

"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 co-operative 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.

Löwa is a large chain of food stores with a workforce of about 3,500 employees. There are 30 branches of "Magnet" shops (comparable to medium-sized companies) and 297 branches of "Zielpunkt" (comparable to small companies) throughout Austria. The "Good Movement at Work" project was established to reduce the incidence of muscular-skeletal disorders. The project was supported by social and health insurance institutions, trade unions and the Chamber of Economy.

Why the food trade?

Muscular-skeletal disorders are on the increase, particularly in the food trade, the most common complaints being strain to the neck, shoulder and lower back. The food trade is an ideal place to start tackling muscular-skeletal disorders as a large number of people are employed here, including women. A high staff turnover in this industry also suggests a need for action.

Löwa was interested in becoming a pilot company for the research and intervention trials because it wanted to reduce staff turnover and days lost through illness, as well as improve its image and gain competitive advantage.

It was also hoped that relevant information could be passed on to other companies in the same sector and specific intervention programmes developed to improve employee health in small and medium-sized companies in general.

Developing relevant solutions

The Löwa project began at the end of 1998 and lasted for 18 months; it involved 49 employees in "Magnet" and 18 employees in "Zielpunkt" shops. The project began with a comprehensive analysis of working conditions, work processes and ergonomic criteria. Measures were then developed, tried out and evaluated. These measures had to be practical in nature and employees had to see their relevance to their own work activities. The project ran as follows:

■ Inspection

A workplace inspection was carried out focusing on elements like the design of the workplace, organisation of work as well as motivation and morale. In-house expectations of the project were also discussed at this point.

■ Analysis of the working day

Staff, who were aware of the situation, were watched during their normal working day. Their movements were filmed with a digital camera, after which they had a chance to discuss how lifting etc. could be improved. Safety at work was also discussed.

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n Employee survey and on-the-spot-inspections

A questionnaire looking at topics such as motivation and work-related health complaints was filled in during individual discussions in order to avoid any misunderstanding. An on-the-spot inspection, concentrating on tasks causing particular strain, completed the investigation and led to the development of appropriate solutions with staff help.

n Exercises/instruction sheets

On the basis of the survey, a number of exercises were developed. These were easy to carry out and were relevant to the specific problems encountered by employees.

n Group Training

Training modules were based on knowledge gained during talks with employees and inspection of the workplace. Harmful methods of carrying out work tasks were identified and alternatives suggested, along with relaxation methods and exercises for short breaks.

Results and conclusions

The project results show that even brief interventionary measures can result in an improvement in the way people carry out their tasks.

Actively including employees is important if measures are to have a lasting impact. Measures implemented must be relevant to their experience. It was also found that training sessions are more successful if superiors join in. Feedback is important, as are posters reminding people of correct procedures. An illustrated leaflet containing tips on how to deal with tiredness and economical ways of working is being put together. Löwa intends to implement the measures step by step in further branches.

The project proved to be of great interest to both employees and management, but a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures is not yet available. Interim results show, however, that employees carry out their tasks in a way less likely to cause muscular-skeletal problems. Other lifestyle issues such as regular sports activities and nutrition were also looked at.

The pilot project showed that a third of employees experiencing aches and pains do nothing about them, a further third cope by taking painkillers. Although no representative study was carried out, it can be presumed that this trend is spread over the whole of society. On a broader scale such problems could be avoided from the outset if schools and training institutes could pass on relevant information to students.

Staff involved in preventive activities also need to have access to information brochures, training modules and the handbook "Movement ergonomics in the food trade". The project shows that finding effective solutions depends to a large extent on the level of in-company knowledge.

The project "Health: a valuable resource in the Waste Sorting Unit Asten" is an innovative initiative looking at health among migrant workers in the waste disposal industry. The waste sorting unit in Asten is a branch of the A.S.A. concern which has 14 sites in Austria, employing over 400 people. In Asten, about 40 employees sort out material (mostly industrial waste), before sending it on to a recycling plant.

About the Company

Working in the waste disposal industry can be extremely hazardous. Workers contend with noise, heat, cold and poisonous or dangerous materials that not only cause physical problems but lead to high stress levels, particularly as the work has to be carried out very swiftly.

The impetus behind the health promotion project in the A.S.A. Waste Sorting Unit came from the occupational doctor. She found that there was an abnormally high risk of accidents in the enterprise and also an extremely bad atmosphere at work. Before the project started, there had been a fatal accident in the company.

The worksite is run as an independent limited company, and is similar in structure to any other medium sized enterprise. The bulk of responsibility, including that of industrial safety, falls on the plant manager. However, industrial safety is only adhered to as a minimum legal requirement. As is often the case in poorly paid industries employing unskilled workers, there is no works council.

With the agreement of the management and the support of the Upper Austrian Sickness Fund (OÖGKK), a health circle project requiring the active participation of the workers (who were mostly non-German speakers) was launched. The objective was to improve working conditions and reduce health hazards by putting the expertise of the people affected to good use.

Bringing health circles to the workplace

The project team, including the plant manager, an occupational doctor, health circle facilitator and the employee of the OÖGKK responsible for health promotion, initiated the following measures in the A.S.A. Waste Sorting Unit:

n Evaluation of occupational accidents and sick leave data

Prior to the circle work, information was gathered on sick leave and work-related accidents so that a comparison could be made with the industry in general.

n Keeping the workforce informed

The purpose of the project was explained to the workforce and a

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written invitation to participate was circulated in both German and Turkish. A meeting conducted in both languages provided staff with further information.

■ **Health circles**

Work groups included staff employed on the conveyor belt where the materials are sorted – a particularly hazardous place to work. As most of the employees here are migrant workers, it was decided that the health circles should be bilingual, i.e. conducted in German and Turkish. An external mediator joined the groups, helped by an interpreter. The 5 circle meetings took place between the middle of June 1999 and the middle of August 1999.

■ **Presentation of the results**

When the health circle meetings finished, the results were presented to the plant manager for his comments. The implementation of the proposed measures was discussed with the circle members (with the help of the Turkish interpreter) and prioritised according to urgency.

■ **Leaflets**

The occupational doctor produced leaflets which were translated into Turkish. They contained information about safety at work (the use of masks and gloves) and how to avoid injuries.

■ **Final report**

The final report, currently being written in two languages, gives information about the most important results and measures. Every employee will receive a copy.

A promising future

Unqualified foreign workers tend to be employed in the waste disposal industry and feeling undervalued is a common problem among them. However, by involving these workers in the problem solving process, management acknowledged their importance to the company.

The trust between the workers and the interpreter (known to be a supporter of the rights of migrant workers) was an important feature. This bilingual, trusting situation created a setting in which the Turkish workers could outline problems in their own language and gave them the confidence to work out solutions.

The opportunity to show their skill and intelligence improved employees' confidence, helped create a better working atmosphere and improved the level of understanding between the two nationalities.

After five meetings, no less than 38 problem areas (such as risk of accidents, noise, dust, stress and hygiene) along with suggestions for solutions had been identified.

Some deficiencies in the implementation of industrial safety also became obvious through the circle work. Within six weeks of the solutions being presented, 50% could be implemented through simple organisational measures and with a limited investment budget. This shows that actively involving the workforce is a powerful method of implementing effective health improving measures.

Experience has shown that continuity of health promotion can only be achieved if someone has specific responsibility for it. At A.S.A., health was placed firmly on the company agenda when the works doctor agreed to take on the responsibility for maintaining healthy working conditions.



The firm employs 20 people and was set up in 1983 by a group of highly skilled and experienced computer consultants. The founder looks after the public relations, marketing and contracts side of the business and his wife, who is the vice-president, organises the internal workings of the company. She is jointly responsible for safety with a safety representative elected from staff members.

Workplace assessment of psychosocial strain

No structured health and safety plan operated in the company, and the work that was carried out only focused on physical and ergonomic issues such as improved office lighting and more comfortable furniture.

reactions that management felt unequal to coping with.

During the interviews staff were asked if they had any suggestions for improving the situation and reducing stress – many proposals for better work organisation and communication were put forward.

Making adjustments

The most frequent problems encountered by staff included the following:

- n Failure by managers to listen to employees
- n Lack of co-operation
- n Enormous workload
- n A heavy burden of responsibility
- n Lonely working arrangements
- n Poor communication and a lack of information.

When the safety representative received the information about workplace assessment from his union, he discussed these new legislative requirements with the vice-president and they set things in motion on an ad hoc basis. Their idea was to try things out, assess the results, and adjust their plans accordingly.

A questionnaire revealed that staff were experiencing problems with the psychosocial environment at the workplace and that many of these problems were shared by all or most people. As a result, individual interviews were carried out with all staff to get a better understanding of the problems facing them. This method was chosen over an open meeting as there was a fear that an open forum would provoke angry

Some of the suggestions put forward to tackle the above problems included:

- n Regular meetings attended by everyone in the company for discussion of current and future projects
- n At least two people working on every project
- n Management interviews with each employee

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- n More social activities
- n Hiring an external consultant.

As a result of the workplace assessment employees enjoy a much better psychosocial working environment. They do not work alone as often as they did, they get help from colleagues when they need it, the flow of information has improved and problems are discussed at open meetings, employees also feel able to contact the safety representatives when they are anxious about something.

Most of the employee proposals were implemented. Over and above these suggestions, a trip to Sweden for staff and their families was organised, partly to improve social relationships and partly to develop a team spirit.

A positive outcome

Workplace assessment pushed the company into dealing with psychosocial issues. To start off with they regarded stress as a personal problem, but came to understand that poor work organisation and communication can have a profound effect on staff.

Initially the company was reluctant to throw resources at workplace assessment too, particularly as some of the staff felt uncomfortable with the project. Now it is seen as an effective tool for developing the organisation.

Interestingly, the company has adapted workplace assessment to suit itself. This is an important factor, as small companies need to have a method that works for their particular organisation.

Integrated Workplace Assessment Denmark



This is a systematic approach to the development of preventive practices in small workplaces produced in consultation with selected experts and with the co-operation of companies in a similar line of business. Elements such as productivity, quality control, company analysis and workshops are also brought in.

The project was supported by the unions, employers' organisations and the government. It was financed by the Work Environmental Foundation (the present Service Centre of the Work Environmental Council). The project was carried out between August 1997 and June 1999.

Background

Since 1994 companies in Denmark have been obliged to prepare a written workplace assessment. The law was implemented in stages, starting with companies in a variety of high risk industries and concluding with micro-enterprises (companies with 1-4 employees), who were required to carry out a workplace assessment before the end of 2000.

The workplace assessment must include the following:

- n Identification of the type and range of problems within the organisation
- n Evaluation of these problems
- n Prioritise an action plan for dealing with these issues
- n Follow-up activities.

Companies are given a broad scope to sort out their difficulties in a way that suits them.

Getting owners on board

The occupational health service in Denmark has been active in developing workplace assessment for small businesses. However, it has often been difficult to convince owners of such organisations that they can benefit from workplace assessment. Essentially they think it's a meaningless bureaucratic undertaking. Small enterprises have other priorities to contend with, formalised management systems such as ISO 14001 and EMAS, ISO 9000, which deal with the external environment and quality control, for example. Even though productivity and efficiency should also be priority issues, owners often neglect these elements, perhaps because they are lacking simple formalised systems.

In order to combine all these elements into one integrated method, the occupational health service in Sorø has worked with a private consultant to develop the 'integrated workplace assessment'. The aim is to integrate preventive working environment activities with quality control, productivity and external environment activities. The integrated workplace assessment is developed and adapted especially for small businesses, taking into account the culture within such organisations and the owners' per-



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sonal perception of the working environment.

Developing effective methods

The method links together the traditional workplace assessment with an evaluation of productivity, quality control and the external environment. The idea is to connect and explore the whole potential of the enterprise, at the same time as developing competitiveness and increasing profit. The method is made up of three elements: A "toolbox" (the integrated workplace assessment), a series of workshops involving similar small businesses and two consultants, followed by individual work carried out by the participating enterprises.

1. The "toolbox" (integrated workplace assessment) contains specially developed material (questionnaires etc.), guiding the user point by point to a number of links between working environment (health promotion), productivity, quality control and the external environment.

2. Workshops are a very effective tool. Attended by a number of small businesses, they are usually run in a series of four. Participants are introduced to specially developed material and are given the opportunity to share experiences.

3. In between workshops individual companies use the "toolbox" to deal with the problems that head their priority list. Advice from the occupational health service in Sorø and independent management consultants is provided when needed. The consultants also help by coming up with ideas for possible solutions, drawing up a timetable and an action plan.

A successful response

Pilot programmes have been carried out in four small companies (fewer than 20 employees) and in one medium-sized company. Evaluation shows that the integrated approach has worked. Participating companies feel positive towards the programme and have not found its demands excessive. Another positive outcome is that the owners of small businesses have started to show an interest in health promotion. This method brings management and employees together and improves dialogue between them. Working together they can look at work processes and production.

How to carry out an integrated workplace assessment

- n Two consultants visit the business and draw up a company profile.
- n A group of 4-5 small enterprises is set up according to profile and preferences.
- n Consultants organise a series of four workshops over a two-month period with a follow-up meeting some months later.
- n Each small business appoints a management representative and a safety representative (an employee).
- n Consultants pay follow-up visits to participating businesses in between workshops.
- n The work carried out by the companies on their own is discussed at the 2nd, 3rd and 4th meetings as well as at the follow-up meeting.
- n The workshops provide a forum for exchanging experiences, and consultants raise relevant issues for debate.
- n Throughout the process the two consultants and other specialists

are available for individual consultation at any time.

- n Once the workshops are over the company will have defined its focus areas, drawn up a plan of action and complied with the statutory requirements relating to workplace assessment and through that, health promotion.

Companies are invited to continue their activities and BST-Sorø will – if requested – provide consultancy and advice.

Case study

A small steel company completed the workplace assessment and identified heavy lifting as a major problem. Difficulties with newly recruited employees were also highlighted. The action plan included the purchase of a crane costing approximately 20,000 €. The crane solved the problem of lifting and released one worker from the workstation. Steps have also been taken to train new workers properly. The owner expects to reduce staff turnover. He estimates that training new workers will cost approximately 8,000-9,000 €, but that the cost of staff turnover is higher.

Any drawbacks?

There is a tendency for companies to revert to haphazard methods of dealing with problems. Therefore the integrated workplace assessment needs further development. There are plans to organise a new pilot programme and to develop more effective measures. There will also be greater focus on ensuring that the action plan is followed through and that improvements are sustainable.

Occupational Health Services tailored for SMEs Denmark



The project is being carried out at the Frederiksborg Occupational Health Service Centre in Northern Zealand. The Centre has 350 affiliated member organisations with fewer than 10 employees. These enterprises make up about 10% of the total number of affiliated employees. The Centre received funding for a pilot project from the National Working Environment Board which was planned to run throughout 1999-2000. The aim was to develop an extensive service profile for small businesses with a firm emphasis on the sustainability of the system.

Introduction

The focus is currently on the construction industry, hotels and restaurants. However, the ultimate objective is to visit all 337 member SMEs.

Evidence shows that SMEs very seldom contact occupational health services. Over the last 8 years the OHS Centre in Frederiksborg has been in contact with 181 SMEs.

Within the construction and hotel and restaurant sectors fewer contacts still have been made with occupational health services. The OHS centre has only been in contact with 13% of SMEs within the construction industry and 20% of SMEs within the hotel and restaurant sector.

How the system works

The essence of the project is to offer services that suit the particular needs of small businesses. The requirements of these enterprises will be met even if the consultancy hours exceed the income from

membership fees for the year.

However, experience shows that small businesses rarely need such comprehensive advice that a great many consultancy hours are necessary.

The project features:

- n A personal contact allocated to each business. That person will visit the business and see how it operates
- n A telephone service providing on-the-spot answers to queries
- n A special workplace assessment method developed for small enterprises
- n Arrangement of seminars tailored for small businesses. Workplace assessment methods are presented along with other special topics designed for this sector. A forum for exchanging experiences is also provided
- n Introduction of businesses to a supportive network such as local employers associations and the organisation of joint activities
- n An information strategy is designed specifically for the target group and includes a

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newsletter and articles in local weekly journals.

One of the most important elements of the project is its ability to understand and empathise with the needs of small businesses. Great emphasis is placed on positive achievements too, instead of the traditional problem oriented approach.

How successful is the project?

A midterm evaluation was carried out. The reaction, overall, was very positive, but a number of problem areas were also identified. Most of the small businesses gave positive feedback and indicated that they were satisfied with the help and advice provided by the occupational health service.

Many owners – more than expected – have asked for help with solving specific working environment problems. A reasonable number of participants also showed up for the seminars (those taking place in small organisations were particularly popular). But the seminars did not go entirely smoothly. For instance, even though an owner might have signed up for an event, he would perhaps not show up if something more pressing cropped up in his business.

The consultants have been on a sharp learning curve. For the most part the project has proved fruitful,

but certain elements have been less positive. For instance, changing from the problem-oriented approach to a more positive one has not been easy.

The project also raised a number of questions such as:

- n What can we really offer these small enterprises with their special problems?
- n How much should we tolerate a negative attitude towards OHS because it's seen as a burdensome extra tax?

Visiting all the sites proved to be a more arduous task than expected – it took far more time to organise than originally anticipated and journeys were often wasted because the owner had gone off to attend to an urgent work matter at the last moment. However, all these problems are of a one-off nature, once each company is allocated a personal contact there will be no further need for such frequent visits.

Drawing conclusions

It is too soon to tell how the project will work in the long-term. Certain trends have been identified however. For example, the SMEs that were visited as part of the project are now more likely to contact the OHS. After meeting with the OHS, SMEs are more likely to draw up a

policy for purchasing better equipment and to draw up guidelines for the safer handling of chemicals and other hazardous substances.

Point Product Ltd is a family owned electronics business employing 41 people. All staff are employed on a full-time basis and more than half have received vocational training.

Building up a healthy enterprise

Employees are divided up into teams. These should meet once a week, but in practice this does not always happen. The entire staff meet up on a monthly basis, however this is not an interactive session, but more of a one-way lecture-type meeting with just a few questions coming from the staff.

Employee relationships have been looked at closely in recent times. Steps are taken to prevent arguments escalating and if a bad situation seems to be developing, things are sorted out quickly.

A suggestion box for improvements was set up four years ago and to begin with many contributions were received, but there has been nothing now for over a year. This is because the staff lost heart when none of these ideas were acted upon. The company recognises that it failed in this respect and wants to address this problem.

Balancing job demands with employees' needs

Staff work flexitime and parents are encouraged to arrange their working hours to fit in with their

children. Extra free days, over and above normal leave, are given to all employees. The company is at pains to build up a more caring atmosphere and to make its staff feel valued.

The atmosphere at work has improved thanks to changes made to the hierarchical structure. Originally the work culture was very traditional, with a fairly rigid chain of command. Things have now changed. Six separate teams work independently and have greater control over their daily routines. Staff members have also been on team-building courses. Other educational and vocational courses have been set up too.

Making on-going improvements

The company has recognised that its staff have a valuable contribution to make and that their opinions need to be taken into consideration if a happier working environment is to be created. For this reason, staff are consulted before changes are made. For instance, a great deal of work has been carried out to improve ergonomics. Recently every employee was supplied with a new office chair. Staff were given the opportunity to try out three different options before



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selecting the one that suited them best.

Conditions have improved a great deal recently in terms of a pleasant physical environment too, as storage space has been converted to work space. Each team was allowed to plan their work area to suit their particular needs. Staff appreciate being consulted in this way.

Why introduce workplace health promotion?

Workplace health promotion was brought in to address the problem of a fairly high sick leave rate – between 12 and 15 per cent. An offer of help from the Finnish Institution of Occupational Health was taken up and the “Prime-age”-project launched.

The company wanted to focus on reducing sick leave by bringing in preventive practices. As a result the amount spent per individual on occupational healthcare has gone up, however these costs are infinitely less than those incurred by sickness absence.

Within the “Prime-age”-project emphasis is placed on physical exercise: making use of the gym, skiing, walking, swimming. The company has set money aside to subsidise these activities. However, motivating people to take up the opportunities provided can be diffi-

cult. People tend to start off enthusiastically but fall by the wayside as time goes on.

All staff are offered private medical insurance from the company, but here too, by no means all staff take it up.

Creating a better atmosphere

Employee satisfaction is much better now that efforts have been made to improve the work environment and their health. Although the pay is not that good and a big gap still exists between management and general employees, the work atmosphere has changed and this is important. Significantly, staff now feel happier about coming to work in the mornings. Productivity has also improved.

The sick leave rate varies from seven to eight percent and is sometimes even as low as 5 percent. Overall, the situation is improving each year.

Looking ahead

The company is committed to making further improvements. One health measure soon to be introduced is the fitness test. There will also be increased focus on training and upgrading skills, this will be of mutual benefit to the staff and the organisation.

There will also be greater opportunities for staff to make a contribution to the way in which the company operates and to make suggestions. In the past, the ideas put forward in the suggestion box weren't acted upon, so staff stopped contributing. This won't happen in the future. Staff will also be encouraged to talk if they have a problem.

The company has learnt an important lesson in looking after staff: the organisation functions better when it is less rigidly hierarchical; employees' expertise and opinions should be taken on board as they are of immense value. Staff should also enjoy greater personal autonomy.



Yleiselektroniikka is in the electronics business and employs 135 people. All have permanent full-time contracts and most have received vocational training. The company supports the Keko project where unemployed people work within the company for eight months (two months of which are devoted to training), with a view to their being employed permanently.

The average number of sick days per person is 3.2. These figures relate only to staff who obtain a doctor's certificate.

ments and other improvements have also been made, for example adjusting the temperature in the offices to a better level.

Helping staff to feel valued

There is a good working atmosphere in the company. Employees are brought into the planning and decision making process and are encouraged to contribute towards the development of the business. Efforts are made to balance the demands of the job with employees' needs, this includes flexible working times. Both the company and the employees are willing to be flexible in all work related matters. For instance, in times of peak demand different teams are prepared to help one another.

Responsibility for OHS matters

An occupational safety committee looks at issues such as fire risk (of major concern in this type of business). New employees learn about safety issues as part of their induction training.

The company has statutory occupational health care. A nurse visits several times per month. The nearest occupational health care centre is only five kilometres away. This is a private health care centre and excellent services are provided and access to health professionals is always readily available.

Continuous improvement of working conditions

The company has invested in improving ergonomics. Office furniture has been upgraded and chairs replaced. Staff were given the opportunity to try out several options. IT has been upgraded to keep pace with general develop-

Promoting physical activity

The company is keen to encourage its employees to take part in sport or some form of physical exercise. A contribution is made by the company towards membership costs of the local swimming pool and gym. Social wellbeing is also taken into

account and the company makes a generous contribution towards events like the Christmas party, theatre visits and so on.

Making changes for the better

Last spring the plant underwent extensive modernisation. Work practices were also looked at and greater emphasis placed on customer friendly operations. Changing the way in which the business functions met with a certain amount of opposition. Fiercest resistance came from older employees, the younger generation are more accustomed to fluid work practices and the need for constant adjustment to meet changing market forces.

To make the transition easier, the company approached influential individuals within the company first and got them on board. The change process took place over a 12 month period to allow time for people to adjust.

With help and financial support from the WHP/Maintenance of Work Ability (MWA) - project, team building and teamwork exercises were carried out. Instructors from the Uusimaa Regional Institute of Occupational Health and Education Administration / Amiedu provided expert tuition.

Looking at the results

Despite the disruption caused by change, employee satisfaction has improved. As a result of focusing on WHP staff feel more motivated and valued and communication at all levels is better.

Satisfied customers are, of course, vital to the business, and customer satisfaction levels are measured regularly. Yleiselektroniikka is a member of Elgomit and surveys are carried out annually via this organisation. When compared to other companies in the same line of business, Yleiselektroniikka enjoys an above average rate of customer satisfaction.

Enjoying good health

Health within the company is good. Absence due to sick leave is low and the remit of the occupational health care service has now broadened. Although the company is happy to report that the physical health of its employees is satisfactory, it also wants to emphasise the importance of well-being in maintaining good health.

The company looks at ways of improving conditions for staff, for instance, bringing in better office furniture. Nowadays, companies know that providing a decent working environment helps create a better public image and ultimately attracts a better quality of employee.

A success story

The company's economic situation has improved. Better results have been brought about by making positive organisational changes and encouraging staff to take an active interest in the business. A motivated, skilled workforce improves the business in many ways. A positive attitude from management is another crucial factor.

The cost of WHP activities is quickly recouped when employees become more productive and sick leave is reduced.

Building up a positive future

Gaining the support of an outside agency is important as it gives credibility to new and maybe controversial projects. People can find change easier to accept when the reasons are explained by an objective outside source. Resources are limited in SMEs and help both in practical and financial terms is very welcome. Once projects are set up, the company can then carry on with them independently. The health of the organisation can then be improved on a permanent basis.



Helsingin Mylly Oy (Helsinki Mills) is a family business set up in 1934, however, the owner's family has been in the milling trade since the 16th century. 23 people are employed here, most of whom have undergone some form of vocational training.



At the mills, wheat, rye, barley and oats are refined for flour production. The company also produces organic flour, which is, at present, an expanding market. Most of the flour is sold to large bakeries, with around 20% of output going to the retail trade.

Working atmosphere

A survey carried out by the Uusimaa Regional Institute of Occupational Health and Education Administration as part of its small workplace programme revealed that the working atmosphere is generally speaking positive. The employees are motivated and committed to work.

Economic situation

The financial situation is currently difficult for most mills. However, Helsinki Mills has a number of strengths: because of its relatively small size it can be flexible, it produces a broad range of high quality products, it has moved into organic flour production for which there is a growing demand and the modern milling technology used is a great asset.

The company has found the advice and development hints from this small workplace programme useful. As part of the project, a number of ergonomic improvements were made. Noise and dust levels were measured and an investment made to improve the environment.

Three employees have taken part in a rehabilitation project, one from the office and two from the production department. All gave a positive response to this programme. Ways of improving well-being have also been looked at as part of the small workplace project.

Giving employees a voice

Employees work in small teams and can organise shift work, work times and job rotation to suit themselves. Management culture encourages staff to be self-reliant and self-motivated. Management also endeavours to involve employees. At a weekly meeting staff are given an update on what's going on within the company.

Why did the company join the programme?

Financial support was a major consideration as there is very little spare money within an SME. The second important reason was to

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access information and advice from an external source. Thirdly, the company sees its staff as a valuable resource and their well-being is important if a good working atmosphere is to be kept up and people are to remain interested in their work.

Continuous improvement of working conditions

Employees report that the small ergonomic improvements made so far have had positive impact on working life. Staff are also keen to continue making suggestions for improving their working conditions.

The biggest problems in the milling industry are noise from the milling process and flour dust. Efforts have been made to reduce dust by using machines with diminished pressure.

Occupational Health Care

The company has a statutory occupational health care contract. As a result of the project the relationship with the occupational health care centre has become more proactive. The centre provides good services and Helsinki Mills receives much help and information. However, the health care centre resources have been cut and as a consequence the staff are always busy. Booking a time for physical

examinations can sometimes be difficult.

Positive health and safety patterns

Smoking is forbidden inside the mills because the grain dust is explosive. Attitudes towards the protective equipment are positive. Staff actively want to use devices such as respirators. The work involves a certain amount of lifting and employees take good care of their backs. In 1999 sick leave came to approximately one day per employee per month, a loss of 21 working days. No occupational accidents occurred in 1999. The company encourages physical activity by supplying staff with swimming pool tickets.

Positive results

Three out of four employees feel that the project has been beneficial. The others feel that the results are, on the whole, more positive than negative. According to a survey carried out by the small workplace project the most important outcome was better communication and co-operation between the employees themselves and between employees and management.

On another positive note, the company was given a clean bill of health at its most recent occupational safety inspection.

The cost of WHP is small compared to the benefits. Improving ergonomic conditions costs very little, but other investments, such as replacing the automatic data processing equipment in the office, proved to be fairly costly.

Looking to the future

Further improvements to the noise and dust levels will be made in the near future.

However the crucial factor governing further WHP activities is Helsinki Mills' place in the market. If its economic position stays good then it will be feasible to make concrete improvements.

The most important piece of advice the company can pass on to others is to keep employees informed as to what's going on and why certain decisions have been made. It is also important to look for expertise from outside the company as small businesses tend not to have health and safety skills at their fingertips.

An external advisor can help implement proposals which might otherwise be shelved or postponed and may also provide invaluable financial support. Last but not least, management must take an active interest in health promotion projects.

Workplace Health Management in SMEs Germany



Conducted by the Institute for Ergonomics and Technology Management (IAT) at Stuttgart University and backed by GEK, the aim of the project was to improve health and safety and health promotion in SMEs via health management tailored to companies' individual needs.

GEK is one of Germany's largest health insurance funds looking after 120,000 companies, many of which are SMEs. It has considerable experience in workplace health management and offers a variety of services including preparation of workplace health reports and establishing health circles. Assistance from the relevant statutory accident and health insurance, guilds and crafts associations, helped the project gain widespread acceptance.

Selecting participants

14 enterprises employing between 3 - 20 people were chosen from a number of professions including dentists and opticians. These businesses already had a keen interest in workplace health plus a positive attitude towards investing time and energy in the project and actively implementing improvement measures. Each enterprise voluntarily appointed a health co-ordinator to oversee the project and act as a "mouthpiece" for employees.

Clear objectives

The purpose of the project was to implement workplace health promotion measures in conjunction with improving occupational health and safety. Companies were supported in their efforts to meet

statutory requirements and information was provided on health and safety, improving the work environment and promoting well-being. Ultimately, the information gained during the course of the project should be communicated to a wide range of businesses.

The project was based on the concept of health management. This goes beyond basic occupational health and safety and aims to achieve holistic health promotion by improving well-being (taking in social and psychological issues) and preventing work-related health risks.

Developing a relevant approach

The crucial factor in the success of the health management system is the creation of appropriate programmes. Therefore, at the start of the project, employees contributed to a comprehensive written survey, followed by staff interviews. These were designed to be as open as possible so that staff felt able to broach difficult subjects. Their observations on the company and suggestions for improvement were noted. A tour of the workplace was also conducted.

Health co-ordinators

Health co-ordinators are fundamental to a project such as this, providing a vital contact point. They re-

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ceived ongoing training on health promotion as well as on risk assessment, dealing with hazardous substances, correct posture, noise, stress prevention and using the internet. The “train the trainer” principle is essential if the health management system is to be integrated into the organisation permanently.

Improving working conditions

In order to create better ergonomic conditions, office equipment – desks, chairs, lights etc – made by different manufacturers were installed in some companies as “sample workplaces”.

Changing behaviour patterns

Training courses and campaigns on lifestyle issues – healthy food, sun safety, exercise and relaxation – were organised at the workplace.

Enterprise workshops (“health circles”)

These are pivotal in reducing mental stresses in small businesses. The workshops were flexible and adapted to suit specific company needs and were mediated by an IAT employee using a special facilitating technique. Individual problems were collated and prioritised in line with employees’ requests and an action plan compiled. The employer only became involved in the latter stages to prevent staff feeling inhibited.

Regular meetings were set up, creating a forum where sensitive and

difficult issues could be discussed. The enterprise workshops also revealed very clearly that a large proportion of stresses could be reduced by a staff-oriented change in organisational procedures and better communication.

Employers’ seminar

This was another key element in the project. At this seminar it was made clear that by enhancing occupational health and safety measures, company costs could be reduced. Further benefits of people-oriented, health-promoting working conditions included greater staff motivation and better performance.

Improved communication

One special feature of the model project was the teaching of media skills adapted especially for SMEs. Training was also given on using information technology for dealing with health issues and using the internet. The project set up its own WWW server which was available to the model enterprises as a common information platform.

Evaluation and results

A final staff survey was carried out to discover what changes staff felt had taken place within the company as well as changes in their personal attitudes and behaviour. A number of factors were noted:

n Better health at the workplace

The vast majority of employees said that they found the sample workplaces and the information on ergonomics very useful. A better working atmosphere was also reported. Most of the companies felt that improving employee health was worthwhile and that continuing to do so was beneficial.

n Success of health co-ordinators

Although a successful concept, a problem did arise – should that individual leave the company, their knowledge and expertise would go with them. However, it was hoped that the company would be sufficiently motivated to continue its good work and that the new organisation would benefit from the health co-ordinator’s expertise.

n The “health building set”

The experiences gained from this project have been collated in the “health building set”, a publication outlining the essential tools for promoting employee health in SMEs according to individual requirements.

It is clear that SMEs are reluctant to accept generalised solutions as they are far too varied for such a broad-based approach to be effective. SMEs need the kind of support that enables them to organise health promotion in a way that suits their particular organisation.

Network for SMEs to Prevent Work-Related Health Risks Germany



Many SMEs have difficulty applying and updating regulations. This is particularly true of complex occupational health and safety laws. The gap between the statutory requirements and practical implementation is widening and SMEs cannot resolve this dilemma.

As SMEs clearly need the support of a third party, the statutory accident insurance for the mechanical engineering and metal-working industries has adopted a new approach for providing this sector with advice and information.

Project organisation

Teams of occupational health and safety experts provided on site information and advice for employers and employees, with the aim of implementing safety and occupational health care measures in accordance with legal requirements. A report outlining areas for action, measures to tackle problem areas and a prioritised action plan was compiled following the tour of the plant.

Employers were asked to pass on these findings to everyone at the company. At the same time each firm was offered additional advice and specialist expertise on solving their difficulties in implementing occupational health and safety measures.

Systematic analysis

Analysis revealed that the major "shortcomings" in small businesses are not so much of a material or technical nature but more often related to problems with organising occupational health and safety and the sheer volume of administrative work connected with it.

Making headway

SMEs with 1 to 30 employees make up roughly 85% of the involved statutory accident insurance's member companies. From April 1995 to the end of March 1999, consultancy events were held at roughly 32,000 of these organisations. Advice focused on new statutory regulations, in particular, the newly amended accident prevention regulations "Occupational safety specialists" and "Occupational doctors". Recommendations were also made on occupational health and safety and preventive measures.

A free assessment of each company was provided by the accident insurance, so that the particular stresses facing individual small businesses could be identified. This information also helped in the creation of targeted measures to tackle occupational health risks.



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More than 98% of businesses are in need of help where this is concerned, particularly where documentation on handling hazardous substances, noise levels and occupational health care examinations are concerned.

The low percentage of organisations with preventive policies (between 2% and 4%) is due to the fact that the data surveys were carried out during the transitional period for the implementation of statutory regulations.

Furthermore, many enterprises are unfamiliar with the complicated statutory provisions on occupational medicine, hygiene and ergonomics that change constantly and, in some cases, can only be understood by experts.

The prevailing assumption that there is a general deficit in occupational health and safety in small enterprises was not confirmed by these results however, and a differentiation between companies had to be made.

Putting knowledge into practice
Based on these evaluation results the accident insurance developed a support system for SMEs that brought in a number of other players including the North Rhine guild health insurance fund and the steel and metal-working guild in Düsseldorf. This approach fulfills the mandatory requirement for cooperation between accident insur-

ance, health insurance funds and occupational health and safety authorities as well as with the enterprises themselves and allied institutions.

An accessible written guide

Employers at SMEs rarely have time to read complicated texts. Therefore an accessible, straightforward and relevant guide to statutory requirements was compiled. The clarity of the presentation and the fact that it was put together following consultation with the various guilds, means that it effectively addresses the needs of SMEs. Produced in file form, each page can be removed for reproduction when required; and for ease of reading, it is divided into two sections, the first containing a brief outline of the eight chapters and the second giving more detailed information. Useful addresses and telephone numbers are listed at the back. It also contains a CD-ROM "Occupational Health and Safety (regulations and information)" providing some useful specimen letters and forms.

Contents of the guide

The list of statutory occupational health and safety regulations is enormous. It would be impossible to look at this mountain of rules and regulations in any detail, therefore the guide has picked out only

the salient points for clarification, taking the specific needs of SMEs into account while doing so.

Following consultation, "classical occupational health and safety" was left out, because SMEs already know how to deal with everyday issues such as this.

Member organisations of the accident insurance can obtain the guides free of charge. During routine visits to businesses, advice is given on how to use the guides and copies are handed out. The guides are also available at training centres of the accident insurance and are used there in business seminars. Guilds allied to the involved accident insurance are entitled to free guides as well.

These guides have been extremely well received both by SMEs and larger companies. More than half of the original run of 25,000 copies has already been requested.

“ArGU!ment” – A regional project on OHS in craft enterprises Germany



Handwerkskammer Düsseldorf
Zentrum für Umwelt und Energie

As part of a project called “ArGU!ment” run by the Dusseldorf chamber of crafts, concepts, measures and tools relating to occupational health and safety for regional craft enterprises were developed and tried out between 1996 and 1999. The aim of the project was to promote better health in these organisations and to help them meet with new statutory requirements.

Project partners

Funds came from the QUATRO programme (financed by the European Commission). One of the major objectives of the QUATRO programme is to help craft businesses maintain high standards of health, thereby enabling individuals to stay in work longer.

Various organisations in the craft sector, state occupational health and safety representatives, statutory accident insurance, the guild health insurance fund, trade unions and educational bodies also took part. This network committee has now established itself as an on-going discussion forum.

Analysis of company needs

Existing empirical knowledge on work and health in the craft sector was by no means sufficient for ascertaining their needs with any degree of reliability. Therefore close scrutiny of the target group was essential before workable methods for addressing their health requirements could be found. Businesses in this sector are characterised by their individuality, motivation and focus on producing high quality products. Individual

health is considered to be important to the success of the business – in a small organisation, sickness can have severe repercussions.

However, formal occupational health and safety is very much geared towards large companies and has very little bearing on the way in which small organisations operate. For example, small businesses do not have company experts or employee representatives to provide a contact point for institutionalised occupational health and safety bodies. Moreover, small ventures don't have sophisticated work organisation procedures or human resources management systems into which preventive routines can be integrated.

Why small businesses resist

This sector is sceptical of the new statutory framework conditions and provisions stipulated in European and social policy. Accident rates are of no interest to small businesses as accidents and industrial diseases are rare. What's more, sickness rates in the craft sector are lower than in other sectors of the economy. Craftspeople also resent superficial, generalised



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descriptions of shortcomings in their businesses.

The “Healthy Crafts” philosophy The extensive material gleaned during the needs analyses was collated in a multi-tier documentation, interpretation and evaluation process. Interim results were presented and discussed by the network committee. The project group then developed a draft concept based on “model” lines. Top priority was given to creating a contextual orientation framework for specific measures and a stable dialogue platform with small enterprises and their trade associations through the development of a philosophy of “prevention in crafts”. This approach was intended to be flexible enough to answer the needs of a diverse range of businesses. Entitled “Healthy Crafts”, it deliberately plays on the social and economic significance of health and looks at preventive measures that will help secure a better health profile for this sector. In this sector, employees often work alone or in small groups. Therefore measures for improving health must take this into account. Appropriate practical aids have to be developed and these must be participation-oriented and fit in logically with the everyday running of the business.

The ArGU!ment project recognises that the human element in the craft sector is absolutely crucial. Here, even more than in most businesses, independence, quality awareness, social skills, motivation, perfor-

mance, creativity and innovation are vital to the success of the enterprise.

“Healthy Crafts” brochure

A total of five individual modules were developed and pilot-tested. The first module was an attractively designed brochure which outlines the philosophy behind proposed preventive measures in the craft sector in an easy-to-understand form.

“Information Manager: Health and Safety”

A compact and accessible information and documentation system was prepared providing essential information. Useful local contacts were listed along with printed application forms and a filing system for correspondence with relevant institutions.

“How safe and healthy is our company?”

A framework was developed to help businesses ascertain their health risks and list their preventive resources. The emphasis was on communication – encouraging constructive dialogue between the owner and employees. This tool differs from existing instruments as it can be used without any prior knowledge of ergonomics and takes a very practical tone in terms of content and language.

Training measures

A fourth module, a Compiler’s Guide, was developed for training bodies, helping them to integrate health and safety into their range of seminars. It was piloted in vocational and further training courses run by the chambers of crafts.

Seminar concept “Prevention in Crafts”

Many occupational health and safety professionals are governed by their experience of large companies. Their approach tends to be formal and bureaucratic and is unsuited to the very pragmatic work culture in most small businesses. Better communication and a deeper understanding of such companies is essential if intervention and consultancy are to be successful in the long term. To help achieve these aims, a seminar concept was developed for full-time occupational health and safety experts, providing them with an opportunity to get to know more about a craftsman’s working environment.

The first trial results are encouraging: communication and intervention skills are improving and a follow-up project aims to modify methods so that even better results can be expected.