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## **Work-related stress**

*TUC Stress MOT*

*European Week for Health and Safety 2002*

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## **Instructions for use**

An MOT for your car comes in two parts: a vehicle survey and a test for the amount of environmentally damaging emissions it produces.

The *TUC Stress MOT* follows the same principles: a survey of the workplace to find out what is creating stress for the workers, and a test of how well the organisation addresses the workers' problems it produces.

### **First use the People survey**

The *Organisation survey* is only really appropriate if there is a problem with stress in your workplace, so you need to do the *People survey* first. That will tell you if you have a problem – if there's no evidence of such a problem, then the *Organisation survey* isn't really worth doing.

### **Getting it filled in**

Fill in the name of the part of your workplace which you are studying (at the start of the form), the date by which it should be returned and who to return it to (both at the end of the form) and then run off enough copies to give to everyone in the part of the workplace being surveyed. You may want to add your union logo etc.

Distribute copies to workers in whichever part of your workplace you want to study. Remember to give the survey to as many people as possible, including agency and temporary workers. Remind them about the deadline for returning the form, and who to return it to.

People may want to give the information completely anonymously so you may need to arrange a post box or similar system where members can drop off their survey sheets.

When the answers have come back, check what percentage of forms have been returned. A return rate of over 50% is very good, and should give you confidence in the results – the lower the rate of return, the less you can depend on the findings of

the survey (and if hardly anyone returns the form, that may just mean there's not a big problem).

### **Make a workplace stress map**

Draw a sketch of your workplace (it doesn't have to be to scale, or a work of art!) Write in each area surveyed the percentage of workers answering "yes" to question 2.

### **Identify the main stressors**

Count up the number of "5s" circled for each stressor. If more than a quarter of the people who responded have circled "5" for any stressor, that issue is a major problem which needs to be addressed.

For each part of the workplace where there are high<sup>1</sup> levels of stress, work out what the main stressors are by listing the number of "5s" each stressor received. The more "5s", the more of a problem that stressor is.

### **Ask for more!**

Once you have developed the stress map, and what the main causes of stress are, put them on a poster on notice boards, or produce a short report of the survey findings (including how many people showed the health symptoms of stress) and give everyone a copy.

Then set up a suggestion box for people to make their own suggestions about how their stress could be reduced – they might come up with ideas you haven't thought of, and their views may help you to persuade management.

### **What to do with the *Organisation survey***

Either on your own or with other safety reps, complete the *Organisation survey*. If the answer to a question is yes, write 'Pass' – if the answer is no, write 'Fail'. If you don't know the answer, leave it blank (but make every effort to find out). Because

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<sup>1</sup> It's your judgment what "high" means – often it will just be compared with other parts of the workplace – you should start where the stress is worst!

you need to find out some detailed information, you may not be able to complete the survey in one go.

If there are five or more questions left blank, the organisation may have failed or it may not, but the first priority should be to find out the answers to those questions – only then can you tell if you've got a problem (and you probably have!)

If the organisation has fewer than five 'Fails', and fewer than five left blank, that doesn't mean the organisation is healthy – but you will need to decide whether to focus on the areas where the organisation has not scored a 'Pass'.

### **Did your workplace 'pass' or 'fail' the MOT?**

This system is not designed to decide whether your workplace is stress-free. All workplaces are likely to have some sort of problem with stress, and just because yours isn't a raging inferno of stress doesn't mean the problems need to be tackled. But purely as a guide:

- if more than a fifth of respondents exhibited one or more health symptoms (in the "how are you?" section of the *People survey*); or
- if there are any stressors where more than a quarter of respondents circled the "5" (people who don't circle the "5" can be considered to have circled "1" for this calculation); or
- if there are five or more 'Fails' in the *Organisation survey*...

then your organisation has 'failed' the *TUC Stress MOT* and needs action urgently – the next section sets out what to do next.

### **What if your workplace 'fails' the TUC Stress MOT?**

Write up a report for your fellow safety reps, union branch, safety committee or meeting with management, including the stress map.

Write up the *People survey* under each heading:

- say what percentage of people answered yes to Question 2, and how many people have the symptoms of stress, and
- under each heading of the what makes you stressed at work section, set out

which stressors got the highest number of “5s”. These are the main problems which your managers need to address.

Write up the *Organisation survey* by separating out the issues where the organisation got a ‘Pass’ and a ‘Fail’, and list the questions you weren’t able to answer. You may need to give some explanation of why you answered each question the way you did.

Then:

- present the report of the findings of the survey;
- draft an action plan (with a realistic timetable for implementation) on how you think excessive workplace stress should be tackled to present to your employer. Make sure areas that are suffering the highest levels of stress are high priority for action;
- ask for a working group to be set up to do this work. Make sure the group itself has a deadline for agreeing the action plan;
- press your employer to fulfil their duty to assess the main risks and make sure that you and other safety reps are consulted on the risk assessment process and action plan, and about its implementation and monitoring; and
- ask the employer to provide training for managers and employees on dealing with workplace stress and its victims.

### **Partnership**

The TUC strongly believes in a partnership approach to tackling stress. You will need allies especially if an employer doesn’t yet treat workplace stress as a serious issue. Setting up a joint working group to tackle workplace stress will help you to gain those allies. Partners for the joint working group could include the safety committee, safety managers, human resources and outside agencies working in health promotion.

### **Further help**

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



Give feedback on the outcome of the *TUC Stress MOT* to your union and to [tuc@worksafe.org.uk](mailto:tuc@worksafe.org.uk) - and also let us know whether you can see any problems with the way the *TUC Stress MOT* is set up, so that we can improve it.