

## Workplace obesity program shows modest effects after just 1 year

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Environmental changes implemented at 12 Dow Chemical Company worksites helped employees' there achieve modest improvements in health risks, including weight management, decreasing tobacco use and blood pressure, says Emory University public health researcher Ron Goetzel, PhD.

Goetzel and his team will present the findings from their study Oct. 29, 2008, at the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association in San Diego.

"These are early findings from a longer and larger multi-site study that examine the effects of introducing relatively low-cost environmental and ecological interventions at the workplace aimed at curbing the growth of overweight and obesity among workers," says Goetzel, research professor of health policy and management, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University. Goetzel is also director of Emory's Institute for Health and Productivity Studies and vice president of consulting and applied research for Thomson Reuters.

"Several research centers across the country are testing this idea with different types of workers and in various industries," adds Goetzel.

The study, the first large-scale study of its kind, examined the effectiveness of environmental interventions that support individual change efforts through creation of more supportive worksite health promotion environments.

Environmental weight management interventions were implemented at 12 work locations at the Dow Chemical Company. The environmental interventions, called LightenUP, aimed to decrease the number of calories employees consumed and increase the number of calories they expended.

Nine locations were designated treatment sites and three control. The control sites received only individually focused interventions via Dow's core health promotion program that seeks to improve employees' health behaviors through a combination of education and behavior change efforts. At treatment sites, employees were provided enhanced access to healthy foods in vending machines and cafeterias, greater access to physical activity through walking trails and pedometer programs, dissemination of multiple health education materials, leadership training, physical activity and weight management programs, health assessments and individual consultations, and online behavior change programs.

Researchers found that after one year, employees who participated in the environmental weight management interventions significantly reduced their blood pressure risk and maintained a steady weight when compared to employees at control sites who only received individual interventions.

"We continue to study the effects of environmental interventions aimed at preventing obesity in the workplace, and we are now beginning to analyze results from the second year. We expect to present updated findings at future scientific meetings," says Goetzel.

Source: Emory University

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