



ENWHP Briefings

No. 2

Promoting health: Responding to the challenges in the new world of work

The world of work is undergoing profound changes which are having a substantial impact on companies and the health of their employees. Greater competition requires faster action along with a higher quality of product and it is increasing the pressures on time and on employee efficiency. The global contest and the advance of new information technologies are calling for a high degree of adaptability and a permanent willingness to learn. Other challenges such as personnel reduction and the introduction of new employment conditions such as part-time and tele-work, the increasing proportion of ageing employees and greater service-orientation can only be met successfully with motivated, well-qualified and above all, healthy employees.

In future, Europe's companies will need to be able to rely on employees who are more flexible, efficient and able to learn, but the companies themselves will have to create the right conditions. Traditional occupational safety and health is unable to cope with the new developments. However, by improving the work organisation and working environment, workplace health promotion can be instrumental in mastering the changes needed to deal with the symptoms arising in the new world of work, such as work-related stress or mobbing. These represent an enormous burden not only on the employees. Companies also face astronomical costs incurred by illness and production losses and the subsequent decline in their competitiveness.

The new world of work is also having a major impact on the social security and health insurance systems in Europe. Successes in health and safety at the workplace result in verifiable lower costs for the social security systems, be it due to the reduction in the use of medical, social and rehabilitative services or to the increase in the contributions paid into the statutory pension insurance funds.

In the Treaty of Amsterdam the European Union acknowledged these challenges and has placed the creation of a healthy world of work well up on the agenda in European occupational safety and health policy. The European Commission has therefore given its support to the work of the ENWHP, which advocates the design of working conditions geared to the future and disseminates "good practice" of workplace health promotion in order to prepare employees and companies for tomorrow's world of work.