

Italy: the government wants to scrap the Institute for Prevention and Occupational Safety

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Within the framework of its "economic manoeuvre" to restore public accounts, the government is planning the removal of the Higher Institute for Prevention and Occupational Safety (Ispesl), the only research center in this area in the country. Its job will be performed by the National Institution for Insurance against Accidents at Work (Inail). Observers say this is creating a conflict of interest since the Inail thus becomes responsible for research on occupational diseases for which it will have to grant compensation.

On 2 June, researchers, engineers, doctors and employees occupied the headquarters of the Higher Institute for Prevention and Occupational Safety, the job of which will now be performed by the National Institution for Insurance against Accidents at Work (Inail). The staff learned in the press that their institution was listed among the "useless structure" the government is cutting via the new decree containing budget restrictions. However, for 30 years, the Ispesl has been "guaranteeing a contribution of irreplaceable knowledge, experience and preparation for the Italian productive system in the area of the protection of workers' health and safety" it reminded, a work both recognized by the national and international scientific community and by union and employers' organizations. Working with the International Health Organization, a "focal point" of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the Ispesl is also the technical referent for several national and local organizations, in addition to helping the Labor and Health Departments as well as regions and provinces develop their health plans.

The decision is even harder to understand since, in spite of reduced State contributions since 2000, "all its activities allowed it to self-fund (€35m) up to more than 60% the State's funding," and that the savings brought by the removal would amount to €426,248. Thus, this removal is seen as a "30-year jump backwards" which "once again isolates Italy from Europe since, in no other European country, the crisis has led to the removal of research institutions on health and safety at work."

Source: Planet Labor