

Greece

Ethel Bus Company

About the company

ETHEL Bus Company was created by O.A.S.A. (Athens Urban Transportation System). It is a company of the wider public sector and legally an Entity of the Private Sector regulated legislatively by Law 2414/96 that stipulates the functioning of companies of the public sector.

ETHEL is in charge of public transportation through the use of thermal buses in the areas of jurisdiction of OASA (wider Athens). It owns 1,800 buses and 6 coach houses. The buses are maintained and repaired by ETHEL, which owns the technical infrastructure for these tasks. The company has 5,977 employees and serves approximately 300 bus routes conducting 13,500 itineraries on a daily basis. ETHEL annually covers the needs of Athens' public for 350 million transportations covering approximately 100 million kilometres. The company is financially supported by the tickets paid for by the public and by governmental subsidies.

Importance of OHS

Occupational Health and Safety is of central importance to ETHEL given the number of citizens it serves on a daily basis, whose safety is directly related to the level of safety and health of the ETHEL drivers. ETHEL authorities have implemented safety and health promotion activities which go beyond compulsory legislative activities.

ETHEL has a very strong union and active union representation. Besides the OHS services (occupational physician

and safety engineer), there is a very active health and safety committee. This factor is considered as the main reason for the innovative OHS and health promotion activities, which are implemented in the company. The health and safety of employees is considered a serious issue and appropriate actions are undertaken to ensure the wellbeing of employees.

A supportive structure

The projects and activities described in this report are initiated and coordinated by the department of Occupational Medicine, Protection and Prevention of Occupational health risks, which is staffed by 3 occupational physicians and 2 nurses. The department is a primary level substructure, legislatively based on the framework of Law 1568/85 and Presidential Decree 17/96. According to legislation it has an advisory role and offers counseling services to ETHEL employees. The service has the responsibility of planning and implementing the OHS and health promotion activities while the overall supervision, management and control of the programme is with the administrative board and the general advisory director.

Clear objectives

The main aims of the programme, which are jointly set and agreed upon by the service and company's authorities, are the following:

- Surveillance (based on employee completed questionnaires, and known occupational hazards)



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Contact:
Ministry of Labour and Social Security
Elisabeth Galanopoulou
Phone: +301-1-3214147
E-mail: healthpr@compulink.gr

Hellenic Institute for Health and Safety at Work
Constantina Lomi
Phone: +301-1-8200100
E-mail: lomi.c@elinyae.gr

Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine
Pania Karnaki
Phone: +301-1-7482915
E-mail: ispm@compulink.gr

- Locating and appraising occupational and environmental hazards
- Contributing to the ergonomic design of work stations, rosters etc
- Providing information and training to employees and employers on OHS matters
- Planning and implementing health education and health promotion activities
- Contributing to the company's efforts to reduce environmental pollution.

Statutory OHS measures

Many precautions are taken to secure employees' health and safety. ETHEL authorities have placed notices in areas, which could be potentially harmful for the safety of employees for example in workshops and garages. Furthermore, all precautions are taken against fires with a fire extinguishing system being established.

The Labour Inspectorate has conducted on site inspections at ETHEL. No violations of the OHS law were reported and only suggestions were made to the company's management for improvement of certain areas.

Voluntary OHS measures

ETHEL's OHS service conducts various medical examinations and tests to evaluate and monitor the health of its employees.

- Personal medical file: The OHS service is responsible for the completion of personal medical files of

employees that include medical and occupational history.

- Clinical examination: Clinical examinations include the systematic monitoring and evaluation of employee health through physical, neurological, cardiological and respiratory examinations.
- Laboratory examinations: Employees undergo periodic laboratory examinations to monitor their hearing and optic acuity and cardiac and respiratory functioning.
- Tetanus vaccinations: ETHEL employees undergo tetanus vaccinations conducted by the company's occupational physicians.
- Supplementary monitoring and sleep-apnoea syndrome checkup: This especially dangerous syndrome for both ETHEL drivers and clients is examined using certain drivers in close coordination with the laboratory for the research of sleep disorders of the University of Athens.
- Supplementary laboratory examinations for newly hired personnel: According to legislation all newly hired personnel have to undergo specific health checkups.
- Psychometric examinations: These tests are done as part of a larger study conducted among a number of different occupational sectors in Greece. Through the use of automated electronic equipment (VIENNA TEST SYSTEM) psychometric measurements are taken in order to evaluate the driving ability of ETHEL employees.
- Mental health: Attempts are being made to expand mental health services, which are offered at ETHEL. In

cooperation with the Centre of Aviation Medicine special cases are examined in order to determine possible psychopathology among a number of drivers.

- Chemical exposure: In cooperation with the Hellenic Institute of Health and Safety at Work plans are being made to conduct tests for measuring CO exposure and other chemical exposures among ETHEL employees.

Employees undergo a full health check-up after being absent because of illness and their medical files and records are examined after requests for change of work positions. Requests for changing work positions are primarily due to health complaints and in particular cardiovascular diseases (30%), musculoskeletal problems (20%) followed by gastroenteric, respiratory disorders and metabolic disorders.

Participating in the European LIFE programme

ETHEL participates in the European LIFE programme in cooperation with the Medical School of the University of Athens. A random sample of ETHEL drivers (non-smokers) underwent medical tests in order to measure exposure to healthendangering physical, chemical, biological and ergonomic factors. The first results indicate that employees of public transport companies show higher morbidity levels compared to other occupations. Research has indicated that the factors to which bus drivers are exposed are responsible for high morbidity levels:

- Physical: noise, dust, repetitive movements, fluctuations in temperature
- Chemical: Environmental pollution
- Biological: Viruses, microbes
- Ergonomic: Rosters, elevated stress, disturbance of biorhythms

Dealing with WHP

- ETHEL takes part in a European longitudinal study, coordinated by the National School of Public Health and the Medical School of Athens University, which investigates the role of diet and other lifestyle factors in the development of diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, hypertension, osteoporosis. All ETHEL employees participate in the study by completing questionnaires and undergoing specific medical tests.
- Because musculoskeletal disorders are a major concern for ETHEL employees, the OHS service has planned and implemented information campaigns about this issue and has published and distributed relevant brochures.
- Information brochures have been written and distributed concerning alcohol and drug addiction.
- The OHS service of ETHEL is widely recognised for the quality of services offered. For example, students from the Health Visitor's Department of the Technological Institute of Athens and the Nursing Department of the University of Athens chose to conduct their practical training in the company.

- ETHEL is represented in many OHS and health promotion international conferences and participates in European associations and networks involved in OHS and WHP.
- ETHEL employees have been trained in the use of first aid

Creating a better environment

ETHEL contributes to the protection of the environment in Athens by the following activities:

- The company has stopped buying equipment and materials for repairing buses that contain asbestos.
- The company has stopped repairing and then reusing lead batteries in its vehicles.
- Over the past few years, the company has replaced old buses with new environmentally friendly vehicles.

Drawing conclusions

All OHS and health promotion activities which have been initiated and conducted by the OHS service of ETHEL have been evaluated as satisfactory by both the company directors and the employees although no official evaluation has been conducted. Frequent medical examinations and monitoring have resulted in changing work positions when, according to the occupational physician, this is harmful for the employee's health. Consequently there are fewer complaints and fewer requests for change of working positions. Furthermore, working conditions for bus drivers have improved as the new vehicles are equipped with air conditioning

facilities. In addition, from an ecological point of view the buses emit less exhaust fumes to the air. This means that they are friendlier to the environment.

Looking to the future

According to the information provided by one of the occupational physicians, ETHEL'S OSH plans are to expand its activities in the areas of workplace health promotion and in particular in areas of smoking cessation and nutrition, as cardiovascular diseases have been identified as a major area problem for ETHEL employees. Furthermore, personal medical files will be developed for all employees and periodic medical examinations will gradually become compulsory for employees of all ages. Furthermore, existing manpower and equipment, which at the present cover approximately 45.5% of the service's needs, will be expanded. Plans are in the process of employing more personnel, i.e. 4 more nurses, technical and administrative personnel.