



## PREVENTING ACCIDENTS TO TEMPORARY WORKERS AT A PAPER MILL

### 1. Organisations involved

Sappi Austria

### 2. Description of the case

#### 2.1. Introduction

Sappi Austria's approach to health and safety is based on the principles of a zero accident target, an integrated health and safety management, training at every level, participative information and control structures and adherence to international best practice and safety standards. The company states: 'At Sappi, our attitude is that any injury incurred whether by our own people or our contractors is one too many. Production is important, but safety comes first.'<sup>1</sup>

Both management and works council prioritise the further development of a good safety culture within the company. While the accident rate among the permanent staff was falling, temporary staff were often involved in occupational accidents. It was obvious that this problem needed special attention. In 2003 Sappi focused on the often neglected group of temporary workers and started a specific project with a range of measures to reduce accidents. It was a success and in 2005 Sappi reached the third place in the Austrian National Safety at Work Award for its project 'Safety and Health for temporary workers at Sappi in Gratkorn'.<sup>2</sup>

Sappi is the world's leading producer of coated fine paper with manufacturing units in eight countries. Sappi Austria has the largest, and most advanced, coated fine paper production line in the world. The total capacity of the papermaking machines in Gratkorn is 860,000tpa. At Gratkorn Sappi employs around 1,500 people.

In 2001 Sappi started a workplace health promotion project named 'Healthy Future'. A set of health and safety measures were carried out, on the basis of an employee attitude survey into issues such as workplace design, balanced diet, social competence, health care, work-life balance and age-adjusted working conditions. 'Healthy Future' aimed to raise awareness among the workers about accidents and unsafe behaviour.

The efforts showed success among the permanent staff but failed to change the behaviour of temporary workers. It was recorded that temporary workers had an accident rate five times higher than permanent staff. In addition problems in teamwork (between permanent staff and temporary workers) were seen as one of the biggest stress factors in the company. In the past problems also occurred with covering staff absence due to illness or vacation. Inexperienced temporary workers had problems operating machines / processes correctly.

To overcome these problems and to improve safety performance the project 'Safety and Health for temporary workers at Sappi in Gratkorn' was developed.

#### 2.2. Aims

The overall goal of the project was simple and clear: to reduce the accident rate, especially among the temporary staff, to nearly zero. It was expected that better incorporation of

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<sup>1</sup> Sappi, Annual Report 2005, p. 38. Available at:

[http://sappi.investoreports.com/sappi\\_ar\\_2005/downloads/sappi\\_ar\\_2005\\_full.pdf](http://sappi.investoreports.com/sappi_ar_2005/downloads/sappi_ar_2005_full.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Arbeit, *Positive Entwicklung bei Arbeitsunfällen – Staatspreis Arbeitssicherheit fördert kreatives Potenzial heimischer Betriebe*. Available at:

[http://www.bmwfj.gv.at/BMWA/Presse/Archiv2005/20050525\\_01.htm](http://www.bmwfj.gv.at/BMWA/Presse/Archiv2005/20050525_01.htm)

# CASE STUDIES

temporary workers into the company's processes and more equal treatment of both temporary workers and permanent staff would benefit health and safety. To reach this aim, an occupational health programme was worked out to improve training and better integrate temporary staff into operational processes. The project aimed to mentor temporary personnel with respect to safety and health.

## 2.3. What was done, and how?

The project was initiated by Sappi's health and security manager. Company management, works council, occupational physician and representatives from the Austrian Social Insurance for Occupational Risks (AUVA) worked together on the project. A temporary employment agency, which provided around 70% of the temporary workers, agreed to support the efforts. The project started in 2003 and after a few meetings five key points were concluded:

### **Demand for a safety certificate from temporary employment agencies**

Sappi asks temporary employment agencies for certification according to the Safety Checklist for Personal Services (SCP Certificate) to make sure that they have dealt adequately with safety and health issues. The SCP Certificate is a specific checklist tailor-made for temporary employment agencies and belongs to the same group of safety management systems as the Safety Checklist Contractors (SCC Certificate).

### **Safety training for temporary workers**

Workers from temporary employment agencies get a one-day training session on safety and health issues at an advanced level. Sappi itself organises and provides the on-the-job training, supported by a representative of the Austrian Social Insurance for Occupational Risks (AUVA). The training is composed of three parts: basic health and safety legislation, occupational safety at Sappi and fire protection.

### **Teambuilding with temporary workers**

In three-day workshops temporary and permanent staff worked together on teambuilding issues. Sappi hired two external trainers from a consulting agency with experience in personnel management and teambuilding. The results of an employee attitude survey on safety and health issues at Sappi were taken as a starting point for the workshop. The perception of safety and health problems within both groups of workers was discussed. Participants worked together in small groups to carry out tasks such as constructing a tower by using materials provided. In this case the task itself was not that important; the focus was on training workers in teamwork by taking health and safety aspects into account. Representatives from management, works council and the safety and security manager of Sappi also attended a workshop. Teambuilding is seen as a key to gaining a better understanding of one another, avoiding mistakes and accidents and improving both operational processes and safety at work.

**Figure 1. Workshop on teambuilding with temporary workers at Sappi, Gratkorn**





### **Advanced training as a safety representative**

One worker among the group of temporary workers was appointed safety representative (SR). This refers to the special situation of temporary workers and is part of the strategy for a better integration of temporary staff in the company. The SR basic training includes knowledge on health and safety legislation, duties of the labour inspectorate, occupational medicine, personal protective equipment, accident prevention and risk assessment. Basic SR seminars with 24 hours of training are provided by Austria's Chamber of Labour, among other organisations. The main temporary employment agency recommended a worker for this training and Sappi agreed to this suggestion.

### **New rules for temporary staff**

New rules were introduced at Sappi stating that some years of professional experience were now a precondition for temporary staff to be allowed to fill in for workers in sensitive areas.

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

By a combination of these different measures Sappi was able to reduce the accident rate among temporary workers by 80% in just one year (from 11 to 2 accidents). During this time 120 temporary workers were employed at Sappi. The ambitious aim of having zero accidents was narrowly missed. Sappi now has a very good safety performance among permanent and temporary workers alike. In addition the relationship between permanent and temporary staff has improved significantly. This was accompanied by certain other measures, such as paying permanent and temporary workers approximately the same, and providing all workers with the same working clothes / overalls.

The problems in teamwork were counteracted by the strategy of teambuilding that included temporary workers and further measures of individual support. With respect to night shift work individual coaching was organised for employees suffering from sleep disorders. All these measures, along with the provision of a hot meal at night to all employees, led to a higher rate of job satisfaction and better team working. Sappi uses the Human Work Index (HWI) to continuously evaluate its safety programmes, health promotion process and the job satisfaction of employees.

The slogan 'Healthy Future' has become part of the overall ethos of the company and is seen as an ongoing process to improve workplaces and to offer health promotion. Training on health and safety hazards and safe work practices is a critical component of Sappi's occupational health programmes. These programmes are now complemented by comprehensive general health and wellbeing programmes which include e.g. health monitoring and initiatives focused on issues such as diabetes and heart health.

Issues like stress management and alcohol awareness are also addressed. Temporary agency workers have the opportunity to take part in the company's health promotion programmes. Health checks including blood count, audiometry, skin checks or cancer checkups are also available to them. In 2005 Sappi received a special certificate for its health promotion programme, the 'Gütesiegel Betriebliche Gesundheitsförderung', from the Austrian Network of Vocational Health Promotion, supported by the 'Fonds Gesundes Österreich'.<sup>3</sup>

### **Problems faced**

When using the term 'temporary worker' it is important to distinguish between temporary employment agencies and so-called 'contractors' (third party companies). Temporary workers from temporary employment agencies usually work closely with the permanent staff at Sappi and are often hired for a longer period of time. Temporary workers from contractors /

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<sup>3</sup> Fonds gesundes Österreich, Gütesiegel Betriebliche Gesundheitsförderung. Available at: [http://www.Netzwerk-bgf.at/portal/index.html?ctrl.cmd=render&ctrl.window=bgfportal.channel\\_content.cmsWindow&p\\_menuid=66230&p\\_tabid=4](http://www.Netzwerk-bgf.at/portal/index.html?ctrl.cmd=render&ctrl.window=bgfportal.channel_content.cmsWindow&p_menuid=66230&p_tabid=4)

# CASE STUDIES

subcontractors have specific jobs like construction work and are mostly employed for shorter periods of time in the plant. The project 'Safety and Health for temporary workers at Sappi in Gratkorn' focused on the workers from temporary employment agencies but also had the contractors in mind.

While the temporary employment agencies were cooperative, some of the contractors felt they were subject to unusually high health and safety demands when dealing with Sappi. Some saw the measures as exaggerated and followed the health and safety rules without real emphasis. To overcome this problem Sappi developed a special system to evaluate the work of the contractors: a specific 'traffic light system' describes their safety performance. A 'green light' given by Sappi shows a good safety performance by the contractor. A 'yellow light' signals an indifferent performance and results in a warning to the contractor. A 'red light' shows a serious violation against safety and health rules that leads to severe consequences for the contractor (e.g. ending of the contract, disqualification from further orders).

## **2.5. Success factors**

In dealing with temporary employment agencies Sappi stressed the advantages of this project: the expected reduction in accidents and improved integration of the temporary workers into operational processes. Sappi argued further that the health and safety demands for temporary workers would rise in all branches and that in the future the temporary employment agencies would face similar high demands in every plant. Permission to work at Sappi can be used as an excellent reference for the temporary employment agency in negotiations with other customers.

The willingness of Sappi management to take a broader view of accident statistics was a major factor in the success of this project. In the past companies usually counted only accidents among the permanent staff in their statistics and omitted accidents involving temporary workers. Using this method the published accident rates showed only a part of the reality. It was a matter of honesty for Sappi to include the accidents of temporary workers in their own statistics, additionally driven by international developments to count accidents in this way. But after including temporary workers the accident rate showed a significant rise at Sappi. Rising accident rates are seen as a black mark against the company; this in turn was a powerful argument for Sappi to impose the project on temporary workers.

The combination of measures taken was also an important success factor. The advanced health and safety training raised the awareness among temporary workers of unsafe situations and behaviour. The process of teambuilding was key to a better understanding between temporary and permanent staff, and for improvement of the operational processes. This led to a higher quality of work which is more satisfying to all. The reliability of the temporary staff increased, and they feel better integrated into the company. The project work led to a win/win situation with benefits for company and workers alike.

## **2.6. Further information**

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# CASE STUDIES

Web: <http://www.sappi.com>

## 2.7. Transferability

The experience gained in the project might be of major interest for other companies or sectors. Sappi itself is working with other paper and cellulose making companies in the 'Österreichische Vereinigung der Zellstoff - und Papierchemiker und -techniker' (ÖZEPA). A working committee of the ÖZEPA assists members on health and safety issues, and Sappi's input on this committee is important.<sup>4</sup>

In future the number of temporary workers is expected to rise in all parts of the economy. Advanced safety training and the integration of temporary workers into occupational processes will become a matter of particular interest. Teambuilding, education and clear rules with regard to safety and health will remain on the agenda for many years.

**Figure 2. Safety leaflet created with participation of temporary workers at their workplaces Green Tick = Safe behaviour / Red Cross = unsafe behaviour**



## 3. References, resources:

Sappi Austria Produktions-GmbH & Co KG, *Gesunde Zukunft – Betriebliche Gesundheitsförderung bei Sappi, Gratkorn, undated*. Available at: [http://www.gzszff.at/projekte/SAPPI\\_Gesunde\\_Zukunft\\_BGF-Beispiel.pdf](http://www.gzszff.at/projekte/SAPPI_Gesunde_Zukunft_BGF-Beispiel.pdf)

Sappi Austria Produktions-GmbH & Co KG, *Einreichunterlagen zum Staatspreis Arbeitssicherheit 2005 des Bundesministeriums für Wirtschaft und Arbeit, Gratkorn 13.12.2004*.

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<sup>4</sup> Österreichische Vereinigung der Zellstoff - und Papierchemiker und -techniker (ÖZEPA), Arbeitssicherheit. Available at: <http://oezepa.austropapier.at/index.php?id=2>