

**Hazards
Campaign**



www.workstress.net

The UK National Work-Stress Network

AUTUMN NEWS 2006

Is this the last chance for voluntary work stress standards?

In 2003, the Health and Safety Commission rejected calls for statutory protection for the mental health of people at work despite the overwhelming evidence that work-related stress was the greatest single cause of ill-health among workers. Instead the Commission decided to rely on persuasion. In April 2004 the **Stress Management Standards** were launched to help employers eliminate damaging stress in the workplace. Employers were asked to *'voluntarily'* adopt the Standards and to accept the *'moral'* case for protecting the health of employees.

What has happened since? Two years on, in the overwhelming majority of workplaces employers seem to have simply ignored the increasingly desperate appeals of HSE to implement the Standards.

In April 2005 HSE began a major campaign to sell the standards to reluctant employers. Seventy organisations were targeted with special help from Occupational Psychologists, ACAS advisors and specially trained HSE Inspectors to implement the Standards in the hope that these organisations would provide beacons of excellence for other employers.

In April 2006 HSE set out on a 'road show' of workshops aimed at HR managers in the employment sectors most affected by work-related stress (Health, Local Government, Central Government & Financial Services) in order "to persuade managers of the business case" for adopting the Standards.

In 2007, HSE will organise a series of seminars to give further help to companies in the implementation of the Standards. HSE says "*In return for this free help and advice, HSE expects participants to start taking action on...work-related stress by early 2007.*"

Nobody can now argue that the voluntary approach has not had a fair chance to work. If employers do not now take up the challenge then the case for statutory enforcement of the Management Standards will be overwhelming. The Stress Network annual conference on 10th November 2007 will examine whether the voluntary system has delivered the goods for workers. Your experience will be crucial to this examination. Please make every effort to attend.

Stress Network Conference

Saturday November 10th 2007, 10.00 till 16.00

Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Birmingham

Enforcing the Stress Management Standards

Early-bird Delegate fee:£50.00

Full Delegate Fee:£65.00 after September 30th 2007

Unwaged Fee £17.00

Overnight accommodation available

Les Roberts, Conference Secretary: lesvroberts@hotmail.com

Convenor's Report

I must apologise for the delay in putting together further newsletters during 2006. It is several months since the last edition, and this one has in fact been in preparation since August. However I was called out of retirement once again to work away from home and sadly, with that and domestic DIY demands, my time has been very limited. We hope to return to our usual 4 editions in 2007. I am grateful to Les Roberts for his working in completing this edition.



Record Web Activity – in March we hit the highest ever record for the network of activity, with over 25,000 hits, and 11,334 documents downloaded by readers. However after a relatively quiet summer period we achieved over 27,000 hits in October.

The Network has now obtained its own display facilities, which have been used at a range of events, and provide a focus for our work and handout materials.

Our revised **Information Pack** was reprinted in the early summer following very generous support from AMICUS, NASUWT and UNISON and we are indebted to them for their generous assistance and support. It is now available in glossy printed booklet format as before.



Bulk copies of the booklet can be ordered by email from the Convenor – please contact landraper@workstress.net for details. A payment equivalent to at least £1.00 per copy is requested.

Stress Conference Cancelled

Regrettably, as a result of lack of bookings, we had to make the decision to cancel our planned Conference on Sickness Absence Management set for *November 18th 2006*. This was most unfortunate as we had a good day planned and we were disappointed in the end to have to turn away a number of late entry bookings. We recognise that Trades Union systems for bids for funding do take time, but we hope that with adequate notice delegates will be able to take benefit from our new conference booking arrangements to be announced for 2007.

We are very pleased to provide advance information of our **November 2007 Conference tackling the subject of "Enforcing the Stress Management Standards"**. Speakers from HSE, the world of academic research and trades unions will set the scene for workshops and discussion groups.

More details will be publicised in due course and will be available via Risks E-Zine, Hazards and Trades Union Websites on <http://www.workstress.net/downloads.htm>

Ian Draper

Diary Dates

Hazards Campaign Meeting Manchester Hazards Centre, December 14th 12.00 till 16.00

Stress Network Steering Group Meetings 2007:-

10th February

24th March

9th June

8th September

Hazards Conference 2007 July 27th to 29th Manchester University

Stress Network at the UK Hazards Conference

Over 500 delegates gathered at Manchester University in mid July for the annual Hazards Conference weekend. As always it is a chance to refresh the batteries, to exchange ideas and experiences and just to take time out to consider how the safety agenda is developing.

The Stress Network, as always played a key part in the event. Ian Draper, Network Convener was invited to Chair the opening Plenary Session at which international guests made presentations and the Annual Alan Dalton Award was presented.

Hazards Campaign

The Network also facilitated workshops on *Stress Risk Assessments* (Dave & Dianne Jones) and on *HSE Stress Management Standards* (Brian Robinson & Ian Draper). Good, positive feedback was received and we thank those who participated in helping us to continue to develop our work and through their participation raise our profile.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Health & Safety Minister at the DTI) was amongst speakers who examined the current risk aversion agenda and looked towards new alternative

penalties designed not only to bring about better enforcement but also the possibilities of more appropriate and direct penalties against organisations and companies where necessary.

Lord Hunt referred to successes achieved through the work of HASAWA since 1974 and that UK has one of the best records worldwide for safety. He asserted that there could be no complacency over workplace health and injury records, good as they mostly were, sensible H&S was the cornerstone of civilised society. He spoke about Regulation being *proportionate to risks*, through targeted efforts, backed up by enforcement where necessary and confirmed that Government was committed to sustained improvements in the Occupational Health challenge.



Making a mark in Europe

European Work Hazards Network in Latvia



UK Stress Network Convener, Ian Draper, representing the UK Hazards Campaign on the Conference Steering Committee, co-ordinated the booking arrangements for the 185 international delegates attending the 10th European Work Hazards Conference, held for the first time in Latvia on September 30th.

Delegates representing Austria, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Scotland, Switzerland and USA spent a profitable three days exchanging experiences and ideas.

The conference commenced with a series of local workplace visits and specialist information meetings, including on Stress and Bullying. The opening Plenary session was addressed by the president of the Latvian Trades Union Federation, and local musical entertainment closed the session. Delegates worked very hard during the Saturday attending 5 Key workshops (including that facilitated by the Stress Network) and 9 topical workshops. An evening social provided opportunity for enjoyment and the morning plenary session committed delegates to continued collaboration.

Stress Workshop Report:-

UK Stress Network representatives, Ian Draper and Brian Robinson ran a very successful workshop for over 25 delegates from several nations. The workshop began by discovering the list of stressors which were common to the group which contained delegates from Latvia, Estonia, Holland, Denmark, UK, Germany, Austria, and Lithuania.

The five most common shared stressors were Workload; the attitude of the management towards workers; consultation with workers about work issues and the provision of information; control of working practices and work patterns and the security of continued employment.

The methods which could be used to interrogate the workplace in order to identify the stressors present and to assess the risk they posed to worker health were then discussed and instruments to help in this process were examined.

The role of proper contracts and job descriptions which were clear, open and fair was looked at and methods by which the worker associations could be involved in the creation of these were suggested. It was considered that such process of worker participation in this process was an important way in which more control of the workplace situation could be given to the worker.

To provide a framework within which this could take place it was agreed that sound legislation was needed on a Europe wide basis to take in to account the need to ensure the fair treatment of workers in the mobility of work in the community; such legislation would need to be written into the national legal structure of EU member states and the Trades Union movements would need to pursue this in their own state. It was agreed that all such legislation must contain robust enforcement procedures.

The value of legislation on the standards of dignity at work which includes the outlawing of bullying, mobbing, sexual discrimination, racial discrimination, age discrimination and all such behaviours was emphasised. The moves to establish standards under which the quality of life of the worker was improved were welcomed and explored with participants agreeing to take this idea back to their organisation for fuller discussion.

We look forward to continued links with our EU partners.



Safety Reps vote stress No. 1 issue – AGAIN!

Once again union safety representatives have declared Stress the biggest problem facing British workplaces, according to a survey of over 3,000 union safety representatives carried out by the TUC. Every year since the survey began the result has been the same. The research by the TUC highlighted excessive workloads, job cuts and rapid change as the most common triggers for rising stress among employees.

Six out of 10 union safety representatives questioned by the TUC earlier this year said stress was the top concern in the workplaces they represented. The figure has risen 5% in four years, with 56% of those surveyed naming stress as the number one hazard in the TUC's 2002 survey, compared to 58% in 2004 and 61% this year.

London was the most stressed out region of the UK, where 67% said it was their biggest problem, closely followed by the North West where 65% agreed. The problem also appeared to be more of an issue in larger workplaces.

Stress was cited as the top concern by 58% of representatives in firms employing less than 50 staff, with that figure rising to 67% in organisations with more than 1,000 employees.

Doing enough?

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: "Stress is a preventable problem and UK employers simply aren't doing enough to minimise its impact. "People who suffer from stress aren't wimps, and their symptoms can make them really ill. Stressed out employees are more likely to experience weight loss, high blood pressure, depression and even heart attacks."

The TUC also claimed that time taken off from work because of stress was costing UK business about £3.7 billion a year.

More than three-quarters of the representatives surveyed said excessive workload was most likely to lead to problems with stress while 57% also blamed staffing levels, 53% rapid change and 34% long hours. One third claimed bullying was a major cause.

CIPD "peddles tired myth"

Commenting on the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) annual absence management survey released recently, TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: 'This report peddles the tired old myth that public sector workers are more likely to take time off work sick. This is simply not the case. Recent research from the Health and Safety Executive shows that one of the main reasons why surveys tend to show greater levels of

public sector absence is because the private sector traditionally under-reports time taken off sick by its employees.

'Also this research ignores the fact that public sector employers are more likely to try to retain members of staff who have been off work whereas workers who take time off ill in the private sector run the risk of being sacked. Better sick pay schemes in the public sector also allow staff to be off until they are better, whilst a lack of cash often forces many private sector employees to return to work before they are well.'

Stressed Nurse Wins £140k

A NURSE has won £140,000 compensation after being exposed to a "health-endangering" workload.

The High Court ruling was made after Melanie Garrod, 53, said she suffered two breakdowns when North Devon Primary Care Trust failed to bring in temporary staff to cover for colleagues on sickness or maternity leave.

Ms Garrod said: "Trust managers have to be aware of the extra pressure they put on staff by giving them extra work. They need to support nurses - even if it's just a phone call to say, 'Are you all right?'"

Ms Garrod told how it took three years for her to decide to sue the NHS. "It was an extremely difficult thing to do," she said. "I was brought up to believe in the NHS and I supported its principles and wanted to do my best for my patients.

"But I was a health visitor looking after young children. My own case load was 250 families but when a colleague was off it would rise to 500 or more cases. I was travelling hundreds of miles a week trying to do my best but little realising how vulnerable I had become."

Ms Garrod was supposed to do a 30-hour week but often had to work many more hours unpaid to cope with the workload.

Stress Managers tell us to 'Smile away stress'

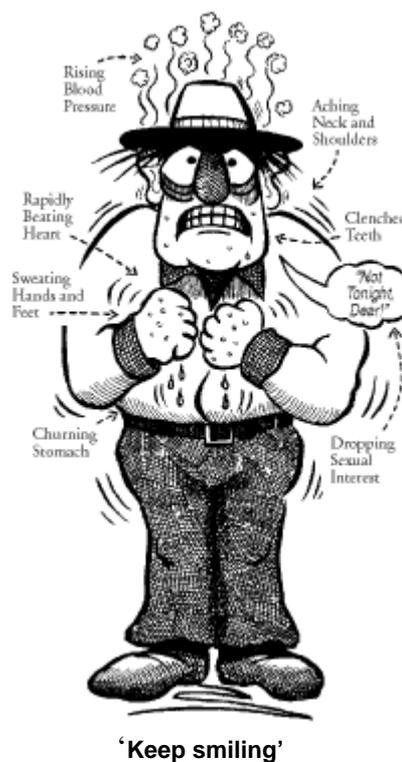
The International Stress Management Association (ISMA) - has launched a new campaign encouraging people to stop allowing everyday stressful situations get on top of them. The themes of the campaign are "smile away stress" and "stress - don't let it get to you" which ISMA said should help to present a more positive, proactive and manageable approach to stress management.

A spokesperson for the association said that while people often associated stress with "major life issues" a "huge amount of our anxiety comes from minor day to day annoyances

When these build up they undermine our natural ability to cope, leaving us tired, anxious, irritable and making stress more infectious."

Earlier this year ISMA helped produce guidance notes to assist businesses and other workplaces implement the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) stress management standards.

The guide - 'Making the Stress Management Standards Work' - can be downloaded from the HSE website



Red tape 'causing mental illness'

According to Tim Cantopher, consultant psychiatrist at the rehabilitation clinic 'The Priory', constant political interference is causing stress-induced mental breakdowns in public servants. He said he mostly treated business leaders 20 years ago but now most of his patients are public servants such as doctors or teachers. Writing in Public Servant magazine, Dr Cantopher called on politicians on all sides to "get out of our public services, stop making us ill"

He said he was currently treating 44 doctors, but he also had teachers, social workers, tax and benefit workers, ambulance crews and fire-fighters on his books. "What these professions now have in common is that they are all victims of the craze so loved by recent governments for regulation and its attendant bureaucracy. The Priory chain of clinics is best known for treating celebrities such as Robbie Williams, Pete Doherty and Michael Barrymore.

Modern gadgets raise work stress

Mobile phones, laptop computers and PDAs are increasing levels of stress in the workplace, according to a study.

Using such gadgets in meetings is regarded as inappropriate and distracting for others, research by the University of Surrey reveals. Most people said they found email and mobile phones necessary for contacting colleagues and clients instantly. But the survey showed their increased use was adversely affecting the patience of others in the workplace.

Turn off

More than half of those surveyed believed it was inappropriate to use any form of IT equipment in a meeting or when talking to another person at work.

Only 11% thought it was acceptable for a mobile phone to be switched on during a meeting. More than 80% felt it was inappropriate to look at or send text messages when with others. Some 60% of respondents said there were informal workplace rules for the use of IT equipment, while two out of five said the use of mobile phones was not allowed.

Mobile etiquette

The University of Surrey study was carried out to examine attitudes in the workplace to modern communication equipment. Researchers said it was generally recognised that a certain etiquette is required when using mobile phones in the workplace. Responding to a call when speaking to somebody implies that the phone call is more important than the person, the survey said. Answering a call during a meeting suggests the meeting is not important.

'Stressed and impatient'

However, the study showed that younger people were less likely to be offended by others answering mobile phone calls during meetings. Professor Michael Warren, of the University of Surrey, said: "We become stressed and impatient when we can't reach someone, yet we resent distractions and can become angry when our own meetings are interrupted by a mobile phone. I'm afraid the research shows that we all want to have our cake and eat it."

Paul Moulds, of Siemens Communications, which commissioned the research, said: "Workplace stress, anger and intrusive distractions are issues that require both management action and improved staff guidelines."

Work stress may cause heart disease and diabetes

Stress has long been linked to ill health, but the British Medical Journal study may have identified the biological process for the first time. The study of 10,000 civil servants found a link between stress and metabolic syndrome, which involves obesity and high blood pressure. Experts said the University College London report was "interesting".

Lead researcher Tarani Chandola said: "Employees with chronic work stress have more than double the odds of the syndrome than those without work stress, after other risk factors are taken into account. "The study provides evidence for the biological plausibility of psycho-social stress mechanisms linking stressors from everyday life with heart disease."

During the study between 1985 and 1999, levels of work stress were measured four times. The researchers also measured the different aspects of metabolic syndrome - a cluster of factors which cause heart disease and diabetes - such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels between 1997 and 1999. Factors such as social class, smoking, high alcohol consumption and lack of exercise were all recorded as part of the study. The researchers discovered that there was a link between the amount of stress experienced in their job and the levels of metabolic syndrome symptoms, even when considering the other risk factors.

Symptoms

This relationship meant that the more stress someone suffered, the more likely they were to suffer metabolic syndrome symptoms. The researchers said that, for example, men who suffered chronic work stress were twice as likely to develop the syndrome as men who had no exposure to stress. Women with chronic stress were also more likely to suffer from metabolic syndrome, although they formed only a small group in the study.

The researchers said one possible explanation for the result may be that prolonged exposure to work stress affects the nervous system. They also suggested that chronic stress may reduce biological resilience, thus disturbing the body's physiological balance.

The study also found that both men and women from lower employment grades were more likely to have metabolic syndrome, confirming past reports that social status is linked to the risk of the syndrome.

A Diabetes UK spokesman said the study was "interesting" and confirmed what had long been suspected.

"The influence of work stress has been known to increase the likelihood of developing high blood pressure and heart disease which are factors for diabetes."

Professor Peter Weissberg, medical director of the British Heart Foundation, said stress was often linked to having little control over work.

And he added: "The good news is that many of the features of the metabolic syndrome can be reversed or improved by lifestyle changes, in particular increasing exercise and losing weight, combined with stopping smoking."

Stress Reduction Kit



Directions:

1. Place kit on FIRM surface.
2. Follow directions in circle of kit.
3. Repeat step 2 as necessary, or until unconscious.
4. If unconscious, cease stress reduction activity.

AHAJOKES.COM

One in 50 police on long-term sick

More than 1 in 50 officers are signed off for 28 days or more. Growing pressures of the job are blamed for lengthy absences. Police chiefs are unhappy with the high number of long term absentees.

"We do have high absence rates. However, we compare reasonably well with other public-sector groups, particularly other emergency services." - Peter Thickett, director of human resources at Lothian and Borders Police.

NEARLY 350 police officers in Scotland are on long-term leave due to stress, injury or sickness, prompting demands for an increase in front-line staff.

Long-term sick leave is defined as 28-days' continuous absence by most forces. According to figures obtained by The Scotsman, some 348 officers are on long-term leave - 2.2 per cent of the national force, or one in 50 officers.

In Strathclyde, 178 officers are on long-term sick leave, 27 of them due to stress. In Lothian and Borders, the equivalent number is 51, with 13 directly caused by stress. This amounts to a £10 million drain on the force's annual budget of £1.1 billion.

Peter Thickett, director of human resources at Lothian and Borders Police, said the service had to do more to improve the way it looked after its staff. He said advances had been made, such as the introduction in his force of mental-health checks for staff exposed to unusually traumatic experiences, such as road crashes and child pornography. But he went on: "We do have high absence rates. However, we compare

reasonably well with other public-sector groups, particularly other emergency services. We cannot make the demands of the job go away, but we can try to get better at what occupational-health resources are available and how managers can be aware of signs of difficulty at an earlier stage."

The Scottish Police Federation, which represents 15,000 rank-and-file officers, said sickness rates reflected the growing burden on police, with extra demands such as closer monitoring of sex offenders and the growing threat of terrorism increasing pressure on officers.

Its secretary, Joe Grant, said an increase in the number of attacks and a cut in the number of annual report showed that 4.5 per cent of police officers' and 5.2 per cent of support staff's working days were lost due to ill-health - both are improvements on previous years.

"At 31 March, 2006, there were 16,221 whole-time equivalent officers in Scotland - an extra 861 over the past three years. There has also been a 1,208 increase in whole-time equivalent support staff in the same period. It would be wrong to suggest that more staff are going off sick because of staffing shortages. However, we agree that more needs to be done to reduce the proportion of working days lost to sickness. We welcome ACPOS [Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland] targets to reduce the proportion of working time lost to sickness.

"Officers dedicated to responding to incidents was taking its toll on officers' well-being, and he called on the Scottish Executive to fund more front-line police. "There are strong links between stress and the level of manpower available, and the amount of work officers are having to do," he said. An Executive spokeswoman said: "The last Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary

Royal Mail fear of stress

Union leaders called today for an urgent meeting with Royal Mail after claiming managers were at breaking point because of rising levels of stress. AMICUS said the workload of managers in the postal organisation had become intolerable following hundreds of job cuts. The union said the problem was highlighted when a London-based manager asked if he could be demoted even though he would lose £15,000 a year in pay because he could no longer take the level of stress. A spokesman for the Royal Mail said the union's concerns were "rubbish" adding stress levels were "lower than industry averages" in the business.



IN THIS ISSUE

- 1 STRESS CONFERENCE 2007**
- 2 STRESS NETWORK CONVENOR
DIARY DATES**
- 3 HAZARDS CONFERENCE 2006
EUROPEAN HAZARDS CONFERENCE**
- 4 SAFETY REPS**
- 5-8 STORIES – STRESS BITS**