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CE Coordinator¹

What role does the CE Coordinator play in the manufacturing company?


MASCHINENBAUTAGE 
MACHINERY CONFERENCE COLOGNE


KÖLN

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Practical solutions for the manufacturer in the Single European Market





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Introduction

CE compliance is a corporate task often taken lightly by those responsible. Statements such as *"We build safe machinery, after all, nothing has ever happened"* are the norm. But things can quickly get out of hand if something does finally happen, as the omissions of the past catch then up with the manufacturer. But who ensures that legally compliant products leave the plant? This doesn't happen by chance and is certainly not a fully automatic process. Appropriate technical knowledge and a suitable organization are prerequisites. The managing director is responsible for the suitable organization. It's not enough to simply designate an employee as the "CE Agent" for this task, one that is frequently and incorrectly regarded as a bureaucratic nuisance, with the order: *"Take care of it, but don't channel any effort into it."* The person responsible for "CE" also has to have the corresponding technical knowledge, the necessary experience and, what is very important, the corresponding competencies. But things often start to break down in the area of competencies.

The CE coordinator in the corporate organization

The CE Coordinator, a designation which suits the task well, is a part of "compliance management" in the manufacturing company. If correctly implemented, this task can best be performed from an administrative unit, as the CE Coordinator should have authority over all persons involved in placing a product on the market (from purchasing through planning and design and finally up to Sales) as far as "CE compliance" is concerned. This person establishes the conditions to ensure that the legal requirements for the product are met. The CE Coordinator therefore ideally reports only to management. This would go far in ensuring from an organizational standpoint that legally compliant products leave the plant. Of course this is augmented by integration of the personnel involved in the CE tasks that are to be performed. Because the CE Coordinator is not by definition there — as is frequently practiced — to perform all "CE tasks" in the company. This is neither practically nor legally possible.

HANS-J. OSTERMANN
CE-COORDINATOR

Other organizational forms are certainly also possible and are also practiced, but in my experience, these have more or less significant weaknesses that fall under the heading of "*too many cooks spoiling the broth*", or "*an employee in Department xyz has no business telling me what to do as a sales manager; I handle the contracts*". This kind of organization will naturally lead to mistakes.

Required knowledge for the CE coordinator

On the one hand, the CE Coordinator has the necessary expert knowledge to technically evaluate the products. On the other hand, he also has the legal knowledge with regard to engineering law. This especially includes the Equipment and Product Safety Law (GPSG) with its ordinances (GPSGV) - and underlying European law, especially the following for machinery and plant construction:

- Machinery Directive,
- Pressure Equipment Directive,
- ATEX Directive,
- EMC Directive
and
- Low Voltage Directive,

as well as knowledge of product liability legislation. Knowledge of environmental law, such as for the subsequent disposal requirements that are to be accounted for, is also becoming increasingly necessary. Experience has shown that lawyers have difficulties with these tasks (domestic technical market is not normally part of his studies, and engineering knowledge is completely lacking), for which reason engineers are always needed for this task. This also always applies in the licensing authorities, for example, where engineers are generally involved in law governing placing a product on the market, from the local supervisory official up to department and division heads in the ministries. However, lawyers are frequently consulted for purely legal matters, inherently resulting in interdisciplinary teamwork where such matters are handled.

Summary

If he does his job well, the CE Coordinator is in essence a sort of mythical farm animal that can produce eggs, wool, milk and meat in abundance, handling a tremendous variety of tasks in "*product compliance management*", bearing a correspondingly large responsibility but is also of great value to the company. Thanks to the CE Coordinator, the managing director can sleep more peacefully when it comes to product responsibility. This has already been recognized in the market, for which reason there are increasingly more training programs for this task. Corresponding offers can be found by searching online for "CE Coordinator". The federal state of Baden-Württemberg is also responding to this development with initiatives such as "CE-coach" - <http://www.cecoach.de> -, which is also supported by many prestigious companies and universities.