

"Let's Get Baking" Austria



The aim of the "Let's Get Baking" project is to improve the health of workers in bakeries by encouraging behavioural change and improving technical equipment. Project partners are the Austrian Workers' Compensation Board (AUVA), the Industrial Inspectorate and Chamber of Commerce of Upper Austria and the Guild of Bakers.

Why bakeries?

Bakeries were chosen because of the high incidence of new cases of bronchial asthma and because small companies are generally disadvantaged where health promotion measures are concerned.

The purpose of the project was to encourage bakers and their staff to take responsibility for their own health, and by doing so to reduce the incidence of serious illnesses such as baker's asthma. Other problems, including poor posture while working, skin diseases and stress, were looked at too.

From a practical viewpoint the project hoped to reduce occupational illness, sick leave and ultimately the cost of rehabilitation and retraining.

Identifying the target groups

The information campaign was aimed principally at master bakers, bakers, trainees, shop assistants and other employees. The main contact was with the master bakers (both male and female), but as workplace safety is the employer's responsibility, owners were involved too.

Raising awareness

Those likely to be affected were made aware of health risks and possible solutions through information campaigns. Because work organisation, technology and behavioural factors influence the health of employees, the emphasis was on comprehensive preventive measures. Project work was carried out from December 1996 to June 1998. The following measures have been implemented to date:

Targeting training colleges

Young people are an important target group and can be reached via training colleges. It was agreed that health promoting behaviour would be taught as part of the curriculum and awareness of health risks raised. Suitable material was developed and made available to course tutors. A participatory approach was found to be important – young people were far more interested in the subject matter when taking an active part in searching for solutions.

Master bakers

Future master bakers are an important target group and the project was described to them in detail.

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n Bakers' Regional Conference

The Bakers' Regional Conference serves as an information forum and is an important platform for publicity work. During the guild members annual meeting, the master bakers were informed about the aims of the project and possible solutions.

n Bakers' workshops

Small groups worked on a number of measures such as developing supporting media: e.g. refilming an educational video from the point of view of a small company, producing humorous laminated posters and tips on dealing with flour dust and avoiding skin diseases.

n Guild circulars

All bakeries were told about the project via a circular and invited to attend a district meeting. A questionnaire about health problems and the problem of flour dust was distributed at the same time.

n Comparative flour dust measurement

Dust levels varied according to the sophistication of the technical equipment and the work techniques used. In one exemplary company, the flour dust values shown were between 0.2 and 2.6 mg/m³, while in another company of comparable size, with a low standard of production technology, the concentration values were between 6.8 and 8.6 mg/m³. The Austrian limit is 5 mg/m³.

n Safety Engineers' Conference

The project was presented to 500 interested safety experts and occupational doctors from all over Austria.

n District meetings

A total of seven district meetings were held by the Provincial Guild to highlight the bakery project.

n Video-bus employee training

AUVA offered training in a video-bus in order to reach small companies which did not have the space for training.

n Company visits

The Accident Prevention Service of the AUVA and the Factory Inspectorate visited a number of companies – largely those which had not taken part in the information events.

n Protective coverings for bakery machinery

The staff of the purchasing cooperative BÄKO, which provides most of the technical equipment for bakeries, are to be trained by AUVA experts. This should ensure that only properly protected machines are provided by this organisation.

n Training of the Factory Inspectorate and Preventive Staff

Training on bakery hazards is to be given to staff in the AUVA Prevention Centres, to safety officers and occupational doctors. Comprehensive information will also be given to factory inspectors.

Results

Only time will tell if baker's asthma and other occupational diseases have decreased. For this reason, only an evaluation of the project is given.

The project was well received by target groups. As many employers themselves suffer from occupational diseases such as baker's asthma, they were very receptive to health promotion and industrial safety proposals. The opportunity to link up with colleagues to find methods of preventing problems, both by technical advances and changes in personal behaviour, was also welcomed.

The results of the survey on the problem of flour dust showed that health risks increase in smaller businesses where there tends to be less effective technical equipment. Bakeries are usually SMEs and often face difficult economic conditions, so making technical adjustments can be a problem. Fitting a business with the right equipment from the start is important as well as providing information so that health conducive work techniques can be encouraged. Behavioural changes are effective in the long-term, but require on-going motivation. A comprehensive approach is therefore necessary for sustained health promotion.

Most importantly, a network has been built up during the course of this project that will sustain it into the future.