

Workplace Health Promotion Improves Productivity and Well-Being



Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) leads to better health, reduced absenteeism, enhanced motivation, and improved productivity: that is the message behind the Workplace Health Promotion project of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA). Employers have an important role to play in encouraging workers to adopt healthy lifestyles. In addition to the health benefits for workers, every Euro invested in WHP leads to a Return on Investment (ROI) of between 2,5 – 4,8 Euros due to reduced absenteeism costs.

According to EU-OSHA Director Jukka Takala, 'supporting a healthy lifestyle pays off for everyone. It benefits employees themselves and their employers, but it also helps the wider society, by reducing the burden on healthcare systems. And with an ageing working population, the importance of Workplace Health Promotion schemes is only going to increase – we need to help people stay healthier for longer, and to achieve this we need employers and employees to work together, to create a healthy working culture.'

Health promotion measures support workplace risk prevention, but do not replace proper safety and health management. There is no point in implementing a WHP programme without also offering a safe and healthy working environment. WHP is based on a healthy culture first of all ensuring that all legal requirements are respected. Carrying out WHP activities both organisational and individual level factors should be taken into account. Many European companies have WHP programmes in place, ranging from encouraging workers to improve their diet (by including low-fat options in work canteens, for example), to providing training for managers to recognise stress symptoms in their employees and take appropriate action.

Dundee City Council in the UK, for example, has been working to improve the psychological and physical health of staff in its Social Work Department. Initiatives have included organisational level actions, such as family-friendly policies, as well as individual level measures such as the provision of a confidential employee counselling service and subsidised slimming club membership. The scheme has already led to an improvement in the health of employees, with an estimated 165,000 Euros being saved in sickness absence every year through a reduction in stress, anxiety and musculoskeletal problems.

EU-OSHA has just launched a new web portal on WHP, including two new factsheets that provide overview and advice to employers and workers. This ranges from ways to create a supportive working environment to providing information, ideas and encouragement on health matters, such as giving up smoking. The portal also includes good practice resources such as useful links and case studies.

For more information on WHP please see <http://osha.europa.eu/en/topics/whp>

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