

Challenging Workplace Stress



The scale of the problem we face on stress in our workplaces is enormous and involves challenging the management 'resilience' agenda. An agenda that includes misconstrued initiatives like; employers putting signs on stairs, to encourage people to walk up the stairs instead of taking the lift. This individualising approach to work related stress does nothing to prevent stress and it makes individuals feel bad about having it. We need to demand a robust and detailed organisational risk assessment approach to workplace stress.

1. Employers duties include providing a safe workplace by:

- a. Assessing the risks (work-stress should be risk assessed like any other work risk)
- b. Eliminating and controlling the risks using the hierarchy of control
- c. Recording what has been done
- d. Explaining to employees what the risks are and the measures taken to exclude the risks and to provide training for both employees and managers
- e. Reviewing the risk assessment regularly, or when there is a change, an incident, or a new process or building etc.

SRSC Regs – this is the most powerful piece of industrial relations legislation we have in the UK. It provides reps with a statutory function to inspect, investigate incidents and consult with management and employees. Safety reps should work in pairs when inspecting, to support each other.

The recent TUC survey found that in the previous year 22% of health and safety reps did not conduct a single inspection and only 43% conducted 3 or more. It is crucial for reps to conduct regular inspections, to send a report to management and get feedback from the employer. It is a statutory provision and employers have no choice but to let health and safety reps carry out inspections.

In ASLEF vs London Underground in 2007. The employer refused the safety rep time-off to undertake a quarterly workplace inspection; the ET upheld the complaint, and the employer had to pay £11,500 compensation, with costs of £4,470.

2. Management Regulations:

- a. Regulation 14 places a duty on employees to inform the employer about serious danger and health and safety shortcomings – this means that where our members are suffering from work related stress they should report it. Reps should prepare a draft letter for members to notify management in writing about any stress related incident. i.e. excessive workload
- b. Schedule 1 to the Regulations contains powerful legislative standards, which include general principles of prevention using the control hierarchy, on the basis of eliminating the risks, evaluating those that cannot be eliminated, combating the risks at source, developing a coherent overall prevention policy, adapting work to individuals and giving collective protective measures priority over individual protective measures etc.

3. Other Actions:

- a. Management should be asked for copies of the Risk Assessment documentation. Reps should investigate and scrutinise their content and make demands to be involved, informed and consulted.
- b. If there is a consistent breach in law then the HSE may be contacted by registering a concern, but in order to do so, you have to show that attempts have been made to resolve the issue internally first. <http://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm>
- c. Ensure all work related stress incidents which are causing your members harm, are recorded in the accident book and notified to management
- d. Carry out a detailed mapping exercise to map out and illustrate the interconnection between excessive workloads, bullying, job losses, grievances, absences and the stress related incidents. This will show how stress is affecting and causing a burden on workers and business. See below for link to hazards magazine resources.

It has been reported that some organisations are addressing some of the work related stress, by ensuring that the employees turned work mobile phones off at night and do not access emails at home.

This information is based on a lecture given by John Bamford (GMHC) at the North West TUC/GMHC Safety Reps Network meeting. For further information about the North West TUC/GMHC Safety Reps Network please email: mail@gmhazards.org.uk

Further Information:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm> - stress standards

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm> - raising a concern with hse

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/10/On-line-Catalogue227032.pdf> - Unison Stress at Work

<http://www.hazards.org/diyresearch/getmapping.htm> - mapping resources

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