Stress @ work – guidance for employers now available

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Stress – "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them"

<div align="right">UK Health and Safety Executive</div>

Employers now have a duty in law to ensure that their employees aren't made ill by their work. And work stress *can* make people ill. Although being *under pressure* can help improve performance and productivity, excessive levels of pressure can result in stress, and stress is now the single biggest cause of occupational ill-health absence, with an estimated 13 million working days lost in Britain in 2003/04 due to **work-related stress**.[1] Employers who don't take stress seriously may therefore leave themselves open to compensation claims from employees who have suffered ill health from work-related stress. Fortunately, however, **reducing stress** need not cost a lot of money.

In November 2004, the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published a new guide for managers on how to prevent excessive work-related stress: *Tackling Work-Related Stress: A Managers' Guide To Improving And Maintaining Employee Health And Well-Being*.[2] With the aid of 12 new management standards, the guide provides a step-by-step approach to tackling the different causes of **stress in the workplace**, and provides advice on identifying those at risk and on how to prevent problems occurring.

What does HSE expect employers to do?

HSE expects every employer to conduct risk assessments for health and safety hazards, including **work-related stress**. HSE recommends a three-step approach to risk assessment, to be taken in consultation with employees and their representatives:

1. Identify pressures at work that could cause high and long-lasting levels of stress
2. Decide who might be harmed by these, and how
3. Assess whether enough is being done to prevent that harm and, if not, decide the steps to be taken.

At each step, findings should be recorded, regularly monitored and reviewed.

The HSE have identified six key aspects of work that, if not properly managed, can lead to *work-related stress* and, within these key aspects, have established 12 management standards (see Table).

Key aspect of work	Management standard
The **demands** of the job (includes issues such as workload, work patterns and the work environment)	1. Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs 2. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
The employees **control** over his/her work (how much say the person has in the way they do their work)	3. Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work 4. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
The **support** received from managers and colleagues (includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues)	5. Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors 6. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
Relationships at work (includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour)	7. Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work 8. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
The **role** of the employee in the organisation (whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles)	9. Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities 10. Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns
Change and how it is managed (how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation)	11. Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change 12. Systems are in place locally to

	respond to any individual concerns

References

1. Health and Safety Executive (2004) *Health and Safety Statistics Highlights 2003/04.* www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overpic.htm

2. *Tackling Work-Related Stress: A Managers' Guide To Improving And Maintaining Employee Health And Well-Being.* http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/information.htm

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information visit http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/information.htm or call HSE's InfoLine on 08701-545500, or write to: HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

Copies Of *Tackling Work-Related Stress A Managers' Guide To Improving And Maintaining Employee Health And Well-Being* (ref HSG218; ISBN 0 7176 2050 6; price £7.95) can be ordered online at www.hsebooks.co.uk, or are available from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 2WA, tel: 01787-881165; fax: 01787-313995.

ADVICE FOR EMPLOYEES

A free employee leaflet is also available from the HSE website: *Tackling Work-Related Stress – A Guide For Employees* (Leaflet INDG341). This leaflet explains what stress is and how it affects people, providing details of what individuals can do at work to help their manager in tackling the problem.

The International Stress Management Association has produced a leaflet showing how employees can work with their employers to tackle **work-related stress** using the Management Standards approach. The leaflet is supported by HSE, Acas, TUC and the CIPD. Visit http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/leaflet.pdf

For more information on stress at work and essential oils, visit:
http://www.aromatherapy-stress-relief.com/stressatwork.html

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