

# Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards 2018-2019

## CASE STUDY



### Substituting hazardous chemicals and ensuring safe, healthy and sustainable working conditions in the hairdressing sector



#### ORGANISATION/COMPANY

Peluquería Elvira

#### COUNTRY

Spain

#### SECTOR

Hairdressing and other beauty treatment

#### TASKS

Hairdressing, beauty treatments, colouring, shampooing, preparing hair dyes and bleaches



Source: Peluquería Elvira.

## Background

Peluquería Elvira is a small hairdressing and beauty business in Villanueva de la Serena, Spain. Workers in this sector are commonly exposed to hazardous chemicals in, for instance, hair dyes, bleaches and shampoos. Such exposure can lead to skin and eye irritation, and respiratory problems.

The company was inspired to improve working conditions for its employees — and become a 'healthy hair salon' — by the efforts of Esther Martí Barrios, a former hairdresser who has been developing ways of improving working conditions in the sector since she

gave up her job in 2009 because of asthma developed as a result of workplace exposure to persulphates and heavy metals.

By adopting the healthy hair salon philosophy, the company is committed to ensuring safe, healthy and sustainable working conditions and environmentally friendly practices that differentiate it from other salons in the market.

## Aims

- To substitute synthetic chemicals that are harmful to health and the environment with safer plant-based alternatives.
- To implement preventive measures that ensure healthy and sustainable working conditions.

## What was done and how?

The company has substituted products containing harmful chemicals with plant-based products. It found through experience, however, that not all plant-based hair colours entering Europe are pure, and some customers are allergic to or intolerant of some of the poorly controlled substances that are used. Therefore, the company now uses only those plant-based mixtures produced in Europe with phytosanitary certificates, to ensure that mixtures do not contain any toxic substances.



Source: *Peluquería Elvira*.

To ascertain what other improvements were needed to transform the business into a healthy hair salon, the company used a self-assessment instrument and employed an external occupational health and safety service to perform a comprehensive occupational risk assessment. This led to the implementation of several measures in addition to the substitution of dangerous chemicals — including technical, organisational and personal protective measures — and a training programme:

- There is now an area with localised extraction equipment for the occasional preparation of dyes containing harmful substances to eliminate bad odours and harmful vapours.
- Although most products used are now plant-based, when dangerous chemicals are used nitrile or vinyl gloves and activated carbon masks are worn.
- The salon is cleaned with lemon, bicarbonate and vinegar, rather than with products containing hazardous chemicals, and waste is sorted and recycled where possible.
- Effective and natural ventilation and temperature control is ensured and comfortable cotton clothing is provided.

- Wash basins are height adjustable and water-flow regulators and mixer taps have been installed. Height-adjustable equipment and trolleys are provided.
- Glare has been reduced by using LED lighting.
- Floors are slip-resistant and non-slip footwear is provided.
- Plugs, cables and equipment are monitored daily to ensure that they are in a good state of repair.

A 60-hour training programme is provided in close collaboration with the external occupational health and safety service, with the full involvement of the salon manager. This practical training is key for implementing and consolidating good practice: staff not only are trained in workplace preventive measures, but are also advised on good nutrition, physical exercise and healthy lifestyles.

The company raises awareness of the issues identified among staff, including by providing face-to-face sessions with hair professionals who have been affected by health problems as a result of exposure to hazardous chemicals at work; staff find these sessions particularly motivating.

The company consults workers on all decisions taken and changes adopted, and has taken steps to generate a climate of dialogue, trust and cooperation. Competitive behaviour is discouraged by providing clear and transparent information. Tasks are shared out in relation to skills, and work is organised in a fully cooperative way, with breaks being taken at least every 2 hours. Efforts are also made to ensure that all workers can balance their work and family lives.

## What was achieved?

Becoming a healthy hair salon meant a change in the salon's philosophy — substituting dangerous chemicals, and making worker and customer health and the environment top priorities for the business. This is highly valued not only by staff but also by clients.

Although the use of synthetic dyes could not be completely eliminated, it has been substantially reduced, by 90-95 %.

Workers report improvements in skin, eye and throat irritation, fatigue and headaches. A survey of 18 other salons with which the company shared this good practice shows that:

- The majority have introduced organic and plant-based colour products to their salons and are fully satisfied with the results.
- More than two thirds have implemented a package of preventive measures and the remainder have almost completed the implementation of such measures.
- In over 90 % of cases, symptoms such as itchy throat, headaches, teary or itchy eyes, and fatigue have completely disappeared.

Substituting dangerous chemicals and implementing the measures described also benefits the environment, as salons no longer pollute wastewater with toxic products.



Source: Peluquería Elvira.

## Success factors

- The company carried out a workplace risk assessment to identify areas for improvement and effectively raised awareness of the need for and value of change among staff. It used tools and services provided through a cost-free programme designed for small and medium-sized enterprises with less than 25 workers and self-employed workers — the Prevención 10 programme designed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs together with the national institute for safety and health at work (INSST) — and a simple self-assessment tool.
- In addition to the substitution of hazardous chemicals, the company also introduced a package of wide-ranging complementary measures to transform its workplace into a healthy hair salon.
- Staff actively participate in all decisions, and undergo practical training in preventive measures. Measures are revisited when problems, for example health complaints, occur.

## Transferability

The healthy hair salon project was extended to and successfully implemented by other salons.

This example of good practice is therefore transferrable, particularly to other small enterprises in the hairdressing sector. The company has in fact shared this good practice with other salons throughout Spain, with demonstrable results.

## Costs and benefits

The costs involved in substituting hazardous products with less hazardous ones and implementing changes to salons are minimal. The economic returns were more than 200 %, partly as a result of reductions in electricity and water consumption: the installation of LED lighting cut electricity bills by 60-80 % and flow regulators reduced water bills by 40 %.

What's more, there are notable improvements in worker health and well-being, resulting in less sick leave and improved customer service.

## Key features of good practice example

- This example makes a valuable contribution to eliminating the use of dangerous substances and improving the safety and health of workers in the hairdressing sector, and adds value to existing practices in Spain.
- The use of dangerous substances has been largely eliminated, and collective, sustainable measures to improve working conditions and reduce harm to the environment have been successfully implemented.
- The management is fully committed to and workers actively participate in implementing improvements.
- The company has shared its good practice with other companies in Spain, with demonstrable results.
- The majority of workers in the hairdressing sector are women, so this good practice example is particularly relevant to this group with particular risks.

## Further information

Further information can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/PeluqueriaElvira>

## References and resources

Prevención 10 programme  
[https://www.prevencion10.es/p10\\_front/](https://www.prevencion10.es/p10_front/)

*'This good practice example is particularly relevant to women who are particularly at risk in this sector.'*