

# Portugal

## Promoting Workplace Health and Well-Being on Almada City Council



### About the city and authority

Almada is a city of Arabian origin, located on the southern edge of the Tagus River, towards Lisbon. The middle-sized council is composed of 11 freguesias, with a total area of 70 km<sup>2</sup> and a resident population of around 160.000 inhabitants. The council occupies the 8th national place in concerns of social and economic development indicators (global development, income, comfort, education).

Almada City Council integrates the structures of Almada City Council (CM) and the Municipal Waterworks and Sanitation Services (SMAS) and currently employs about 2.100 workers, most of them with civil servant status. Around 1.600 employees work at CM, the majority of whom are male (60%), blue collar (63%), with an average age of 41 and average employment duration of 13.2 years. At SMAS, the staff majority is also male and blue collar (70%), the average age is 44 with an average employment duration of 16 years.

### Innovative principles

In 1988, Almada City Council decided to set up a Health, Safety and Quality of Working Life Project, aimed to promote the health and well-being of the workforce, to improve the work environment and quality of products and services, to increase equity in health and health care, and ensure equal opportunities for all employees, integrating these objectives in Almada City Council mission ("to build up a city for its citizens"). The Occupational Health Team currently car-

ries out more than forty activities and programmes, based on innovative principles, such as:

- Integrated approach to health at work and health care
- Written policy for Health, Well-Being and Quality of Working Life Promotion, as part of the Corporate Social Welfare plan (including health insurance plans: health, life, personal and work accidents)
- Adoption of workplace health promotion concept and methodology (using a project management approach: marketing, needs, expectations and preferences assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, monitoring and follow-up)
- Multi-disciplinary health team (involving occupational medicine, ergonomics, occupational and clinical psychology, industrial hygiene and safety, family medicine, occupational health nursing, social service support, marketing & communication)
- Involvement of management and employees representatives (including Workers Council and Occupational Health and Well-Being Joint Commission)
- Management of the activities by projects or health programmes
- Specific information and training system and definition of a marketing and communication strategy
- Specific health budget.

The project is a part of the Corporate Social Welfare plan, guaranteeing other benefits such as: Health insurance plan; refectory; milk distribution to the blue-collar workers; scholarships for working

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students; pre-retirement support for workers; structures and support for workers' children: day nursery, kindergarten, spare time occupation, holiday colonies and Christmas party, with gift distribution; commemorative lunch on City Day (24th June); commemorative lunch for female workers on Women's Day (8th March), with distribution of flowers and gifts; integration of new workers, involving the Occupational Health Service, the staff department and the destiny service.

**Project infrastructure**

This is based on the Occupational Health and Well-Being Joint Commission, constituted by management and employees representatives, including administration leadership and technical support from the Occupational Health Service. The work of the Commission is oriented towards workplace health promotion, based on the negotiation by consent of the aims and measures included in the Health Promotion Plan, articulated with a "Health at Work Mediators' Net", constituted by employees with additional training. The Commission approves and applies the health promotion intervention, considering needs, expectations, the involvement, participation and the main problems, as well as the purpose of workers empowerment, giving them the tools to choose the best way, preventing damages, with measures oriented towards individuals and the work environment. The Occupational Health Service provides technical support by means of a

multi-disciplinary health team, distributed over 2 main areas:

- Health at work, which involves occupational medicine, ergonomics, occupational psychology, industrial hygiene and safety, marketing & communication
- Clinical services, an autonomous unit, that guarantees the personalised health care and assistance following sudden and long-term illness of employees, their families and retired employees

The "Health at Work Mediators' Net", is constituted by workers who are voluntary and/or invited by their superiors, and who are provided with training in first-aid and given specific training by the Occupational Health Service.

**Action areas**

■ **Health, safety and industrial hygiene at work**

Almada City Council provides human and finance resources to fulfil their obligations in this domain, creating an internal and private service and supporting its activities.

■ **Prevention of alcohol-related problems at the workplace**

The programme is aimed at premature identification of employees with alcohol-related problems; provision of individual support to employees, management and organisation; treatment and professional (re)habilitation; management and employees' training; information on the impact and consequences of alcohol consumption at workplace. We began in 1990 with information and education measures oriented towards

the whole organisation and to specific groups; stimulating voluntary self-control with proper equipment; organised working meeting with management and began the clinical screen and individual and group training. The diagnosis led us to find excessive consumption by 2 in 3 workers of the professional groups evaluated. Since then, we have trained managers to enable them to deal with alcohol problems in their workplace; training was also given to union representatives and workers representatives at the Joint Commission; the Commission worked upon principles, rules, recommendations and circuits to enable the organisation to deal with the problem. We have been meeting with several management levels since 1999 in order to stimulate premature identification and report situations in need of support.

■ **AIDS at workplace**

In 1993 we characterised attitudes and behaviour towards AIDS in a group of 208 blue and white-collar employees using information and training sessions at the workplace and by distributing information material and using audiovisual equipment. The prejudice, doubts and fears originated by the illness were supported by several measures, of which we distinguish the ones taken by the Joint Commission: protection of individual rights and support measures for infected employees; information/training regarding the ways to avoid the infection; support from the management and colleagues when needed; definition of a policy on the subject implying the organisation, essentially supported on the principle that the AIDS

infection is no reason to consider people incapable to work or to make hidden screen tests during health examinations.

### ■ **Relaxing postural exercises at workplace**

We provided individual support at the workplace to employees who wanted to obtain training and information on relaxing exercises so that they could practice autonomously for 10 to 15 minutes every day at their regular workplace, in order to improve individual well-being and promote autonomous practice of relaxing postural exercises suited to their function and physical activities. Currently, the programme involves about 90 workers, mostly female and white-collar, to whom we provide a first session to present the programme and its objectives, perceive and gather experience on people's habits, needs and expectations, which are monitored and evaluated regularly giving consideration to assent, motivation, perception of the obtained benefit, individual and organisational facilities and constraints.

### ■ **Female workforce health promotion**

We have provided regular screenings since 1991 in order to detect and prevent the risk of cancer of the uterus and the breast. This has been supported by information and training sessions oriented towards the premature diagnosis; in 1992 (before the law was passed) we began "Pregnancy Support at Workplace", aimed at increasing the awareness of pregnant women on subjects related to pregnancy, birth and puerperium; promote physical and mental

preparation during this period; ensure professional re-integration, contributing to health and well-being at work.

### ■ **"Heart on Wheels"**

Initiated in 1995 and repeated in May each year as this is the "Month of the Heart" in Portugal, we join employees and their families on a cycling trip between Almada and Costa da Caparica, a convivial opportunity that is part of an initiative that aims at drawing attention to the importance of physical activity in order to prevent coronary diseases. Furthermore, the bicycle is promoted as a pleasant form of alternative transport, helping maintain physical health and individual well-being. The "cycle tourists" take advantage of the convivial opportunity to take a walk, wearing a T-shirt and cap with the initiative logo, receive participation medals, and have the chance of winning a bike. After this colleagues and families sit down to a communal lunch.

### ■ **Social support for problem cases**

The precariousness of the employees development indicators and the prevalence of grave social problem cases, impact on absenteeism and the organisational climate, these are the foundations for providing social support and family therapy to problem cases in the context of sudden and long-term illness and health surveillance; the support given to families, management and organisation, mediating and acting with the available resources at the City Council and public and private resources; support to interned workers and creation of a supportive climate at the workplace. The cases are identified

by the Health Mediators' Net, by the management, personal initiative or in the context of the technical and clinical activities of the Occupational Health Service (e.g. alcohol and drugs consumption, ...)

### ■ **Information, communication and image system for health promotion**

The geographic dispersion of the City Council workplaces and the employees' mobility, the need to improve communication, participation, training and information and the implementation of the entire organisation for health and well-being promotion aims were the foundations for the specific information concept, communication and image system, constituted by our support and materials (leaflets, placards at strategic places at the workplace, ...) bearing logos and key-phrases for different programmes.

### **A supportive structure**

Almada City Council develops and/or supports several activities and programmes in partnership with local institutions, in order to stimulate health promotion at workplace, such as: elementary schools, social solidarity private institutions, University of Science and Technology, Almada Environmental Agency, Hospital Garcia de Orta Friends League, Preventive Cardiology Institute of Almada, Lions' Club Almada (Almada Health Fair), ..., who often use the City Council premises to organise events on health promotion and in particular on workplace health promotion. The city

offers extensive sports facilities for physical activity, thus enabling people to promote and maintain their physical condition, in particular for the active population and also for vulnerable groups (disabled, pregnant, elder people, children, ...)

### **Awards and merit certificates**

Between 1992 and 2000 the Almada City Council Occupational Health Service received a total of seven awards and merit certificates for its successful performance, such as

1994 – distinguished by the European Foundation for the intervention on the psychosocial aspects affecting absenteeism

1999 – distinguished with a Merit Certificate from the European Commission/European Network AIDS and Enterprises, in Brussels, for the support given to workers infected with the HIV virus

2000 – received the Quality Award on the Public Administration of Setúbal District from the Municipalities Association and Portuguese Quality Institute for the purposes and results of its global action.