

What can safety reps do?

They can identify whether stress is a problem in their workplace. Organisations that expose workers to excessive levels of stress will suffer:

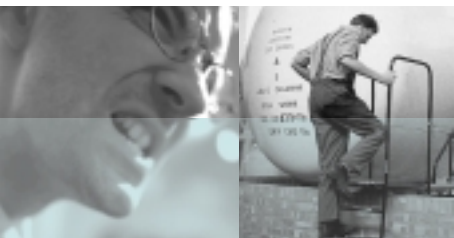
- ◆ high levels of sickness absence;
- ◆ high accident rates;
- ◆ low morale; and/or
- ◆ bullying and violence.

Safety reps can survey their members using the TUC Stress MOT to identify which stressors are the biggest problem (go to www.tuc.org.uk/stressmot or contact the TUC). This will identify the areas of the workplace and the stressors which most need risk assessments.

Safety reps should press their employer to fulfil their duty to assess the risks. They should make sure they are consulted on the risk assessment process and any action which follows.

If an employer has no specific policy on stress safety reps should suggest one is developed. Reps should ask the employer to provide training for managers and employees on dealing with workplace stress and its victims.

Reps should monitor the effectiveness of the employer's actions, and regularly survey members, to look for signs/symptoms of stress in their colleagues. Members may not want to admit that they are stressed, feeling they may be victimised or ridiculed.



Further information

The HSE publishes guidance and information about stress at work – on their website at www.hse.gov.uk or phone Infoline at 08701 545500.

The TUC produces guidance, news and information at www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/ or call 020 7467 1294 for publications. The TUC also provides training courses for safety reps.

Your union will be able to advise you further and provide materials to help you to take action on workplace stress.

Information is also available from the UK National Work Stress Network, at www.workstress.net

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tackle the hassle



what safety reps can do to manage the risks of stress at work

European Week for Safety and Health at Work
Preventing Psychosocial Risks at Work



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WORKING
ON STRESS

What is stress?

The HSE defines stress as: “the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them.”

Too much stress causes illnesses such as:

- ◆ heart disease, strokes and high blood pressure;
- ◆ stomach ulcers and other digestive disorders; and
- ◆ depression and other mental illness.

It can cause accidents, skin disease, alcohol and drug abuse, violence and family breakdown.

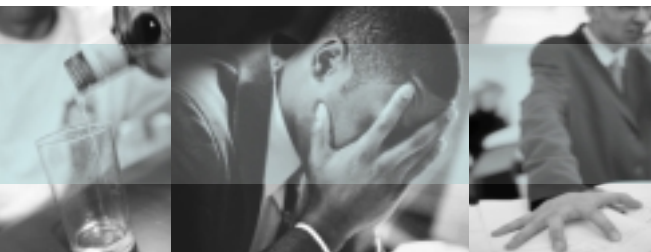
Stressed workers are less productive, more prone to errors, and can reflect badly on their employer’s reputation and image.

What causes stress?

The HSE are developing management standards setting out how employers should control the main causes of stress (stressors) which are:

- ◆ the demands of the job;
- ◆ lack of control;
- ◆ work-life balance and support at work;
- ◆ work relationships;
- ◆ change; and
- ◆ conflicting roles.

For all these reasons, stress needs to be tackled as an occupational health, human resources and equality issue.



Partnership

The TUC strongly believes in a partnership approach to tackling stress. Safety reps will need allies especially if an employer does not treat workplace stress as a serious issue. Partners could include safety managers, human resources and outside agencies working in health promotion.

The economic effects

Nearly one in three of Europe’s workers, more than 40 million people, report that they are adversely affected by stress at work.

The Institute of Management estimate that 270,000 people take time off work because of stress, which costs British companies around £538 per employee according to the CBI.

The overall cost to the economy of work-related stress is in the region of £7 billion per year.

Work-related stress is the major problem facing British workplaces. But managing the causes of stress at work so that people don’t fall ill is possible and often fairly simple.



The law

There is no specific law on stress. But employers have a legal duty to reduce the risks of stress to an acceptable level to prevent workers from suffering the ill effects of exposure to workplace stress. The main health and safety laws that can be used are:

Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974: “it shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees.”

Regulation 3(1)(a) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999: “Every employer shall make a suitable and sufficient assessment of ... the risks to the health and safety of his employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work.”

Paragraph 80 of the accompanying Approved Code of Practice: “When allocating work to employees, employers should ensure that the demands of the job do not exceed the employees’ ability to carry out the work without risk to themselves or others”.

Your employer should conduct a risk assessment for workplace stress if there appears to be a significant risk. The main causes of stress must then be treated in the same way as any other workplace hazard. They should be identified, and controls must be put in place to remove or reduce the causes of stress as far as possible.