

OSH MANAGEMENT IN A SUPERMARKET CHAIN

1. Organisations involved

REWE Group

2. Description of the case

2.1. Introduction

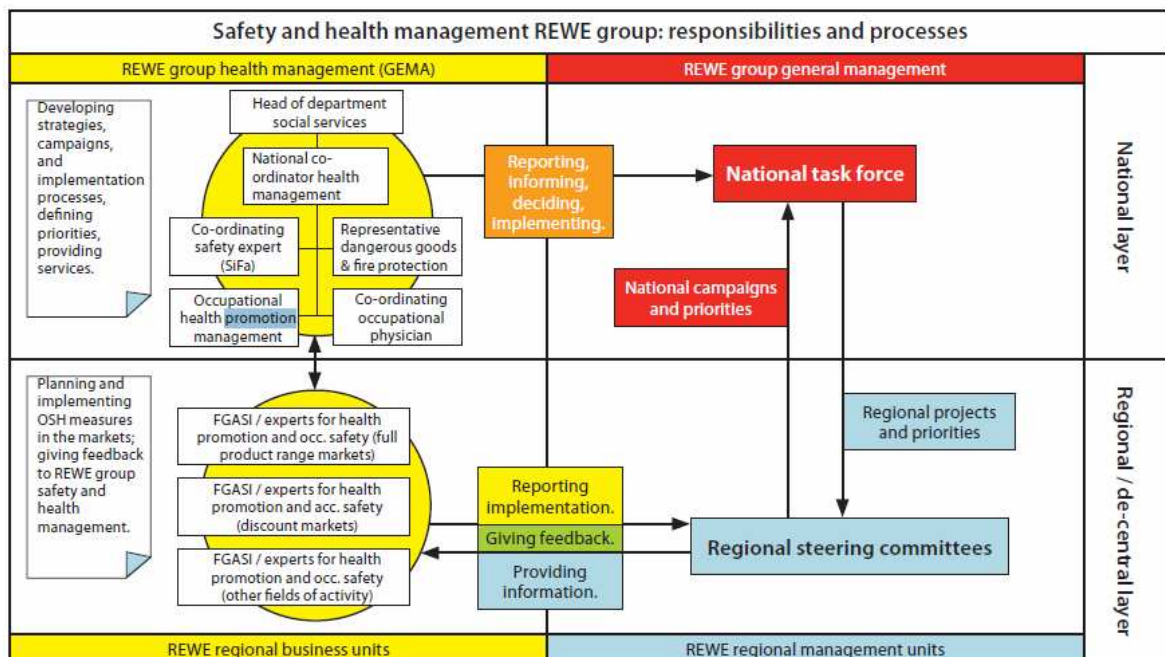
The REWE Group is an international enterprise with a cooperative structure. About 320,000 workers in retail markets and administration in 16 European countries are responsible for an annual turnover of EUR 49.8 billion. Nonetheless, because of the cooperative structure, many supermarkets are run mostly independently and have to be considered as SMEs with 50 or less employees.

REWE strives for innovation, growth and profitability in its core sectors of food and tourism. To reach these strategic objectives and to ensure sustainability it is of major importance to have clearly defined responsibilities and well structured management processes between headquarters, regional administration units and more than 6,000 supermarkets and department stores in Germany. This affects all management processes, including safety and health management.

Workplace risk assessment has to be carried out in accordance with the European and national legislative framework. To ensure safe and healthy workplaces it is important to regard this not as a mere formality but to take adequate intervention measures whenever indicated and to periodically re-assess all workplaces.

The person responsible for workplace risk assessment in retail stores is the store manager. He can request assistance from experts in health promotion and occupational safety (Fachkräfte für Gesundheitsförderung und Arbeitssicherheit, FGASI) from REWE's regional administration units. The general design of REWE's health management, including the different layers and processes of management, is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. REWE OSH management scheme



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The core question at the beginning of the project was how locally conducted risk assessments could be mainstreamed into REWE Group management processes. A more centralised and standardised design was considered to be helpful to figure out typical risks in retail stores in general, to compare strains and workload for different workstations and work processes, and to evaluate the efficiency of intervention measures.

2.2. Aims

The REWE Group management decided to standardise risk assessment with the help of modern technology: inspecting supermarkets with the help of a personal digital assistant (PDA) allows the use of the same checklists and risk assessment instruments in all shops. Data can be saved in a central database that allows direct comparison between findings and interventions. This contributes to better documentation and sustainability in workplace health interventions.

Milestones of the project were:

- designing the PDA checklist
- testing PDA checklists in inspections in full product range supermarkets
- documenting experiences
- expanding the use to further markets and fields of activity
- periodically evaluating the findings and proposed interventions
- identifying areas of elevated risks and tackling them.

2.3. What was done, and how?

In Germany, workplace risk assessment has to be carried out under the provisions of sections 5 and 6 of the Arbeitsschutzgesetz (Law on occupational safety). Additional provisions have to be taken into account with regard to the safe handling of dangerous substances (s.7 Gefahrstoffverordnung, Decree on dangerous substances) and general operational safety (s.3 Betriebssicherheitsverordnung, Decree on operational safety).

Within the REWE quality management system (RQMS) workplace risk assessment was carried out by the shop manager, assisted by experts on health promotion and occupational safety from FGASI. During their inspections they used checklists to assess occupational safety, hygiene, and general aspects of quality.

The FGASI experts were able to customise the checklists to suit the needs of the supermarket under inspection. Results were filled in manually and transferred later to a computer database. However, because the checklists were not standardised it was not possible to directly compare results between supermarkets.

The company therefore decided to introduce PDAs to standardise risk assessments and to enable data to be entered into the central database immediately.

The risk assessment checklists were amended by the quality management team and the FGASI experts. The new computer-based risk assessment tool is comparable to checklist A110 of the Statutory Accident Insurance for the Retail Sector (BGHW 2007) but contains additional questions relevant to the different parts of each supermarket: 77 questions cover the following areas:

- whole supermarket environment in general
- electric equipment
- stock
- bakery
- convenience

CASE STUDIES

- service counter
- till area
- in-house traffic routes
- transportation equipment
- fire protection
- dangerous substances
- first aid inspections
- training measures
- other areas of activity.

Each question allows the inspector to decide whether safety requirements are being met or not. If deficiencies are noted, comments can be added. Every question is given a specific weighting. The average weightings in different categories allow the FGASI expert and the central safety and health unit to compile a safety profile of each supermarket which is fully comparable with the profiles of other supermarkets in the group. In this way it becomes obvious if the general safety profile of the store is very good, good, tolerable or poor and which interventions are required to improve its rating.

The supermarket managers can profit from the experience of FGASI and management experts. Adequate measures can easily be taken to improve working conditions, and these measures can be targeted precisely on the relevant area. The efficiency of measures can be evaluated and activities and general strategies can be adapted to target new situations.

2.4. What was achieved?

In the current business environment, operational objectives can only be met if management can make decisions quickly on the basis of clearly identified needs. This applies to general management as well as safety and health management. Risk assessment with the help of PDAs and a central database permits transparent and systematic safety management in regard to risk assessment and intervention measures. The use of a computer-based, standardised checklist can be seen as a positive contribution to safety and health management. In this supermarket chain, risk assessment is no longer a standalone activity undertaken by individual store managers. The management of each supermarket can request help and advice from regional and central management at any time. Areas of elevated risk or deficiencies in work organisation can be identified and problems can be solved systematically. Direct comparability of supermarket profiles, risk assessment results, and interventions have allowed the group's safety and health managers to start a real spiral of permanent improvement.

Problems faced

Problems lie in the corporate structure of the REWE Group: within the first project group of full product range supermarkets some markets are run independently by their owners. They are only bound to the REWE Group by a cooperation contract. These owners are offered the new risk assessment instrument, but its use is voluntary.

For the Group as a whole this means that in the long run acceptance of the new risk assessment instrument, risk assessment practices, and safety standards may differ between independent REWE supermarkets and supermarkets that are full subsidiaries of the Group.

2.5. Success factors

The design of a single checklist suitable for supermarkets was the first step to standardisation and transparency. The use of the PDA and the direct transmission of data to a central database enabled a clear and comparable workplace risk assessment which allows cooperation between local, regional and central management units and can help to improve working conditions in all



group stores. Existing quality management and health management structures helped to realise the project quickly.

2.6. Further information

Contact information:

REWE Zentral AG

Roland Kraemer

Domstrasse 20, 50668 Köln

Tel: +49 221 149 -1922

Fax: +49 221 149 -971922

Email: roland.kraemer@rewe-group.com

2.7. Transferability

The principle can easily be transferred to other sectors of activity in the REWE Group. This will only require adjustments in the design of the risk assessment checklist and the addition of a correlating module to the database.

The design of the project can be seen as an option for effective safety management for all enterprises that consist of a central steering unit and various local subsidiaries, as is commonly found in the food and non-food retail sector, a sector that employs some 15.5 million workers in Europe (EU-25, Eurostat 2006).

3. References, resources:

Sources and further information

Berufsgenossenschaft für Handel und Warendistribution: *Sicherheitscheck – Verkaufsstellen allgemein. Eine Handlungshilfe zur Gefährdungsbeurteilung.*

Available at: <http://www.bghw.de/praevention/sparte-einzelhandel/sicherheits-checks/a-110-verkaufsstellenallgemein>