



Shortlist 2010

Greenwash Award

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**Nominated for the Public Eye Greenwash Award 2010  
from the Swiss Trade Union Confederation "Unia," Service Sector:**

## **Health Promotion Switzerland**

### **In Brief**

*Health promotion in a climate of fear: The Health Promotion Switzerland foundation awarded the "Friendly Work Space" label to various Migros companies in May 2009. At the same time, numerous complaints were made by Migros employees to the Unia trade union that a climate of fear reigns at the major distributor. Many employees fear they cannot keep up with demanding and unhealthy performance requirements, as Migros has recently been laying off more people whose health is poor, often as a consequence of long years of demanding work at the company. Increasingly, veteran employees are laid off or urged into early retirement under false pretexts. Harmful and unlawful long-term night shifts without compensating daytime shifts were common practice.*

### **Brief Profile of the Nominated Institution**

The Health Promotion Switzerland foundation is an institution based in Lausanne and Bern that initiates, promotes, and carries out public health activities. Its "Friendly Work Space" label honors, in its own words, "enterprises with systematic and sustainable business health management." This consists of six criteria including "creation of work structures that are beneficial to mind and body," "social responsibility," "careful use of natural resources," and "measures for healthy work design."

### **Criticized Institutional Misconduct**

In May 2009, Health Promotion Switzerland awarded the "Friendly Work Space" label on the following Migros companies that do not fulfill the criteria of the label: the Micarna meat processing plant; the Suhr distribution center; and the Migros cooperative in Lucerne. When comparing the criteria with the actual situation at Migros, a stark difference appears between expectations and reality.

Unia, the nominating labor union, is aware that a climate of fear reigns over Migros employees, worried that they cannot keep up with the demanding and unhealthy performance requirements. Migros has recently been laying off more employees whose health is poor, often as a consequence of decades of work for the company. Increasingly, veteran employees are laid off or seemingly forced into early retirement over trivialities. Based on employee responses, "health management" in this climate leads to employees increasingly coming to work although ill, or not going through with pending operations after being pressured by a superior. In short, the "health management" is perceived by

many employees as an instrument to discipline workers. Also, at the Suhr distribution center, a diesel locomotive that emitted severe odors was only taken out of service after employee intervention and a report in the Swiss newspaper “SonntagsBlick.”

The awarding of the label to Micarna was particularly criticized. The Unia labor union brought a legal case against Migros before the Federal Administrative Court of Switzerland. Claims of the case were (among other things) long-term night shifts without compensating daytime shifts, and regularly recurring Sunday shifts, both granted by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO). With the decision of March 28, 2009, various authorizations relating to long-term night shifts and Sunday shifts were repealed, and thus Unia’s criticism was legally endorsed. It is incomprehensible that an enterprise can ignore the legal framework, and advocate against occupational health findings for such regulation, and nonetheless be awarded the “Friendly Work Space” label.

### **Demands**

The “Friendly Work Space” label must be revoked from the Suhr distribution center and Micarna. At a minimum, the legal requirements must be met before this label can be awarded. Conversely, a label cannot be awarded merely for acting within the law. The supervision of implementation of operational health management must consider the perspectives of those affected as well as social partners. In general, operational health management carries the risk of leading to the disciplining of the workers, resulting in workplace pressure that is harmful to health. Critical self-reflection of these dangers must be a part of the criteria. In addition, the employees must have participation rights.

### **Further Information**

- <http://www.sf.tv/sendungen/kassensturz/sendung.php?docid=20090630>
- [http://www.beobachter.ch/arbeit/artikel/migros\\_schlecht-belohnte-firmentreue/](http://www.beobachter.ch/arbeit/artikel/migros_schlecht-belohnte-firmentreue/)