

## **LONG-TERM PREVENTION OF MSD: INSTITUTIONAL PLAYERS FACILITATE AN ENTERPRISE-LEVEL APPROACH**

### **1. Organisations involved**

Association régionale pour l'amélioration des conditions de travail des Pays de la Loire (ARACT)  
Mutualité Sociale Agricole du Maine et Loire

### **2. Description of the case**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

Both for enterprises and for OSH personnel, the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) remains hard to implement. This illustrates a major paradox between the significant quantity of knowledge available on these disorders and the increasing mobilisation of the various occupational health stakeholders on the one hand, and on the other hand the frequent loss of impetus of corporate approaches to occupational risk prevention.

Currently, despite converging efforts, occupational risk prevention is not sufficiently efficient. The option decided on by the project is to encourage the enterprises to organise real long-term occupational risk prevention policies covering organisational and human factors.

#### **2.2. Aims**

The scheme proposed to the enterprises is based on three essential factors:

- Help six enterprises implement a policy for prevention of MSDs, by encouraging its integration into a sustainable corporate strategy. On this occasion, financial resources are deployed by the Regional Labour Directorate to fund 50% of the cost of private consultants.
- Implement a multi-disciplinary approach to the prevention of MSD due to the complexity of these disorders. For this purpose, the institutional players are mobilised both in the performance of the departmental project and in its deployment in each of the enterprises.
- Capitalise on and identify over five years the factors contributing to long-term prevention in order to disseminate this information more widely.

To support this system, institutional players are called upon: the regional labour director, the departmental labour inspectors, the deputy director and inspectors of the regional health insurance fund (CRAM), the occupational health and safety (OH&S) consultant and the industrial doctor of the "Mutualité Sociale Agricole" health insurance fund (MSA) and the special adviser to the organisation of Regional Action for the Improvement of Working Conditions (ARACT) who is the project manager.

Each enterprise undertakes to produce a review of the existing situation: health, production and quality indicator monitoring board, supplemented by a questionnaire on actual work experience. It receives support from the institutional partners to guide and manage a comprehensive participatory operation.

The main features of this operation are defined by the departmental project:

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- regarding the means: project management, supervisor, steering committee and working groups with the operators involved, where appropriate, awareness raising and action training of the players;
- regarding the steps: diagnosis, help in researching and implementing solutions;
- regarding competencies: support from private consultants.

The enterprises will later take part in practical discussions between stakeholders at intercompany meetings and possibly present first-hand accounts at events organised by the project partners.

## **2.3. What was done, and how?**

### **Experience of one of the six enterprises involved in the plan**

Since it was founded in 1980, a cattle slaughterhouse in the Pays de Loire region has developed a process of occupational risk prevention involving research on work stations, working conditions and safety, with the help of the MSA (social insurance management organisation for the agricultural population).

This process has created a deeper knowledge of the work constraints, enabling some of them to be mitigated, and strengthened the relations between company managers, employees and occupational health players.

However, despite these efforts, the enterprise was still faced with a stubbornly large number of MSD-related occupational diseases. The number ranges between 10 and 17 each year, for a workforce of 590 production operators.

Moreover, an in-depth programme of occupational risk assessment undertaken in the plant in 2003-2004 confirmed the scale of the risk. It is in this context that the departmental project was proposed to the enterprise.

After discussing the feasibility and potential benefits of such a project in the meat industry, the ARACT special adviser, the OH&S consultant and the industrial doctor of the MSA proposed it to the plant manager. During this work meeting, these three players basically clarified for the company manager MSD prevention issues and the means available to act effectively in the long term. In particular, the idea was put forward of shifting from safety management to an overall approach to occupational health.

Following this discussion, the principle of management's involvement was accepted. The project was then presented by the OH&S consultant and the industrial doctor to the CHSCT (committee for health, safety and working conditions). This session enabled them to link the project scheme to the concerns of the players in the enterprise.

A review of the existing situation was then performed with the help of the ARACT special adviser, the OH&S consultant and the industrial doctor, and followed up by the labour inspector. The enterprise then chose a consultant.

The proposed method was to bring the stakeholders together to discuss their understanding of work situations.

Support was provided in two forms:

- Provide the management with information on MSDs and raise awareness on the importance of workers' involvement in MSD prevention. At the same time, the aim was to encourage

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management support for the project task forces and enable them gradually to construct a shared viewpoint in the enterprise.

- Train two "project task forces" to understand and analyse the work in order to transform situations that were known to generate MSD. These task forces brought together operators, line managers, supervisory staff, members of the CHSCT, the industrial doctor and the OH&S consultant.

The key goal of the programme was to develop skills in work understanding. This was facilitated by the expertise of the consultants and by feedback and discussion activities which gave a sense of perspective and enabled appropriation.

This programme, carried out as part of an organised project with a supervisor (the safety and environment manager) and a steering committee, enabled the various players (operators, managers and maintenance staff) to discuss their working conditions, to propose potential improvements and to understand the work of others. It is the path taken that leads to a decision.

## **2.4. What was achieved?**

### **What changed over the period 2005–2008**

Following successive evaluations, the results can be broken down into three dimensions: human, organisational and technical.

Human changes in the relationship to work, which are based on an acquisition of knowledge concerning MSD, a close understanding of the work and changes in perception of the work station. In their work, new social relations have developed among colleagues, technicians and managers thanks to this opportunity for exchanging viewpoints.

#### Changes in work organisation:

Among the possible paths of action, decisions of an organisational type were adopted:

- one additional operator at the start of the line to decrease the portions and relieve the workload of the other operators;
- two operators instead of one on the flank stripping station to regulate the workload;
- possibility for employees to work during the week on several work stations involving different loads.

This reorganisation was performed while maintaining the original work rate of around 40 quarters per hour.

#### Technical changes:

From a technical viewpoint, measures were implemented to reduce physical stress for the operators, including a major investment for the creation of a mobile foot bridge on the slaughter chain.

Through this mobile foot bridge, operators can now work without having to carry heavy pieces of meat (20-40 kg) and can drag the meat on a carpet to avoid twisting their spine as a whole.

To achieve these results, a series of choices had to be made to reach decisions. At this level, the contributions of the industrial doctor and the OH&S consultant aimed to link these three dimensions constantly and give a reminder of the goal of overall health at work over the long term.

In 2008, the programme continued with the consultants gradually being withdrawn. The safety manager, acting as project supervisor, now manages and coordinates the brainstorming groups. The enterprise's independence is built up with the support of the industrial doctor and the OH&S consultant (reminders, relays, etc.).

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Difficulties have arisen, some of which have been overcome:

- This organisation relies on the participation of different actors and therefore demand time and attendance at meetings, which means less time for production. The company, as it was willing to conclude the project, made sure that relevant stakeholders are available throughout the duration of the project,
- Another aspect that required additional efforts was establishment of the working groups.

The solution was found by empowering the competent persons (responsible member of CHSCT service health and safety) to conduct meetings, write reports and prepare the refunds to the steering committee.

## **2.5. Success factors**

The project succeeded thanks to the convergence of four major factors:

- awareness of company managers in a field prepared for occupational risk prevention for some years now;
- an organised project proposed by the ARACT;
- contribution of specialist consultants in a comprehensive approach to occupational health; and
- cooperation between the industrial doctor and the OH&S consultant.

The involvement of various structures in a single project (at the departmental level and at the local enterprise level) promoted sustainable action through the pooling of resources and competencies.

The enterprise's permanent efforts depend on three key aspects:

- a management decision-making process which is made possible by the various players' thorough understanding of the work;
- a process of appropriation which makes the players capable of observing, exchanging viewpoints and reporting their analyses to the managers;
- a process of methodological and strategic support by outside players (consultants, OH&S expert, industrial doctor, etc.).

## **2.6. Further information**

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## **2.7. *Transferability***

This initiative is applicable in other sectors of the agricultural and food processing industries, provided that the various entities involved act energetically to pool their resources and competencies to serve the enterprise.