

Workplace Investigations

Contributing Editors

Phil Linnard at Slaughter and May
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01. What legislation, guidance and/or policies govern a workplace investigation?

Netherlands

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Dutch employment law does not provide for a timeframe within which an internal investigation must be launched. However, it is important for an employer who suspects abuse or irregularities, to start an internal investigation without delay. In essence, that means that as soon as management, or – depending on the specific circumstances – the person who is authorised to decide on disciplinary sanctions against a certain employee, becomes aware of a potential abuse or irregularity, all measures to initiate an internal investigation should be taken promptly. If this is not done, the employer may lose the opportunity to take certain disciplinary actions.

The legal framework relating to an investigation by an employer into the acts and omissions of an employee are determined by, among other things, section 7:611 of the Dutch Civil Code (DCC) that stipulates good employer practices; Section 7:660 DCC (right to give instructions to the employee); the European Convention on Human Rights; the Dutch Constitution; the General Data Processing Regulation; and, if the employer uses a private investigation agency, the Private Security Organisations and Detective Agencies Act and the Privacy Code of Conduct for Private Investigation Agencies.

The legal basis from which the employer derives the authority to investigate can be based on the employer's right to give instructions (section 7:660 DCC). Pursuant to this section, the employer has – to a certain extent – the right to give instructions to the employee “which are intended to promote good order in the undertaking of the employer”. In many cases, an investigation of a work-related incident will aim to promote good order within the company. As such, the investigation is trying to:

- find the truth;
- sanction the perpetrator; and
- prevent repetition.

Instructing an employee to cooperate with an internal investigation falls within the scope of the right to instruct.

Subsequently, the employer must behave as a good employer during the investigation, pursuant to section 7:611 DCC. This is coloured by the classic principles of careful investigation: the principle of justification, the principle of trust, the principle of proportionality, the principle of subsidiarity and the principle of equality. Furthermore, the principle of hearing both sides of the argument applies and there must be a

concrete suspicion of wrongdoing.

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Switzerland

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There is no specific legal regulation for internal investigations in Switzerland. The legal framework is derived from general rules such as the employer's duty of care, the employee's duty of loyalty and the employee's data protection rights. Depending on the context of the investigation, additional legal provisions may apply; for instance, additional provisions of the Swiss Federal Act on Data Protection or the Swiss Criminal Code.

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21. How do you handle a parallel criminal and/or regulatory investigation?



Netherlands

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In case there is a parallel criminal or regulatory investigation usually consultation between the investigators and the authorities takes place. Agreements are then sometimes made about the investigation conducted by / for the employer. In some cases, the authorities will ask to stay the investigation. There is no policy from the government on this topic.

There are situations where the authorities can compel the employer to share evidence. This depends on the exact circumstances of the case. For instance if the employer is the suspect in a criminal case.

It does occur that the authorities are given evidence upon request without the authorities having to order the extradition of evidence.

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The actions of the employer may carry through to a subsequent state proceeding. First and foremost, any prohibitions on the use of evidence must be considered. Whereas in civil proceedings the interest in establishing the truth must merely prevail for exploitation (article 152 paragraph 2, Swiss Civil Procedure Code), in criminal proceedings, depending on the nature of the unlawful act, there is a risk that the evidence may not be used (see question 27 and article 140 et seq, Swiss Civil Procedure Code).

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