also be carried out as an online remote and collaborative e-learning development process, as illustrated in the above models.

3. Health and safety in a green economy

In the last decade, many industries have shifted their focus from productivity to 'sustainability'. Environmentally friendly practices are being used everywhere and this has resulted in the emergence of a 'green economy'. However, experience has shown that some practices may perhaps be more environmentally friendly, but they're also more hazardous to the workers' health. Therefore the International Labour Organization (ILO) warns that 'green jobs' should also pay attention to the health and safety of the workers.

Green jobs.

The term 'green jobs' covers a wide variety of jobs, ranging from the very high-tech eco engineering work, to the low-tech recycling and waste-management. These so-called 'green jobs' improve the environment and create new job opportunities, but at the same time they also often imply occupational safety and health risks. Workers in waste management and recycling face a series of new and unknown hazards, such as chemicals, electronic waste, radiation and nanomaterials, of which the potential hazards are still unclear.

Promoting safety and health in a green economy

ILO is concerned with this evolution and therefore published a report, titled 'Promoting safety and health in a green economy'. Juan Somavia, the ILO Director-General, repeated this message on the occasion of the 2012 World Day for Safety and Health at Work and pointed out that "Renewable energies, waste management and recycling, as well as the greening of traditional industries must be approached from the outset with an eye on the occupational safety and health challenges aiming to the elimination of old hazards and risks and preventing new ones from emerging".

When green jobs go wrong

ILO report highlights two 'green' sectors that have environmentaly-friendly goals, but at the same time often imply serious hazards to the

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workers: a) the recycling industry and b) the waste-to-energy sector.

Recycling Industry

Recycling work can be dirty, polluting, undesirable, even dangerous, and it is often poorly paid. The report cites a study of working conditions in recycling centers in Sweden. That study identified several risks and found a high frequency of injuries amongst the recycling workers. It concluded that there is a clear need for preventive actions in several areas, such as better machinery and equipment and more training, especially in handling hazardous waste.

Workers at a UK-based electrical waste recycling facility suffered from mercury poisoning, generated by the recycling of eco-light bulbs containing mercury, due to poor work practices. Another example is scrap metal recycling, which is a vast industry that employs many workers. In the United States common causes of illness in this industry are heavy metal poisoning, repeated trauma disorders, skin and respiratory diseases or disorders.

Waste-to-energy Sector

The energy sector has also developed an interest in waste management as waste can be an interesting source of energy. This said, waste-to-energy processes can generate hazards from impure gas production, explosions, dangerous substances and gases in confined spaces. Future landfill mining for valuable resources will increase exposures to harmful materials. Waste-to-energy is clearly 'green' in its premeditation, but the human cost may often be very high.

Fastest growing green employment

ILO's green jobs programme identifies waste management as one of the fastest growing sources of green employment. However, many waste management jobs, which are green in theory, are not green in practice because of the environmental and human health damage caused by inappropriate practices. Most waste management strategies promote a shift from considering waste as an unwanted burden to viewing it as a valued resource, or to prevent its generation in the first place.

According to the ILO report, "a true green job must integrate safety and health into design, procurement, operations, maintenance sourcing, use and recycling". Occupational safety and health mechanisms need to integrate the greening process into their policies and programmes of action. Policy changes are necessary to support approaches such as "prevention through design" in creating green jobs. Social dialogue among representatives of government, workers and employers is central to the prevention and management of occupational hazards and risks. As the Director of the ILO Programme on Safety and Health at Work and the Environment, Seiji Machida concluded: "Moving towards a green economy implies setting higher standards for environmental protection while, at the same time, incorporating workers' safety and health as an integral part of the strategy. Only then we will be contributing to an environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive outcome".

More information may be found into the following ILO report 'Promoting safety and health in a green economy'

http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/video/WCMS_175600/lang--en/index.htm

4. Biological hazards in eco-industry

Workers in eco-industry are often exposed to biological hazards at work. Biological hazards are organic substances that pose a threat to the health of humans and other living organisms. These include pathogenic micro-organisms: viruses, toxins (from biological sources), spores, fungi and bio-active substances. Biological hazards can also be considered to include biological vectors or transmitters of disease.

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Exposure routes

There are three major of routes of entry for these micro-organisms into the body; through the respiratory system, digestive tract or skin contact with contaminated objects. At workplaces exposure stems mainly from breathing zone, which requires that micro-organism releases from material as dust or from liquid as aerosol. The severity and probability of health effects depends on concentration, the magnitude of dust or aerosol formation, the nature and amount of exposure, exposure route, the duration of exposure and individual susceptibility.

Nature of biohazards

Individual biohazards may be classified in several ways. One method of classifications, type of agent, is considered in this article. The approach taken in this article is to include biological agents that may cause infection, allergy, toxicity, or otherwise create a hazard to human health.

1. Infectious agents

Infectious agents are capable of causing disease and can be classified according to size, properties and morphological characteristics (e.g. viruses, bacteria, fungi).

2. Plant and plant products

Contact with certain plants, plant materials or fungi may cause non-infectious poisoning, stinging, allergic reactions and irritant-contact or allergic-contact dermatitis. Fungi such as moulds and yeasts can cause allergies that result in hypersensitivity or asthma.

3. Animals and animal products

Zoonoses are infectious diseases that can be vector-borne or transmitted directly from wild or domestic animals. Other forms of transmission of zoonoses include those due to exposure to bacteria or viruses

Most of the agents defined as "occupational biohazards" may also be classified to the following subgroups:

a) Micro-organisms (viruses, bacteria, fungi) defined usually as single species causing infectious or allergic diseases, or particular substances of microbial origin (endotoxins, enzymes) that may be produced by more than one species.

b) Arthropods (crustaceans, arachnids, insects) comprising species that may attack and bite or sting workers causing adverse effects (skin inflammation, systemic intoxication, transmission of infectious agents), or act passively as a source allergenic particles affecting respiratory tract, skin or conjunctiva.

c) Allergens and toxins derived from higher plants that may, upon skin contact, cause dermatitis, or by inhalation cause rhinitis and/or asthma.

d) Protein allergens of domestic and laboratory animals, which are present in urine, feces, saliva, hair, dander, and feathers, or in particles of ground tissues that may become airborne during production of food or drugs (fish meal, enzymes).

Wastewater and solid waste sector

Wastewater treatment plant operators apply physical, chemical and biological processes to remove contaminants. Workers can be exposed to a range of hazardous substances and biological agents from these processes. The composition of the microflora varies regarding spectrum of species and wastewater concentration. Factors such as microorganism input, chemical substances in the wastewater, climatic conditions and procedures influence these parameters. In studies, three clusters of symptoms have become evident at wastewater treatment plants: lower respiratory and skin symptoms, flu-like and systemic symptoms and upper respiratory symptoms.

Workers in waste management can be exposed to a wide range of biological hazards. Bacteria, fungi, spores, viruses, parasites as well as degradation products such as endotoxins are present as aerosols or biological agents that adhere to biodegradable waste . These agents

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may cause diverse allergies, bronchitis, severe diseases of the mucosa like organic dust toxic syndrome, hemorrhagic fevers, brucellosis, diphtheria, Q fever, tuberculosis, viral hepatitis, leprosy, bacterial dysentery, meningitis and cholera. In landfills, animals (e.g. different bird species) may transmit infectious diseases.

[Biological Hazards. Safety Institute of Australia Ltd 2012.[

[Dutkiewicz, J., Jablonski, L. & Olenchock, S. A. Occupational biohazards: A review. American Journal of Industrial Medicine 14 (1988), 605–623.]

[Liukkonen, T., Kallio, N., Rautiala, S., Mäkinen, M. & Reiman, M. Työympäristön mikrobiologisten riskien hallinta massan ja paperin valmistuksessa. Metsäteollisuus 2010.]

[Maintenance and Occupational Safety and Health: A statistical picture. European risk observatory literature review. European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) 2010.]

[National Hazard Exposure Worker Surveillance: Exposure to biological hazards and the provision of controls against biological hazards in Australian workplaces. Safe Work Australia 2011.]

5. EQF and ECVET - The European educational policy instruments

The background of European educational policy

In the year 2000, an action and development plan for the economies of the European Member states, called Lisbon Strategy, was decided. The aim was to make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion"[1] within ten years until the year 2010.

Due to different educational traditions within the member states, there was a lack of transparency to qualifications between the states and therefore, a poor mutual recognition and acknowledgment of acquired learning services. To face these challenges, there were developed and introduced different instruments. Two of them, the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) are in the focus of this article.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

To make the qualifications between the member states of the European Union more comparable, the idea of a common framework for the assessment of qualifications has arisen. The main goal is to improve the mobility of European citizens, thru the transparency of qualifications "and contribute to meeting the requirements of supply and demand in the European labour "market." [2].

The framework covers vocational education as well as higher education and refers to full qualifications. The comparison of qualifications is based on the approach of learning outcomes. These outcomes are described along an eight level reference scale and consider non-formally as well as informally acquired skills. The eight different levels are described along the descriptors "knowledge" (=factual and theoretical), "skills" (=ability to apply knowledge) and "competences" (="proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities"[2].

To classify the different national qualifications to the EQF, the development and introduction of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) in the member states was recommended by the European Parliament and the Council on the Establishment[3].

The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)

The main goal of the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) is the improvement of mobility through the development of a process of consideration, recognition and

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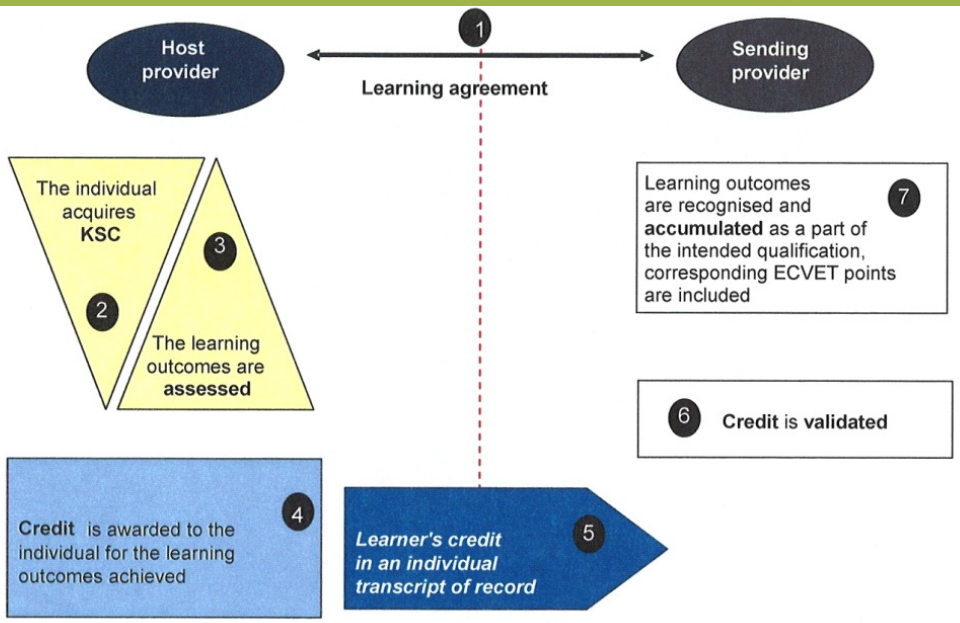

accumulation of learning units. The approach is, as well as the EQF, oriented on learning outcomes. They describe what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after the completion of a learning process. In difference to the EQF, ECVET covers learning units and not full qualifications.

The figure below [4] describes in which way ECVET works and what steps are taken until the process of consideration, recognition and validation is finished.

In the beginning, there is a learning agreement between the host and the sending provider. The qualification will be described and grouped into learning units with corresponding learning outcomes. During the stay abroad, the learner acquires knowledge, skills and competences, which are assessed by the host provider. For those learning outcomes, the host provider award credit points which are documented in an individual transcript of record. In a last step, the learning outcomes are recognized and accumulated by the sending provider, as a part of the intended qualification.

The ECVET is applied gradually from 2012 in the Member States. A review of the ECVET recommendation should be concluded till the end of year 2014.

Instruments of the European educational policy in THESEIS

As mentioned before, the EQF refers to full occupational qualifications while ECVET is more individual and requires arrangements between the sending and the hosting provider. During THESEIS project, (for the training material that will be collected and/or developed based on identified training needs), the approach of learning outcomes will be used. This will contribute to transparency and comparability of learning units for different partner countries, participating in the project.

It will also matter for the contribution of quality aspects in learning outcomes.

[1] European Council (2000): http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/00100-r1.en0.htm .

[2]European Parliament Council (2008): Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, Official Journal of the European Union.

[3] Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (2012): http://www.deutscherqualifikationsrahmen.de/ .

[4]CEDEFOP 2010: The development of ECVET in Europe, Working Paper No. 10, Luxemburg: Publications Office of the European Union.

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6. 2nd coordination Meeting

The 2nd coordination meeting of THESEIS project was realized in Prague, on the 7th and 8th of June 2012. The meeting was hosted by the Czech Occupational Safety Research Institute (VUBP).

During the meeting, organisational, technical and financial issues regarding the project progress were thoroughly discussed. Proposals for the contents of 1st and 2nd surveys as well as the country and synthesis report, the development of training material were presented. Details on the meeting aims, partners' discussions and views, results are included in meeting minutes. List of participants, meeting's agenda and photos can be accessed in THESEIS website

7. Country reports

All country reports elaborated in 8 European countries (Greece, Belgium, Germany, Finland, Czech Republic, Poland, Sweden, and Bulgaria) have been completed. The country reports were based on the results of 2 surveys conducted in each participating country.

The first survey focuses on the requested and available knowledge, skills and competences on OSH issues – Use of Questionnaires and the second survey indentifies and examined the existing National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) for the workers occupied in eco-industry.

The compilation of Synthesis Report follows.

8. Next Planned Action – Events

Training Material – Services

After the completion of all country reports, elaborated in 8 European countries (Greece, Belgium, Germany, Finland, Czech Republic, Poland, Sweden, Bulgaria), and the compilation of their synthesis report, THESEIS partners will focus their efforts on

a) the Identification – Designation of Learning Outcomes of workers occupied in waste water and solid waste management, for Health and Safety issues

Learning outcomes will be specified based on the questionnaires assessment (see first article of current Newsletter) and the identification of National Qualifications Framework and Jobs' Descriptions of workers occupied in pollution management sector, in the abovementioned 8 European countries. Then, learning outcomes will be used for the collection and development of THESEIS project didactical contents.

b) Grouping of the learning outcomes in distinct learning units and described along knowledge, skills, competence descriptors

Learning outcomes will also be grouped in distinct learning units and described along knowledge, skills, competence descriptors (EQF, ECVET).

c) Configuration of VCP training services

The Swedish Tele-Pedagogic Knowledge Center will configure the training services that will be provided by the Virtual Community Platform (VCP), according the results (training needs, learning outcomes) of the final synthesis report and the proposed Vocational training model.

Articles to National Press and Magazines – Presentations to Seminars

All partners will prepare and publicize one technical article at national press in each partner country. The articles will concern a presentation of the project and the main outcomes achieved, so far. THESEIS dissemination activities will also include presentations to seminars at local and national level.

Additionally, country and synthesis report results will be disseminated to project interested stakeholders. THESEIS project results will be uploaded to ADAM platform for its contents renewal.

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THESEIS PROJECT

THESEIS e-mail:
info@theseis-training.eu

THESEIS website:
www.theseis-training.eu

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Frequently Asked Questions FAQ

Please post your questions either on THESEIS project and/or other issues related to Occupational Health and Safety training, vocational training, etc. by contacting us via theseis e-mail: info@theseis-training.eu.

An expert from the THESEIS working teams will undertake the task to answer the posted question and upload it on FAQs field of THESEIS website.

Project's Interim report

Finally THESEIS project coordinator (SIGMA Consultants, Greece) will compile and submit to EACEA the project's Interim report. Alongside, the THESEIS Interim report, the Interim Quality Report will also be produced. The Interim Quality report will contain the results of the implemented measures for quality management and assurance from the project start to the half time (30-12-2012) of the project duration.

Next coordination meeting

Next scheduled meeting of the THESEIS partners is the 3rd coordination meeting that will be held in Nurnberg, Germany, during December 2012. It will be hosted by the Forschungsinstitut Betriebliche Bildung (f-bb – Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training).

9. Related Projects

You can get extra information of other ongoing projects that operate in the same field of interest as THESEIS, through the Related Projects Link of projects website.

If you wish to enrich the project list please send the proposed projects at the following e-mail address: info@theseis-training.eu

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