

## FNEEQ says “No!” to occupational health and safety management systems



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In theory, when an employer shows an interest in occupational health and safety, that’s seen as a good thing. But in practice, when that interest is rooted in obtaining “Healthy Enterprise” certification, our experience is that it can be very bad news for employees... Why? To answer this question, we need to take a closer look at occupational health and safety management systems, or OHSMS.

In recent year, Quebec managers have been taking an increased interest in OHSMS, tied to ISO standards. The goal of these programs is to create a healthy and sound environment in the workplace through internal policies, practices and mechanisms designed to promote health prevention, legislative compliance and improved performance. This fad was prompted in 2004 when a group of entrepreneurs and investors, among them the Chagnon family and Power Corporation, got together and decided to create the Group for Promotion and Prevention Strategies, also known as GP<sup>2</sup>S, to raise corporate awareness about the cost of health to Quebec’s public finances and economic development. Why this sudden interest by managers in occupational health and safety? The answer can be found on the group’s Website:

*Investing in health programs that are centred on encouraging healthier lifestyles and work environments can be very profitable for an organization. Figures from Canadian businesses show that for every dollar invested in a well-structured program based on best practices, up to \$5 in productivity gains is generated in the first five years following*

*implementation. The return on investment is higher still when we take into account the savings to our healthcare system (our translation).<sup>1</sup>*

What that tells us is that improving health and safety in the workplace is all about productivity, performance and profit. Two years later, in 2006, GP<sup>2</sup>S worked with the Ministry of Health and Social Services to create the government’s action plan to promote healthy lifestyles,<sup>2</sup> a strategy aimed at “improving Quebecers’ quality of life by giving them access to environments that encourage healthy lifestyles, notably through physical activity and healthy eating habits.”<sup>3</sup> In 2008, the group’s initiative culminated in the establishment by Quebec’s *Bureau de normalisation*, a paragonovernmental agency, of the Healthy Enterprise standard.

To date, 48 private-sector companies, municipalities and health and social service agencies have obtained Healthy Enterprise certification, which covers four areas of activity: employee lifestyle, work/personal life balance, working environment and management practices.

The FNEEQ see the Healthy Enterprise standard as “bad news” for employees. The first reason is that this standard contains no requirement for union involvement:

management can put together a “health and well-being” committee as it sees fits, completely bypassing the parity structures provided for under the collective agreement. Secondly, the occupational health and safety priorities are imposed from the outside, without necessarily taking into account the particular reality or problems of the workplace. And lastly, we believe there is a high risk that the standard’s “employee lifestyle” component will lead to personal blame for health. For example, what happens if an employee who is a smoker refuses to follow a stop-smoking program, knowing he is “costing his enterprise \$3,000 more a year than a non-smoking employee?”<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, the FNEEQ’s federal bureau tabled a resolution in April 2013 to oppose implementation of the Healthy Enterprise standard in our educational institutions and to strengthen occupational health and safety parity committees in all three of our *regroupements*. The federation’s occupational health and safety committee was also given the mandate to develop a portrait of the parity committees in our unions. It is imperative that occupational health and safety remains a union issue focused squarely on the needs of our members rather than on the needs of some board of directors looking for outside certification to boast about on a Website.

1 <http://www.gp2s.net/fr/norme/pourquoi-norme-promotion-sante-mieux-etre>

2 Seven government departments and three agencies have signed on to this action plan, which can be viewed at: <http://msssa4.msss.gouv.qc.ca/fr/document/publication.nsf/fb143c75e0c27b69852566aa0064b01c/92885999c9ad58748525720d00653c6b?OpenDocument>

3 <http://www.saineshabitudesdevie.gouv.qc.ca/extranet/pag/index.php?le-pag>

4 <http://www.gp2s.net/fr/norme/pourquoi-norme-promotion-sante-mieux-etre>