

Getting your employer to carry out a Stress Risk Assessment

A practical guide for trade union health and safety reps

This guide is for union health and safety reps and covers 3 steps for organising to get your employer to adopt a stress risk assessment, a guide to what one should cover, and a checklist.

All risk assessments are unique to workplace and work roles: what's included in your workplace risk assessment will look different to other workplaces, but this guide is designed to give you a template and pointers to work with.

Why stress risk assessments matter

Work-related stress is one of the biggest causes of sickness absence at work, and the most commonly occurring hazard – 79% of health and safety reps cited it as a concern in our 2025 survey. However, two thirds of reps also say they are not aware of any assessment into the risk of stress at work – let alone action to prevent it. This presents us with a an organising opportunity: where no stress risk assessment exists at work – or current management is poor – reps and activists can work to challenge it.

Employers have a legal duty to assess and control the risks from stress in the same way they do for any physical risk to your health and safety.

A stress risk assessment helps to:

- Identify what's causing stress at work
- Prevent harm before people become unwell
- Improve morale, retention and productivity
- Reduce sickness absence and staff turnover

Stress is not a concern for specific individuals who are struggling — it is a workplace hazard that employers are required to manage, which risks all of us as a collective.

Your legal rights as a health and safety rep

Employers must carry out risk assessments under health and safety law, including for risks to stress.

As a union health and safety rep:

- You have the right to be consulted on risk assessments
- You can raise stress as a health and safety issue
- You can request that the employer assesses the risk of stress before people are harmed

The law does not say employers have to use a specific model — but they must assess the risk properly, and present mitigations.

The HSE Management Standards – a tool employers can use

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has produced Management Standards for work-related stress. These are not an extra-legal requirement, but they are a recognised framework that employers can choose to use. The TUC and HSE has a [joint guide](#) to these.

The Management Standards:

- Help employers identify common causes of stress
- Focus on how work is organised and managed
- Are designed to prevent stress, not just respond to it
- Encourage worker and union involvement

Using the HSE Management Standards can either be a first aim, or you may decide it is something to work towards once a stress risk assessment is in place.

Step 1: Build the case for a stress risk assessment

You do not need to prove a crisis before asking for action. Useful signs that stress is a risk at work include:

- Excessive workloads or unrealistic deadlines
- Long or unpredictable working hours
- Staff shortages or high turnover
- Poor management support
- Bullying, harassment or violence in the workplace
- Reorganisations, restructures or job insecurity
- Members reporting anxiety, burnout or exhaustion
- Working conditions, e.g. real terms pay cuts, or an uncomfortable work environment

Encourage members to raise issues collectively. Stress is often a pattern, not a one-off, but many employers will try to dismiss the issue as something caused by issues 'outside the workplace'.

It may be useful to use tools like surveys or inspections to gain a fuller picture of how members are being affected, and to present the undeniable evidence to the employer.

[The HSE's Stress Indicator Tool](#) is one way you (or your employer) can create a survey to collect and analyse experiences of work-related stress.

Step 2: Make a formal request

Ask the employer for a stress risk assessment in writing, or alternatively raise it at your Health and Safety Committee, and make sure the request is minuted. This helps make the issue visible and creates a paper trail.

Your request should:

- Refer to the employer's legal duty to assess risks
- Ask for union involvement
- Cover groups of workers, not just individuals
- Be realistic about preventative steps

Example wording:

"As a recognised trade union health and safety representative, I am requesting that the employer carries out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for work-related stress, in consultation with union safety reps. The HSE Management Standards provide one framework that the employer could choose to use in developing this work."

We have also produced a [template letter you can adapt](#).

Step 3: Keep the focus on prevention

Stress risk assessments should look at: how work is organised, how people are managed, what pressures are built into the job, and what stress triggers are present.

Be cautious if the employer only offers the following type of 'preventative action':

- Wellbeing training
- Resilience workshops
- Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)
- Apps or mindfulness sessions
- Mental Health First Aid training

These measures may help individuals, but they do not replace a stress risk assessment, nor do they prevent work stress in the first place.

What a stress risk assessment should cover

A good assessment should identify workplace stressors, many of which reflect the areas covered by the HSE Management Standards.

Demands: workload and staffing levels, pace of work and deadlines, long hours or lack of breaks

Control: How much say workers have over their work, flexibility in how tasks are done

Support: Support from managers and colleagues, access to supervision and training

Relationships: bullying or harassment, poor behaviour or unresolved conflict, lone working or isolation, risk of violence and abuse

Role clarity: Clear job roles and responsibilities, avoiding conflicting demands

Change: How change is planned and communicated, support during restructures or new ways of working

Environment: Site-specific stressors such as poor access to toilet facilities, working in heat or cold conditions

Involving workers and unions

Stress risk assessments should be informed by workers' experiences. This must include union safety reps being involved throughout, and may also involve anonymous surveys, team discussions or focus groups. Workers are the experts in how work affects us.

Turning findings into action

Once risks are identified, the employer must take steps to reduce them. This could include:

- Reviewing workloads and staffing
- Improving management training and support
- Tackling bullying and harassment
- Improving communication about change
- Giving workers more control where possible

Actions should be practical and specific, have clear timescales, and be reviewed with union safety reps.

Reviewing and building on the assessment

Stress risk assessments should not be a one-off exercise.

They should be reviewed regularly, updated when work changes, and used to measure whether actions are working. Over time, you may choose to demand your employers develop their approach using the HSE Management Standards.

If your employer resists, you can:

- Raise the issue through formal consultation channels
- Use joint health and safety committees
- Escalate through union structures and consider collective action
- Gather evidence and make a report to the regulator

Checklist for Reps

Use this list as a quick recap covering all the different steps to consider.

Before you raise the risk assessment

- Members are raising concerns about workload, pressure, burnout or stress
- There are patterns (not just one individual case)
- Changes at work may be increasing pressure (restructures, staff shortages, new targets)
- Stress is being “managed” through wellbeing offers rather than prevention
- You’ve spoken to members and gathered examples (anonymously if needed)

Making the request

- You’ve asked in writing for a stress risk assessment
- You’ve referenced the employer’s legal duty to assess risks
- You’ve asked for union involvement and consultation
- You’ve made clear it should cover groups of workers, not just individuals
- You’ve mentioned the HSE Management Standards as a framework the employer could adopt

What the stress risk assessment should cover

- Workload, pace and staffing levels
- Long or unpredictable working hours
- Control over how work is done
- Support from managers and colleagues
- Bullying, harassment or poor behaviour
- Violence or abuse

- The working environment and welfare provision
- Role clarity and conflicting demands
- How change is planned and communicated
- Workers are consulted (rep involvement, surveys, discussions)
- Findings are recorded and shared
- Actions are identified — not just risks

After the assessment

- Actions are practical and preventative
- Timescales and responsibilities are clear
- Union reps are involved in reviewing progress
- The assessment is reviewed after changes or if stress remains high
- There's agreement to build on this work over time (e.g. using the HSE Management Standards more fully)

If the employer resists

- You've raised it through formal consultation or H&S committee
- You've reminded them stress is a health and safety issue
- You've kept the focus on prevention, not individual resilience
- You've escalated through union structures and considered collective action
- You gather evidence and report to the regulator