Working together for better workplace health

WORK-RELATED : Stress
Work-Related Stress
Pressure is part and parcel of all work and helps to keep us motivated, but excessive pressure can lead to stress, which undermines performance, is costly to employers and can make people ill.

HSE defines work-related stress as ‘the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them’. Compared to other industries, the construction industry is not a sector known to be at high risk of work-related stress.

There is however, anecdotal evidence and research to suggest that stress may be a concern within the construction industry. A study conducted by the Health and Safety Laboratory found that around 10% of their sample of construction industry workers found their job very or extremely stressful.

The ‘top five’ most stressful aspects of work for respondents were:

(1) Having too much work to do in the time available
(2) Travelling or commuting
(3) Being responsible for the safety of others at work
(4) Working long hours
(5) Having a dangerous job

In their sample, management grade employees, along with road maintenance staff, designers and administration staff report more stress than other job roles, primarily construction labourers/operatives.

There is a difference between stress and pressure. Everybody needs a certain amount of pressure for motivation and to perform at their best. It's when there is too much pressure without recovery time that people start to experience stress.

Work-related stress is not an illness, but it can lead to increased problems with ill health, if it is prolonged or particularly intense. Examples are heart disease, raised blood pressure, regular headaches, back pain, gastrointestinal disturbances and various minor illnesses. Psychological effects can be anxiety and depression.
Relevant Regulations

This list is not exhaustive:

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (as amended)

Equality Act 2010

The Data Protection Act 1998

Access to Medical Reports Act 1998

Other Legislation that applies to work related stress includes:

Employment Rights Act 2008

Public Order (Amendment) Act 1996

Protection from Harassment Act 1997

Working Time (Amendment) Regulations 2009

Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to assess risks to health and safety at work. This includes the risk of employees developing stress-related illness; however assessment is more complicated than for physical hazards, although it involves the same basic principals.

Employers who don’t take stress seriously may leave themselves open to compensation claims from workers who have suffered ill health resulting from work-related stress.
What should you do?
The HSE have produced “Management Standards of Tackling Work Related Stress” which provides a lot of useful practical advice on Managing Stress in the workplace this information can be accessed on the internet at www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards and includes a step by step guide on managing stress, with downloads and links to help the process.

The Management Standards are broken down into six key headings:

1. Demands
Includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:
- The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work
- People’s skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- Employees’ concerns about their work environment are addressed.

2. Control
How much say the person has in the way they do their work

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.
- What should be happening / states to be achieved:
- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work;
- The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills;
- Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken; and
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.
3. Support
Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:
- The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; and
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

4. Relationship
Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:
- The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- Employees share information relevant to their work;
- The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.
5. Role
Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles

The standard is that:
- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:
- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible;
- The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and
- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

6. Change
How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

The standard is that:
- Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:
- The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
- The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals;
- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs;
- Employees are aware of timetables for changes;
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.
What should you do?

- **Develop a simple policy for stress management.** An example policy is given on the back page.
- **Identify someone who is to be responsible for managing stress.** This could be a manager or supervisor. You should ensure that they have been given sufficient training and information to recognise related hazards and risks
- **Put some control measures into place** and make sure they are regularly checked to be working well
- **Identify the key hazard areas** using the six key headings within the Management Standards
- **Decide who may be harmed and how.**

Work related stress can affect any member of your team, even though some may cope better with work pressures than others. In particular, it might affect those exposed to excessive pressures in the six key hazard areas.

At particular times your staff may be more vulnerable to work related stress. For example those returning to work after a stress related illness, or those who have experienced a personal or family problem, such as bereavement.

Some workers may feel anxious about the amount of work they have to do or the way you will react if they tell you they can not cope. Finding out how the factors are affecting workers requires a partnership approach, based on openness, honesty and trust, which explores what the main effects of work are on staff and what areas should be targeted first.

**evaluate the risk and take action:**

- conduct and implement recommendations of risk assessments
- link problems to solutions - talk to your staff to confirm your findings and develop practical solutions
- communicate results - provide feedback to staff and deal with individual concerns

**record your findings:**

**develop an action plan:**

- set goals to work towards
- prioritise
- provide something to evaluate and review against

**monitor and review:**

- monitor against your action plan to ensure agreed actions are taking place
- evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions you implement
- monitor workloads/working hours/overtime to ensure staff are not overworking

**ensure good communication with staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes**

**ensure that bullying and harassment is not tolerated**
be vigilant and offer additional support to a member of staff who is experiencing stress outside work eg. bereavement or separation

train and support managers in implementing stress risk assessments

support individuals who have been off sick with stress and advise them and their management on a planned return to work

Health surveillance / screening for the specific risk

Record keeping: You may need to store copies of the following documents:
- action plan and any amendments/ follow up
- sickness/absence data
- staff turnover information - A high turnover may be as a result of work related stress
- questionnaires
- notes of meetings with workers where significant discussions were made or discussions took place
- written expert advice provided to you
- back to work plan

How do you recognise stress?
Many of the outward signs of stress are recognisable. Look for changes in a person’s mood or behaviour, such as deteriorating relationships with colleagues, irritability, indecisiveness, absenteeism or reduced performance. Those suffering from stress may also smoke or drink alcohol more than usual or even turn to drugs. They may also complain about their health, for example they may get frequent headaches and or disturbed sleep.

If you feel that an employee is suffering from work related stress, listen to them, try to address the source, involve them in discussion, and if necessary encourage them to seek further help through their doctor or occupational health service provider (OHSP).

No specific health surveillance criteria exists with regards to stress, however regular reviews of employee attendance records may enable stress related illness or absenteeism to be identified. If however the individual undertakes SCW they should be assessed by an OHSP in relation to their mental health.

Purpose of Mental Health assessment:
To identify any serious mental health problem in an individual who is undertaking SCW, whereby any such problem could have the potential to affect their own safety or that of others, and therefore allow for that risk to be managed.

Example stress management policy
We are committed to protecting the health, safety and welfare of our workers and recognise that workplace stress is a health and safety issue and acknowledge the importance of identifying and reducing workplace stressors.
This policy will apply to everyone in the company and managers are responsible for implementation and the company is responsible for providing the necessary resources.

- The company will identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress. These risk assessments will be regularly reviewed.
- The company will consult with Trade Union and other workers safety representatives on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- The company will provide training for all managers and supervisory staff in good management practices.
- The company will provide confidential counselling for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors.
- The company will provide adequate resources to enable managers to implement the company’s agreed stress management strategy.

Signed

(Chairman / Managing Director / Senior Partner)

Date

Expert help is available from:
Constructing Better Health
Contact us for impartial and confidential advice:
tel: 0845 873 7726 or click on www.cbhscheme.com

CBH accredited occupational health service providers listed on the CBH website

www.hse.gov.uk/stress