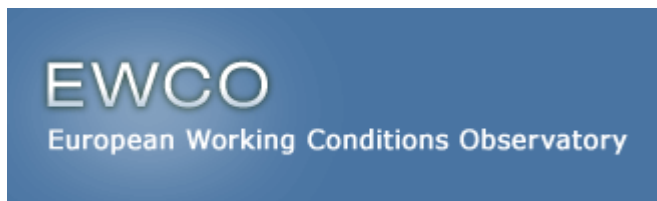


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## Improving working conditions has positive impact on safety environment

*Data from the Netherlands Survey on Working Conditions show that poor working conditions and a need for measures to improve them are related to a negative perception of the workplace safety environment. The latter is rated relatively positively in sectors with dangerous and physically demanding working conditions such as construction and manufacturing, where measures to improve working conditions are often taken; the education sector scores lowest in this regard.*

Recent findings from the National Survey on Working Conditions (*Nationale Enquête Arbeidsomstandigheden*, [NEA](#)) provide a closer look into the way that Dutch employees experience the safety environment of the companies for which they work. The NEA is a survey of about 25,000 employees that covers topics regarding working conditions, work characteristics and health (Van Hooff, Van den Bossche and Smulders, 2008). In the NEA, the safety environment is measured by means of four indicators, based on a questionnaire by Zohar and Luria (2005). These indicators are as follows.

- 'At work, much attention is paid to suggestions from employees to improve safety.'
- 'At work, employees receive a lot of information about working safely.'
- 'At work, when safety issues arise they are dealt with immediately.'
- 'Working safely is encouraged at my work.'

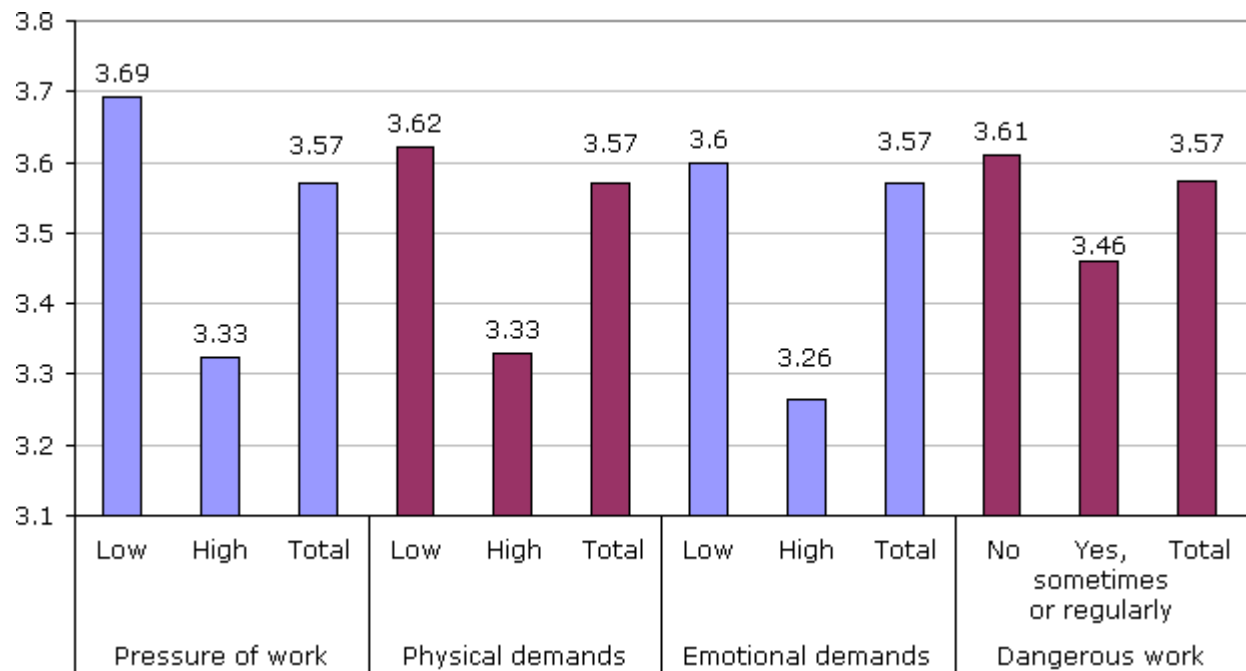
## Rating workplace safety environment

Dutch employees rate the safety environment of their company on average as 3.6 on a five-point scale, with five being the highest score in terms of workplace safety environment and one being the lowest. Male employees tend to rate the safety environment slightly higher (3.6) than female employees do (3.5). In terms of age groups, workers aged 25 years or more rate the safety environment higher (3.7) than younger workers do (3.4).

## Relation with working conditions

Analyses reveal that working conditions and the workplace safety environment are strongly related. As expected, employees with unfavourable working conditions, such as high work pressure, dangerous work and high physical and emotional demands, rate the safety environment of their company significantly lower compared with employees who are not working under these conditions (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Safety environment, by working conditions\***



Note: \* Workers assessed the workplace safety environment on a five-point scale, with five being the highest score in terms of safety and one being the lowest.

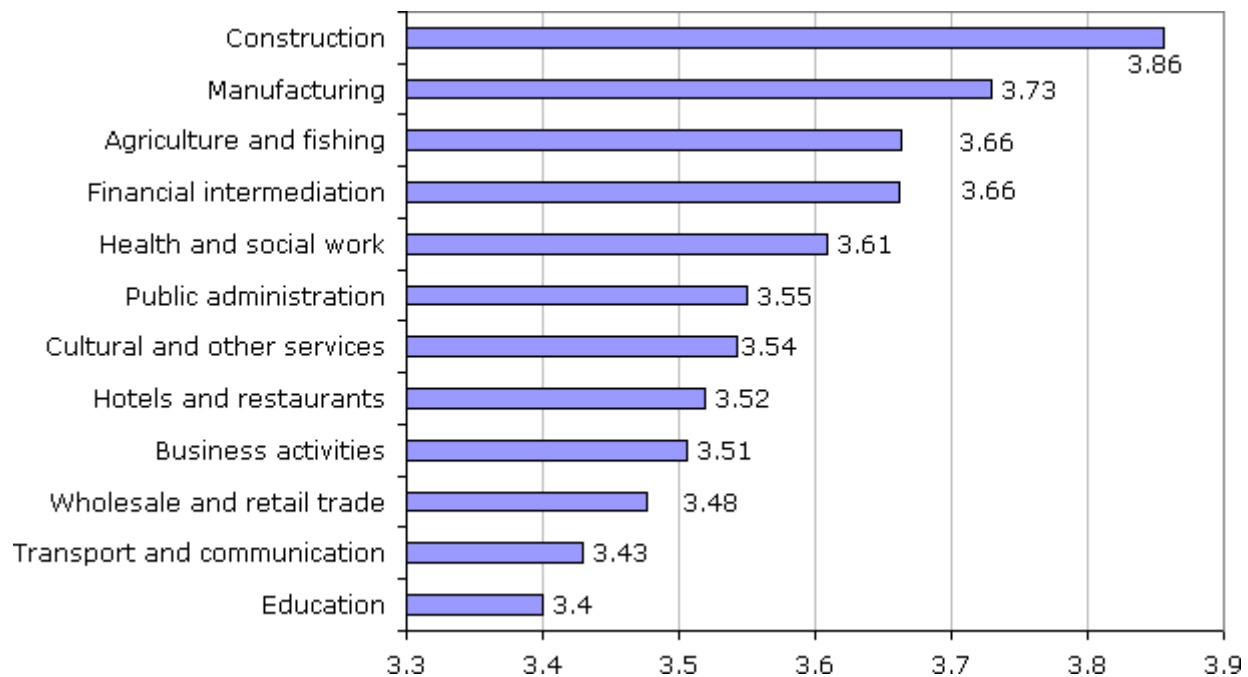
Source: NEA 2005 and 2006

Safety environment, by working conditions

## Sectoral impact

Significant differences arise in the workplace safety environment rating among sectors of economic activity (Figure 2). In the construction sector, the safety environment is rated highest (3.86), whereas it is rated lowest in the education sector (3.4). Remarkably, the safety environment appears to be rated relatively high in sectors generally associated with dangerous and physically demanding working conditions.

**Figure 2: Safety environment, by sector**



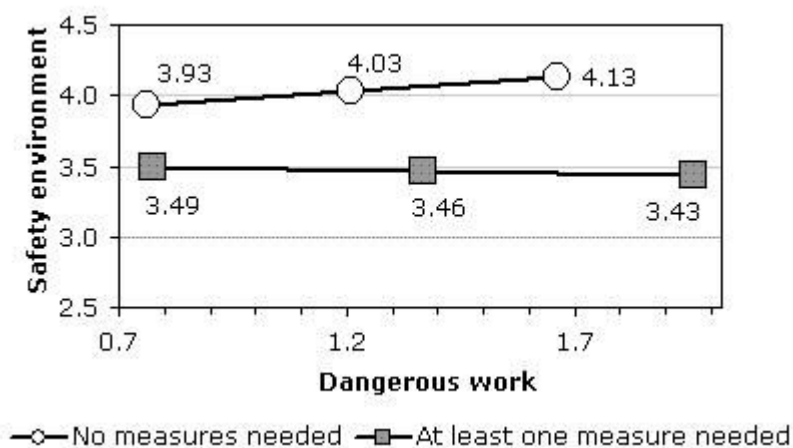
Source: NEA 2005 and 2006

Safety environment, by sector

### Effect of safety measures

Next to working conditions, the necessity to take safety measures – according to the employee – appears to be related to the workplace safety environment. When safety measures are not needed, according to the employee, the safety environment is rated higher than when measures are needed. The safety environment is rated even higher when working conditions are reported to be poor but, according to the employee, no measures are needed. Figure 3 shows an example of this effect for dangerous work; similar figures are found for physical and emotional demands and pressure of work.

**Figure 3: Relation of working conditions, the need for safety measures and safety environment**



Source: NEA 2005 and 2006

Relation of working conditions, the need for safety measures and safety environment

The fact that the workplace safety environment is rated higher in sectors with dangerous work and physically demanding working conditions could be due to the fact that, in these high risk areas, safety measures are taken relatively more often than in sectors associated with less obvious and less acknowledged psychosocial risk factors.

## Conclusions

Previous research has shown that the safety environment is a predictor for safety behaviour and occupational accidents within companies (see, for example, Gimeno et al, 2005). In this sense, more knowledge on factors related to the safety environment of the company may give employers the opportunity to create safer workplaces. The results of the present analyses imply that taking measures to improve working conditions has a substantial positive impact on the safety environment of the company, especially when working conditions are reported to be poor and employees consider that measures are needed.

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Maartje Bakhuis Roozeboom, TNO Work and Employment

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- **ID:** NL0902019I
- **Author:** Maartje Bakhuis Roozeboom
- **Institution:** TNO Work and Employment
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