

Working together to beat stress



Last year European Safety and Health Week concentrated on preventing accidents in the workplace. It was a great success with thousands of organisations carrying out activities across the country. The theme for 2002 is work-related stress.

Around half a million people in the UK report that they have experienced work-related stress, anxiety or depression at a level that has made them ill. Too many working days are lost because of stress. And it was for this reason the Commission made the prevention of stress a priority programme.

This year's newsletter provides a valuable insight into the issues, coupled with practical advice and guidance about how you can play your part. We have also developed the hugely popular Action Packs to help you, which are available through the dedicated helpline – 0800 085 0050.

Bill Callaghan

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Chair of the Health and Safety Commission



Working on st

More than 40 million people throughout Europe experience mental and physical abuse in the workplace on a daily basis, and most suffer in silence.

This year's European Week for Safety and Health, commencing 14 October, will focus on the prevention of these psychosocial risks as well as the 'hidden' costs to businesses of lost working days.

An estimated half a million UK workers report they have been made ill by work-related stress. Other sources suggest one in five workers report their work to be very or extremely stressful.

The causes are diverse and complex but are essentially associated with the design and organisation of work, including its management. Many managers fail to perceive work-related stress in particular as a management issue because they consider its effects not to be serious.

Some even believe that it is confined to those who have a personality weakness, or that it can be dealt with solely by individuals making lifestyle changes. Furthermore, managers often do not know how to assess the problem or what to do about it and

are unaware of their legal obligations.

Typically, the risks facing workers can cause stress and include poor work organisation and design, violence, threats of violence, verbal abuse from members of the public and bullying by work colleagues. Concerns around poor work organisation and design issues include working at high speed, uncertainty about job roles, lack of control and high demands and poor management of change.

Recent research into the area found that more than 50% of workers operate at high speed or to tight deadlines for at least a quarter of their day, 9% have little or no control over their work and around 10% report that they have been subjected to intimidation at work.

These issues were also found to affect workers across all types of employment sectors. Stress was highlighted as the second most

reported work-related health problem, affecting 28% of workers.

Fatigue was deemed a common problem among 23%, and 4% reported that they had been subjected to physical violence from members of the public.

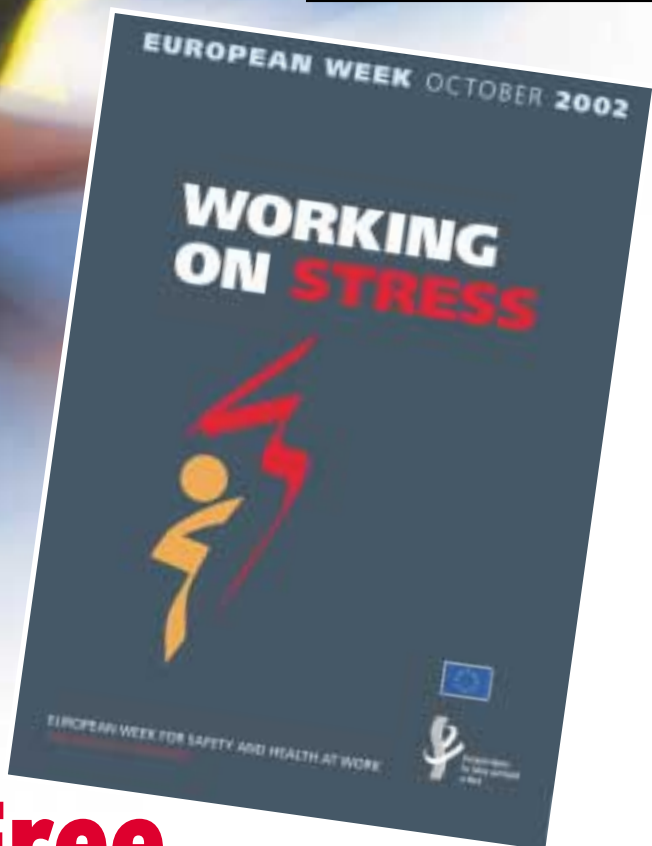
In a bid to ensure the UK is a safe and healthy place to work, this year's Safety and Health Week will concentrate on promoting organisational activities to reduce work-related stress and mental and physical abuse.

Once again the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) will oversee the organisation of the week in the UK. It is also being supported by various organisations including TUC and CBI, key stakeholders including IOSH, RoSPA, British Safety Council and BackCare as well as government agencies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

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What YOU can do during the week

1. Exhibitions and displays
2. Competitions
3. Education and training packs
4. Seminars and workshops
5. Company open days promoting health and safety themes
6. Invite contractors to attend information sessions
7. Publish special features in company magazines
8. Mentor schemes for small businesses
9. Staff suggestion schemes
10. Questionnaires and surveys
11. Start a 'Good Neighbour' scheme
12. Explore media opportunities for your campaign
13. Hazard spotting in the workplace



Free Action Pack

Posters, stickers, fact sheets
Call 0800 085 0050

HSE Infoline
08701 545500

It is becoming an increasingly global phenomenon affecting all countries, all professions and all categories of workers, families and society in general. Furthermore, there is evidence that the experience of stress at work is associated with changes in behaviour as well as physiological functions, and both may be detrimental to health.

Stress may contribute to the development of various symptoms of occupational ill health and of physical and psychological disorders. The emerging approach for intervention emphasises prevention and elimination of the causes, rather than the treatment of its effects.



Stress knows no boundaries

Effects on the body

	Normal (relaxed)	Under Pressure	Acute Pressure	Chronic Pressure (stress)
Brain	Blood supply normal	Blood supply up	Thinks more clearly	Headaches or migraines, tremours and nervous tics
Mood	Happy	Serious	Increased concentration	Anxiety, loss of sense of humour
Saliva	Normal	Reduced	Reduced	Dry mouth, lump in throat
Muscles	Blood supply normal	Blood supply up	Improved performance	Muscular tension and pain
Heart	Normal rate and blood pressure	Increased rate and blood pressure	Improved performance	Hypertension and chest pains
Lungs	Normal respiration	Increased respiration rate	Improved performance	Cough and asthma
Stomach	Normal blood supply and acid secretion	Reduced blood supply and increased acid secretion	Reduced blood supply reduces digestion	Ulcers due to heartburn and indigestion
Bowels	Normal blood supply and bowel activity	Reduced blood supply and increased bowel activity	Reduced blood supply reduces digestion	Abdominal pain and diarrhoea
Bladder	Normal	Frequent urination	Frequent urination due to increased nervous stimulation	Frequent urination, prostatic symptoms
Sexual Organs	(Male) Normal (Female) Normal periods etc	(M) Impotence (decreased blood supply) (F) Irregular periods Decreased blood supply	(M) Impotence (decreased blood supply) (F) Irregular periods Decreased blood supply	(M) Impotence (F) Menstrual disorders
Skin	Healthy	Decreased blood supply, dry skin	Decreased blood supply	Dryness and rashes
Biochemistry	Normal: Oxygen consumed, glucose and fats liberated	Oxygen consumption up, glucose and fats consumption up	More energy immediately available	Rapid tiredness

(Source: A Melhuish, Executive Health, London Business Books, 1978)



He's charming, he's the manager and he's a bully

David, a supermarket manager, regularly bullies various members of staff. A serial bully, he intimidates people until they leave the company. If challenged, he always argues that their work is unsatisfactory.

Although regarded by many friends and higher management as a charming man, many staff are ruled by fear – he marginalises people who challenge him by overloading them with work. His inability to manage people has led to the deterioration of several stores under his leadership and on each occasion he has been demoted to smaller, more manageable stores. His employer refuses to accept that it is not his ability to manage the

store which is at fault, but his inability to manage and motivate people.

Carol worked for the company for two years before David was moved to her store. Her work was found by her previous manager to be satisfactory. When he arrived at the store everybody thought he was charming and couldn't see why he had gained such an awful reputation. But the honeymoon period soon ended.

David recognised that Carol was unlikely to complain to higher management and began bullying her. He regularly shouted at her in the middle of the supermarket in front of customers to the extent that she

would rush into the toilets in tears. Where a complaint did reach the union representative, he would apologise and back off for a few days to a week.

The constant harassment made Carol nervous causing her to make mistakes, at which point David would castigate her in public by shouting. Eventually, Carol developed a skin complaint and, rather than support her, David asked her if it was contagious in a bid to try and use company policies to stop her working with food.

Carol was bullied for more than a year before she eventually left the company. David continues to manage the store and is still a bully.



Much job stress can be reduced by clarifying roles, responsibilities, and lines of authority. If you are not clear about your own job responsibilities, work with supervisors to clarify your job role. Set clear priorities for yourself. This is particularly important when employees are responsible to two or more bosses.

Stress can also be related to having too much to do in too little time. Improve your time management skills - many good books on the topic are available in public libraries. Set realistic time limits on your work and, if at all possible, allow lead time so that work can flow smoothly.

Try to build exercise and relaxation breaks into your daily work routine. When stress and tension are out of hand, find someone to talk to, to share your frustration, anger and distress. Talking with a sympathetic listener often can give you the relaxation, perspective and confidence you need to cope with your stressful situation.

The Burnout Blues

If you are totally burned out at the office, what should you do?

Firstly you must ask yourself what you can do to resolve the situation on your own, even if you do eventually decide to approach your line manager. Burnout is caused by stress and imbalance – all work and no play.

Balance your intense work days by spending more time with family and friends, exercising, increasing the amount of water you drink and eliminating caffeine from your diet.

If you decide to approach your line manager about burnout, specifically address what is wrong with your situation. Go to him/her with possible solutions, for example, you may request a re-arrangement of your work schedule, time off or a longer lunch break. However, if you are experiencing serious problems such as poor sleeping patterns as a direct result, then you should seek medical advice.

It couldn't happen to me

Bullying or violence in the workplace often goes unrecognised according to the Institute of Personnel Development (IPD). It estimated in 1994 that a staggering 1 in 8 (3 million) UK employees had been bullied at work during the previous five-year period. More than half of those who had experienced bullying also said it was commonplace in their organisation and a quarter said it had got worse during the previous 12 months.

Eight years on and the problem has not been resolved – these figures have since been backed up in survey after survey.

Workplace bullying can take many forms and may include examples of racial and/or sexual harassment. On the whole, however, bullying at work takes place as clear examples of the abuse of power.



Work-related stress Myths & Facts

1. Work-related stress is not a serious problem – Wrong.

In the UK, as many as one in five people report being exposed to high levels of work-related stress. An estimated half-million individuals report experiencing stress at a level they believe made them ill. This means 6.5 million working days lost per year. It costs society between about £3.7 billion and £3.8 billion (1995/96 prices).

2. Stress is a mental illness – Wrong.

Stress is the natural reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. While it is not an illness, if it is prolonged or intense, it can lead to mental and physical ill health, such as depression, back pain and heart disease.

3. A little bit of stress is good for you – Wrong.

Ill health due to work-related stress, or conditions ascribed to work-related stress, is the second most common type of work-related ill health reported.

4. Stress only happens to wimps – Wrong.

Anyone can suffer from stress. It all depends on the circumstances we are in at the time. Preventing it is good for employee health and well-being and good for business.

5. All you need to do is go for counselling to stop work-related stress – Wrong.

Counselling may help individuals who are suffering from work-related stress, but it is unlikely to tackle the source of the problem. Research has found that support at work, particularly from managers for their staff, has a protective effect - front line prevention by the organisation is better than third party cure.

6. There's nothing employers can do to stop work-related stress – Wrong.

Employers can take steps to prevent work-related stress in their organisations. As a first step, they can consult with their staff or trade unions to identify problems and work towards agreed solutions.