## Case

# “Pharma LAB”

The case study concerns a major pharmaceutical company, which has seen an increased number of serious allergic reactions causing long-term sick leaves among employees working in the holding areas where animals used for testing and experimental use are kept.

The reasons for the allergic reactions were primarily exposure to animal hair from rats, mice and other types of animals, but happened despite very meticulously designed safety regulations giving clear instructions to employees entering and exiting the holding areas

A participatory approach was chosen by management to try to identify any flaws or breaches in the design or adherence to the safety precautions. A committee consisting of the local safety manager, a nurse and the local trade union were set up to conduct interviews with all employees working with or being in touch with the animals.

The interviews disclosed that the employees were generally extremely careful in their handling of the animals – professionally aware of the risk of infecting the animals or otherwise contaminate the tests.

Going through the safety regulations it became clear that each and every element were addressing the health and safety of the animals and the need to protect the stables against external contamination. Some of the precautions did indeed contribute to protect the employees as well – but that was only a side-effect of the animal directed regulations

With the help of an external consultant the committee developed a new set of guidelines which also focussed on the health and safety of the employees.

The committee also established that workplace training needed considerable improvement and training manuals were re-written to include a set of new work procedures.

The intervention included

* improved equipment and maintenance
* improved safety regulations
* improved training, work procedures
* organizational changes.

These interventions led to a marked decrease in both the incidence and severity of the allergies and a dramatic reduction in sick days and employee turnover.

Cost of changes and process was recuperated within a half-year due to reduced sick days and employee turnover. In addition productivity increased due to improved work procedures and a perceived higher level of commitment from both management and employees.