

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO REDUCE THE RISK OF MSDS

Organisation

Savatech d.o.o.

Introduction

Rubber manufacturing is an industry where physical strain and repetition of intensive movements are high. The load on individual extremities and the musculoskeletal system are also high. By means of various tools – methods of ergonomics analysis – the team performed ergonomic-related evaluation of individual workplaces in Savatech. In 2004, the company adopted a comprehensive occupational safety and health policy in line with the international standard OHSAS 18001 *Occupational health and safety management systems*. It has also committed itself to continual improvement in work conditions.

Aims

To decrease sick-leaves and improve worker satisfaction was the primary goal of a standardised approach to resolve the issue of risks for musculoskeletal diseases.

What was done, and how

An interdisciplinary team tackled problems in relation to risk factors (manual handling, bad ergonomic conditions, etc.) for musculoskeletal diseases at workplaces in Savatech. The team contained specialists from the field of occupational safety and health, organisational heads for particular tasks, responsible construction designers, work process technologists, authorised occupational health doctor, workers and worker representatives. Using a range of ergonomics analysis tools, it performed ergonomic-related evaluation of individual workplaces in the company and consequently improvements were introduced.



Figure 1 A workstation at Savatech



Figure 2 A workstation at Savatech

The procedure of a repeated ergonomic analysis on a workplace (February – November 2007) was:

- recording individual work phases and activities;
- measuring ergonomic parameters (time of each individual phase, frequency, weight, micro-climate, etc.);
- evaluating;
- video recording;
- interviewing a worker;
- detailed analysis based on the record;
- final findings;
- proposals for ergonomics-related improvements;
- defining priorities;
- preparing a progress programme;
- proposals to the management;
- approval;
- implementation;
- measuring effects.

An in-depth ergonomic analysis of workplaces was made a constituent part of the annual risk assessment audit. Annual programmes and goals were defined using the results of the audit.

A number of other activities were organised.

- Provision of training courses to make associates aware of how to prevent and reduce risks for MSDs in workplaces.
- Publication of a weekly information bulletin *Srečko* (Lucky) that gives advice and warnings.
- Preparation of a manual *With physical activity to Better Health*. This contains recommendations for healthy and balanced nutrition and physical exercises for preventing and reducing the risk for musculoskeletal diseases. Every worker in the company has received a copy of the manual. Workers working at computer monitors had exercises demonstrated by a professional fitness trainer.

The company has prepared a translation of Australian guidelines on manual handling with practical guidelines for preventing risk when moving loads. The translation with supplements based on Slovene legislation was forwarded to the heads and planners of production processes to act as an aid in assuring comfort at work and a safe and healthy workforce.

In the Sava newspaper, associates were made familiar with the issue of MSDs with practical recommendations for safe work as part of a *Lighten the Load* campaign. Even a painting campaign was launched for the youngest under the title of *Lighten your Load*.

What was achieved

Despite operating in the heavy industry sector, the total sick-leave figure of Savatech is below the average in Slovenia, and in the period January – July 2007 it amounted to 4.78 (Slovene average 5.0). The sick-leave figure from 2004 to 2007 (period January – August) was reduced by 28.8 %.

Investment costs have been EUR 4 million (redesigning workstations, etc.) with direct benefit of EUR 1.5 million, (reduced sick leave, etc.). An indirect benefit achieved is higher employee satisfaction.

Further information

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Transferability

The procedure of ergonomic analysis of workplaces is an excellent example of good practice that could be adopted by other organisations. Costs in this example are relatively high, but it could be applied in SMEs with much lower costs.