

Summary

Special environmental investigative officials (in Dutch: milieu-boa's) are in charge of the investigation of violations of the environmental regulations (as described in domain II of the 'Circulaire Buitengewoon opsporingsambtenaar' (Circular on the Special Investigative Official)). They are employed by the National Inspectorates and local authorities, but also by private employers. To use their powers of investigation, special environmental investigative officials must meet the requirements of professional competence set down in the afore-mentioned circular.

Some time ago, these requirements of professional competence have been raised. According to the Prosecution Service and a representation of employers of special environmental investigative officials, both the quality of the legal enforcement of environmental regulations and the professionalism of the special environmental investigative officials were in need of improvement. To meet the raised requirements of professional competence, a new training programme for special environmental investigative officials has been developed, consisting of a once-only continuation course, or a brush-up course and a cycle of permanent retraining and refresher courses (in Dutch: PHB). The PHB consists of four modules, one of which a special environmental investigative official must follow each year. Special environmental investigative officials are required to complete this programme after qualifying for their basic certificate and in conjunction with their regular work. As of 2010, a cooperation of five training institutes offers this training programme: the Police Academy, the training institute of the Dutch Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA), the Living Environment and Transport Inspectorate (ILT), the Administrative Academy and the Water Academy.

The goal of this study has been to provide insight into the functioning of the new training programme and, more in general, into the intended professionalization of special environmental investigative officials. The main research question was: how does the training programme function, and to what extent can it contribute to the intended professionalization of the special environmental investigative official? The study has been carried out in the fall of 2014, based on a study of documents and more than twenty interviews with representatives of the Prosecution Service, the training institutes and employers. We have analysed the training programme, focusing on teaching materials, teacher instructions and exams; in addition, we have attended classes and talked to teachers and course members.

The study shows that the intended professionalization of special environmental investigative officials has indeed been started. This process seems to have begun to pay off: special environmental investigative officials can use their powers of investigation more actively and self-consciously. They are surer of their ground. Yet, at the same time, it is still unclear to what extent the professionalism of the special environmental investigative official has been raised to the required level. Beforehand, the intended improvement of this professionalism has not been sufficiently operationalised to make this possible: at which moment will the intended professionalism be reached and how should this be established?

We can conclude that the curriculum of the continuation course and the permanent retraining and refresher courses generally fit in well with the special environmental investigative official's job profile. As such, they should contribute to the professionalization in view. Some components of the training programme can still be

improved. Different parts of the programme are in need of the introduction of, for instance, more depth (with regard to the competences to be learned), balance (between theory and practice), and coherence (a continuous learning curve). (External) supervision of the quality of exams is missing as well. In this context, the closing chapter contains a number of suggestions for improvements.