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**28/03/2001**

## **Factsheet 12 - Occupational Safety and Health and Employability: programmes, practices and experiences**



In recent years, employability has emerged as one of the key policy initiatives that governments can take

to boost levels of employment within national economies. It is primarily seen as a labour market intervention. And although there is no single agreed definition, employability is principally concerned with improving the knowledge and skills base of workers and unemployed people by means of further education and vocational training. The aim is to assist workers to find or maintain employment. In September 1999 the link between occupational safety and health and employability was addressed in depth for the first time at a conference jointly organised by the European Agency and the Finnish Presidency of the European Union<sup>1</sup>. Since then, the Agency has organised a number of follow-up activities including the report that is summarised here. According to the report, occupational safety and health can contribute to the improvement of worker employability in a variety of ways including workplace (re)design, maintenance of a healthy and safe work environment, training and retraining, assessment of work demands, medical diagnosis, health screening, and the assessment of functional capacities. The report brings together 26 case studies of initiatives from a variety of organisations and are divided into four main categories: - major programmes that deal with health and safety hazards aimed at preventing occupation-related injury and illness. These programmes often focus at specific risk groups; - rehabilitation of ill workers by providing services or adapting workplaces to help the ill or injured worker to recover from their complaints and

reintegrate into the workplace; - reintegration initiatives for longer term disabled people; - Workplace Health Promotion initiatives which use the workplace as a setting to undertake activities aimed at improving the general health of the workforce. As well as describing the 26 initiatives, the stakeholders involved, the results obtained and the problems encountered, the report also assesses their impact and looks at the 'generalisability' or transferability of the lessons learned. Seven examples are outlined here to give a flavour of the report.

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**Roxane L. Gervais**, Health & Safety Laboratory

Health and wellbeing are essential elements to increase and/or maintain employee performance, productivity, job satisfaction and engagement within the work environment. This article presents an overview of the differences in the interpretation of the terms, while acknowledging that these differences arise due to cultural and organisational interpretation of workplace practices. In addition, it highlights organisations' promotion of policies to improve or increase health and wellbeing in the workplace. Effective policies and practices could lead to healthy employees with a high state of wellbeing, which benefits both the organisation and the wider society.

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