

STRESS

(See also: [Management of Health and Safety\(51\)](#))

STRESS

INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress is generating increasing public and media concern. Although there are no precise figures on the prevalence of occupational stress, it is widely held that the problem is substantial and increasing. This is supported by a number of surveys that suggest that occupational stress is now seen as a major contributor to overall illness and sickness absence in the workplace. Legal judgements recently have awarded damages in stress-related cases.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is the reaction people have to excessive demands or pressures. In the workplace it arises when people try to cope with the tasks, responsibilities or other types of pressure connected with their jobs but find difficulty, strain or worry in doing so. Stress triggers complex changes in the body's processes, causing physiological changes and affecting the way people think, feel and behave i.e.

Physiological changes	Behavioural changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• increased heart rate, perspiration• dry mouth• headache, dizziness, blurred vision• lowered resistance to infections• aching neck and shoulders• skin rashes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• people becoming anxious, irritable• drink more alcohol• smoke more• loss of sleep• reduced motivation

People experience stress in different ways and to different degrees. Much depends on how individuals cope or think they cope and the extent of support that is available to them. The stress response is not in itself an illness - it's effects often being short-lived and causing no lasting harm. However, where workplace pressures are intense, sustained for some time or are simply beyond the capacity of the person to cope stress can lead to actual mental and/or physical ill-health. **Where such a risk exists, then stress and the workplace pressures causing it become a legitimate health and safety concern.**

Ref: 82

March 2005

WHAT MAY GIVE RISE TO STRESS?

There are a number of aspects of work that may give rise to stress:

ASPECT	EXAMPLES
General management and culture of the organisation	Lack of clear company objectives and values Poor communication Lack of employee consultation/involvement during periods of organisational change Lack of management support and development for staff
Role in organisation	Employee's roles within the organisation unclear Conflicting objectives and priorities High level of responsibility for people
Career development	Career uncertainty Career stagnation Poor status Job insecurity or redundancy
Decision making/control	Low participation in decision-making Lack of control over work Little decision-making in work
Relationships at work	Social or physical isolation Poor relationships with superiors Interpersonal conflict, including bullying, violence, sexual or racial harassment.
Home/work issues	Conflicting demands of work and home Low levels of support at home Dual career problems
Job design	Ill-defined work High uncertainty in work Lack of variety or short work cycles Fragmented or meaningless work Under-use of skill Constant exposure to client/customer groups
Workload/work pace	Lack of control over pacing Work overload or underload High levels of pacing or time pressure
Work schedule	Shift working Inflexible/overburdensome work schedule Unpredictable work hours Unsocial work hours

STRESS

Ref: 82

March 2005

THE LEGAL POSITION

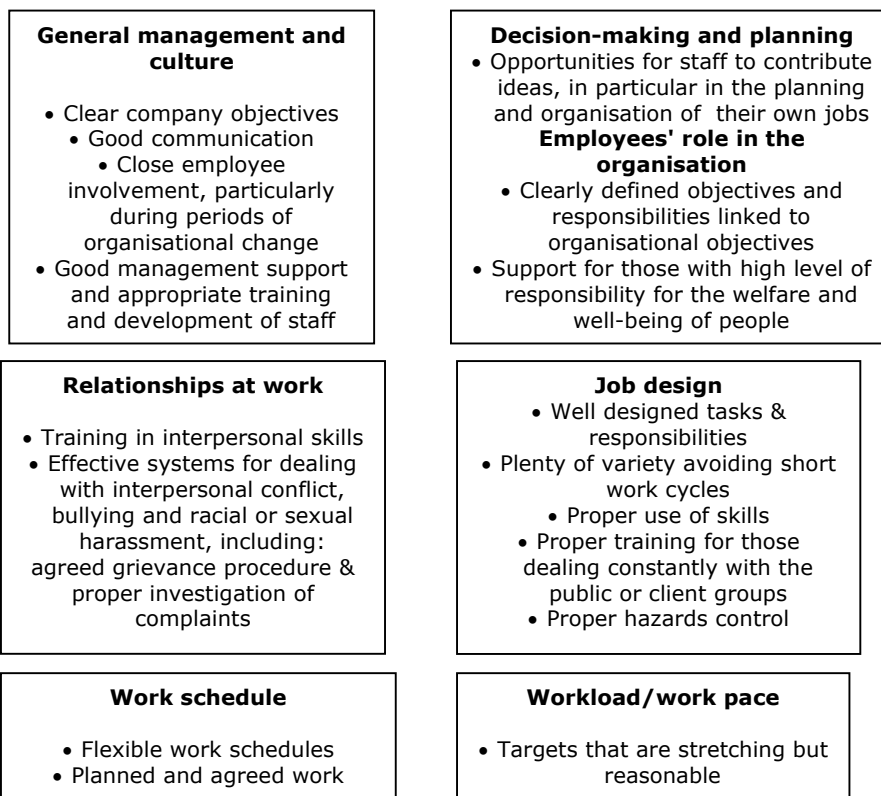
There is no specific legislation on controlling stress at work. However, employers have a **general duty** under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that their workplaces are safe and healthy. Also, under the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992 employers are **obliged to assess** the nature and extent of risks to health in their workplace and base their control measures on it.

Employers have a legal duty to take reasonable care to ensure that health is not put at risk through excessive and sustained levels of stress arising from work activities i.e. to treat stress like any other health hazard.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

1. Good management - including 'regard for people' attitudes.
2. Ensure appropriately open and understanding attitudes to stress.
3. Ensure jobs are 'do-able', matching the job with the person in it.
4. Management style - consistent, concerned, communicative and caring.
5. Managing periods of change so as to reduce uncertainty.
6. Providing help, support and training.
7. Monitoring stress levels - perhaps through a combination of sickness absence monitoring and periodic anonymised staff surveys.

Some of the things that can help in a positive approach to stress reduction are:



HSE has published stress Management Standards to help employers, and employees and their representatives to manage the issue sensibly and minimise the impact of work-related stress (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/standards.pdf>). They are aimed at anyone with responsibility for tackling work-related stress in organisations. That might be the person who has responsibility for co-ordinating the stress risk assessment, human resources managers, health and safety officers, trade union representatives or line managers.

The process outlined within the stress Management Standards is not law, but following it can help organisations meet their legal duties.

It provides further practical information, advice and tools on how to assess the risks from work-related stress in organisations. The standards provide simple, practical steps to help organisations identify the causes of stress and take action themselves.

Ref: 82

March 2005

ORIGINAL ISSUE DATE: October 1997	ISSUE No: 3 (DCY)	ISSUE DATE: March 05
SECTION: Stress		PAGE No. 4 of 5

CHECKLIST - STRESS

- | | | | |
|--|-----|----|--|
| 1. Do you recognise occupational stress as a legitimate health and safety issue? | YES | NO | |
| 2. In running your business, where necessary, do you seek to minimise occupational stress through the following: | | | |
| • Development of an appropriate management culture (communicative, participative, supportive)? | YES | NO | |
| • Involvement of staff in decision-making and planning? | YES | NO | |
| • Appropriate role for, and support of, employees in the organisation? | YES | NO | |
| • Optimising relationships, interpersonal skills etc. at work? | YES | NO | |
| • Flexible work schedules, planned and agreed hours of work? | YES | NO | |
| • Appropriately considered job design? | YES | NO | |
| • Stretching but reasonable work targets? | YES | NO | |
| 3. If necessary, do you monitor occupational stress (or its possible indicators)? | YES | NO | |

REFERENCES/FURTHER DETAILS

- *1. HELA Circular 81/4 – Work Related Stress.
www.hse.gov.uk/lau/lacs/81-4.htm
- *2. Booklet HSG 116 Stress at Work - a guide for employers (HSE) (1999) ISBN 0-7176-0733-X.
- **3. Leaflet INDG341. Tackling work-related stress a guide for employees (HSE). www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg341.pdf
- **4. Leaflet 'Work Related Stress- A Short Guide' (HSE) INDG281 (11/99) www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg281.pdf
- 5. 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. The leaflet can be viewed at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/leaflet.pdf>.
- 6. The HSE's main web page on work-related stress can be viewed at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/information.htm>. The main page for the Stress Management Standards is at: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm>.

* Available to view by prior arrangement at Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Environmental Health Services, Council House, Coton Road, Nuneaton. CV11 5AA

** Free copy available from Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council at the above address.