

# Stress Awareness

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# What is work-related stress?

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“The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other demands placed on them”...

# Who experiences work-related stress?



- It can happen to anyone
- No-one is immune
- It affects people at work who cannot cope with what is being asked of them...

# How does it affect the individual?

- Physical effects
  - Heart disease
  - Gastrointestinal problems
  
- Psychological effects
  - Anxiety
  - Depression...

## Signs to watch out for

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- easily lose their patience
- have difficulty concentrating
- think constantly about the worst outcome
- have difficulty sleeping
- become depressed
- preoccupied with, or obsessed about, one subject...

# Consequences to the organisation

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- Increase in sickness absence
- Reduced staff moral
- Reduced staff performance
- Staff seeking alternative employment
- Loss of skill base for the company...

## Why take action to combat stress?

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**Ethical reason** – employers have a ‘duty of care’

- Work-related stress can lead to ill health
- Employers should not affect the quality of life of their workforce
- Employers should do as much as they reasonably can to control the risk...

## Why take action to combat stress?

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### **Legal obligation**

- Health & Safety at Work Act 74 - 'duty of care'
- Management Regulations 1999 – 'risk assessment'...

## Why take action to combat stress?

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### **Economic reasons**

- Sickness absence due to stress costs the UK billions every year
  
- The cost to Employers includes
  - Temporary staff costs
  - Compensation payments
  - Legal costs for claims...

# What should be done?



- Adopt a 'risk assessment' approach to reduce work related stress
- Make stress part of the Safety Reps inspection routine
- Introduce a union negotiated 'stress policy'...

# Risk assessment should involve



- Identifying pressures at work which can cause stress
- Deciding who might be harmed
- Deciding if enough is being done to prevent that harm
- Taking steps to deal with those pressures by changing:-
  - The way work is organised
  - Tackling the sources of stress...

# Some ideas for the inspection checklist



- Are individuals able to cope with demands of their job?
- Are systems in place locally to respond to any individual concerns?
- Are employees able to have a say about the way they do their work?
- Do employees have control over the pace of their work?
- Are employees encouraged to use their skills & initiative?
- Are employees encouraged to develop new skills?
- Are employees given adequate information & support?
- Are employees given regular constructive feedback?
- Are measures in place to prevent unacceptable behaviours?
- Are systems in place to enable employees to report unacceptable behaviour?...

## A negotiated stress policy should include



- Recognise that stress is a health and safety issue
- Recognise that stress is about the organisation of work
- Be jointly developed and agreed with the union
- Have commitment from the very top
- Guarantee a 'blame free' approach
- Apply to everyone...

# The HSE's Management Standards



- **Demands** – workload, work patterns, working environment etc.
- **Control** – how much say does a person have about their job?
- **Support** – level of support provided by employer and work colleagues
- **Relationships** – can employees raise their concerns, openness and honesty? – employees are not subject to unacceptable behaviour
- **Role** – do people clearly understand their role within the organisation?
- **Change** – how is change managed; good communication, consultation...

# Caring for those with work-related stress



- Employers should offer support for those affected by work related stress
- Stress management courses and education can help people recognise the early signs of stress...

# Union negotiated rehabilitation policy

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- Investing in ill health, providing access to good 'occupational health' facilities
- Not making health a disciplinary matter
- All levels of management involved in rehabilitation schemes...

# Rehabilitation policy



- Recognising stress is a Health & Safety issue
- Should apply to everyone in the company
- Provide training for Managers & Supervisors
- Confidential counselling
- Adequate resources provided to implement policy
- Involve Union representatives...

# Checklist



- Is stress a problem?
- Do you have a stress policy?
- Was it negotiated with the Union?
- Talk to the members about their anxieties
- Establish a negotiated rehabilitation policy...

# Where to get more information



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## Useful websites:-

- Unite
- HSE
- TUC
- Hazards group
- Labour Research Department...



Any Questions