

Why a “Healthy Enterprise” Standard?

Work... affects health

Since adults spend more than half of their waking hours at work, wouldn't it be logical to not only talk about health in the workplace, but especially to offer programs that will promote the adoption of better habits and a healthier working environment? This way, we would not only be able to keep them away from the hospital, but also make them happier and more productive in their personal and professional lives.

The time is right

Young people entering the job market today are more concerned than previous generations about their own health and the need to maintain a balance between work and personal life. Therefore, it is in the interest of employers wishing to attract these young workers to publicly show that they offer health programs to all their employees. This will quickly become an effective way of retaining current employees and attracting new ones.

Concerted action

This innovative standard will allow concerted, organized action of public and private resources in order to promote prevention strategies for health. It involves taking action in companies on the following four levels: habits, work-personal life balance, working environment and management methods. Given these actions are aimed at employees and management, the integration of this standard into management practices will:

1. provide a good forum for directly reaching the public to promote behavioural changes in terms of adopting good habits and preventing illness;
2. promote an improved working environment and management practices influencing the health of employees;
3. lead to significant improvement in the wellbeing, health and quality of life of Quebecers;
4. encourage companies and organizations that support the public health network to help curb and even reduce the increasing healthcare costs of curative medicine;
5. contribute indirectly to the acquisition of healthy habits in the children and loved ones of employees;
6. increase productivity in companies, and, in turn, company competitiveness.

Substantial jumps in productivity

Companies want to know right away what implementing the “Healthy Enterprise” standard will do for them. Well, the numbers speak for themselves. For companies that have integrated health programs based on good habits and improved working environment, figures show that each dollar invested in these programs brings a return of \$1.50 to \$3.00 in increased productivity over the first five years of these programs. Overall, the return on investment is far greater when we take into account the money that the healthcare system saves.

Currently, given the increasingly intense competition worldwide, companies are looking for new ways to substantially increase their productivity. However, the answer is simple: human resources. By reducing absenteeism, overtime, CSST contributions and group insurance premiums, the company wins on several fronts. Not only do health programs cost a company nothing, but the return on its investment will come through increased productivity and reduced overhead.

... over

A few statistics

Studies have shown that:

- eliminating a single health risk for an employee increases productivity at work by 9% and reduces absenteeism by 2%¹;
- a physically active employee is 12% more productive than a sedentary employee²;
- an employee who smokes costs a company \$3,150 more a year than a non-smoking employee³.

Reduced costs for the healthcare system in the mid- to long-term

Bad habits (high-fat, high-sugar diet, sedentary lifestyle, smoking, etc.), high levels of stress and an unhealthy working environment affect the chances of tens of thousands of Quebecers to remain healthy. Approximately 40% of hospitalizations are related to bad habits and stress. As well, those hospitalized often require recurrent care for their conditions.

The poor health of the population reduces the governments room to manoeuvre because of the enormous costs to the healthcare system. Increased healthcare costs mean that the government's other areas of concern, such as education and infrastructures, suffer from chronic underfunding. The aging of the population, increased rates of obesity, changes in our diets (junk food) and intense stress at work all contribute to making the cost of healthcare a bottomless pit.

Yet, if people made simple changes to their habits and if companies slightly modified their management practices, costs to the healthcare system could be largely reduced. Since people spend more than half of their waking hours at work, it is only logical to make changes in the workplace.

Companies promoting their concern for employee health

Just like ISO-certified companies, which advertise the quality of their processes, businesses that obtain their "Healthy Enterprise" certification could publicly advertise their commitment to maintaining and promoting the health of their employees by setting up a management process based on best practices.

The assurance of best health practices in a company

Companies are used to basing their business processes on the best practices in their sector of activity. By implementing the "Healthy Companies" standard, they can rest assured that their health program will be based on the best practices in this area. As well, since the standard will be regularly updated and will take into account the latest best practices in the field, they will be able to remain one step ahead.

And if a company already has a program?

Implementing the standard and obtaining certification is an extra step for companies that already have health programs, since this standard:

- provides consensual guidelines for actions that significantly contribute to the health and wellbeing of employees;
- structures corporate actions and facilitates the maintenance of current programs;
- outlines a way of measuring returns on activities;
- clearly shows the commitment of the company to make their employees' health part of their values and integrate it into their management practices (attracting and retaining employees);
- helps companies reduce the pressure on the Québec healthcare system.

Lastly... an issue of sustainable development

Integrating this standard into Québec business management practices is definitely a concrete and convincing action for sustainable development in our society. This action involves the health of our people, the productivity of our companies and the economic health of Québec.

1. Source: Pelletier B, Boles M and Lynch W. *Change in health risks and work productivity over time*. J. Occup Environ Med. 2004; 46 (7): 746-754.

2. Source: Health Canada.

3. Source: Health Canada.