

**WORK** *stress*

The UK National Work-stress Network • [workstress.net](http://workstress.net)

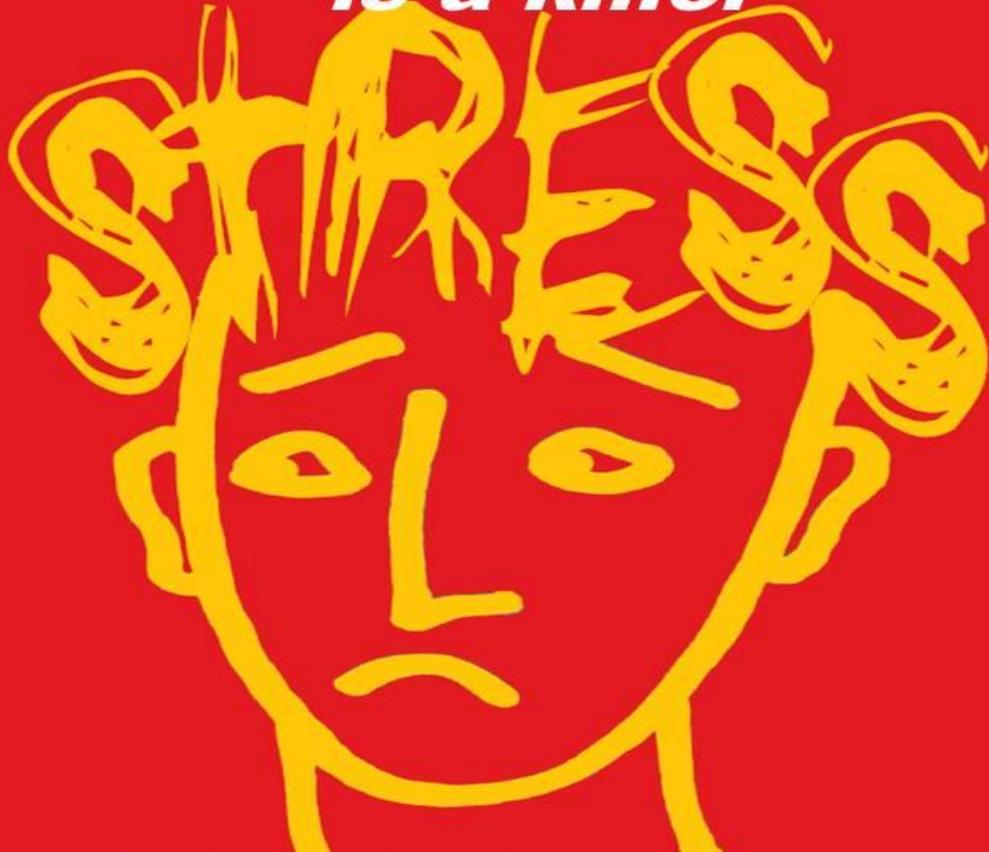
**Hazards  
Campaign**

## IWMD Newsletter 2014

International Workers Memorial Day Edition - April 28<sup>th</sup> 2014

**NO ONE SHOULD LEAVE WORK AT THE END OF THE DAY LESS HEALTHY THAN THEY WERE WHEN THEY STARTED**

# Work Stress *is a killer*



**ATL** **GMB** **Hazards Campaign** **NASUWT** **pcs** **PGA** **UNISON** **unite**

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## ***All around us the incidence of work-related stress is rising.***

We have all seen the effects of the recession and the austerity policies of this government on the those in employment, those not currently in employment, those under employed, and those desperate to hang on to their employment. Issues of expanding workloads, uncertainty of employment, working a variety of zero hours contracts and the attack on in-work benefits and the Bedroom Tax are all taking their toll.

It is also having an effect on those trade unionists who are trying to represent their members in this challenging environment both in terms of the stress they are under and also in the reducing numbers of new reps coming forward.

So stress at work is growing and at its most extreme it can lead to death by stress – exacerbated heart or other physiological conditions, accidents caused by negligence through stress or by the taking of one's own life. Serious psychological damage is also a frequent outcome, affecting not only the sufferer but also the family.

There will almost always be a variety of reasons that lead to suicide. Quantifying blame is often very difficult. Here are some of the sad events from the last year where work related stress was a major or the main cause of death.

### ***School Bosses' Excessive Checks 'Drove Teacher Towards Suicide'***

An "inventive, inspiring and creative teacher" had taken her own life after being ground down by an invasive system of appraisals and check-ups.

"She found herself in such a dark place that the only way out she could see was to literally end her life,"

"She would drive to school in tears thinking about how a little accident might free her from the constant monitoring undermining her professionalism and the criticism and stifling of her creativity."

"Excessive monitoring and all its implications is one of the main drivers of the recruitment and retention crisis that is just around the corner."

One teacher told the NASUWT Conference: "CCTV has been used against staff to imply they are handling a situation incorrectly even though the CCTV has no sound."

Delegates at the annual conference unanimously agreed that excessive monitoring is disempowering and adding to teachers' stress and workload.

### ***Watchdog calls for benefits shake-up following suicide***

A highly critical report has called for changes to the Government's work assessment system after a woman killed herself following cuts to her benefits.

The findings of an investigation into the Scottish case found the assessment process "flawed" and "unreliable".

In the document, published today, the head of Scotland's mental health watchdog has said the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) system needs to be changed.

Dr Donald Lyons, Chief Executive of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, added that the woman's case also indicated a lack of appreciation of the effects the tests had on vulnerable people's lives.

He said: "I don't think there is enough understanding of the momentous impact these assessments can have. There was nothing else going on in this woman's life that we could identify as to why she took her own life. She was engaged, she was looking forward to getting married. The only thing going on was the benefit assessment.

"I think the DWP should reflect on this case and learn from it. It does suggest that, certainly with regard to people with mental health problems, the assessment process is flawed and unreliable."

The report will put further pressure on Prime Minister David Cameron to review the assessment process which has been criticised for dealing harshly with the sick and disabled.

## ***Mobile giant Orange hit by 'suicide epidemic' as 10 employees take their own lives in seven weeks***

Union leaders described the deaths as an "alarm bell" and called on the company to reconsider plans to slash its workforce by almost a third in the next six years. The company – formerly France Telecom – promised continued "vigilance" but pointed out that staff surveys showed a steep increase in job satisfaction and a substantial decline of stress since 2009.

Sociologists said that talk of a suicide epidemic at Orange, either now or in 2008-9, was misleading. Statistics were valuable only if averaged out over four or five years, they said, and the longer-term suicide rate among employees of Orange is little different to the French average, which is admittedly one of the highest in Europe.

Between 14 January and 6 March this year, 10 staff of Orange, all working in different offices around France, took their own lives. This compares with 11 suicides among Orange employees in the whole of last year and 12 deaths in 2012. Of the 10 suicides this year, union officials say that two were "clearly connected with events in private lives". But the remainder appear, on the surface, to be related to workplace stress.

## ***Fit For work - The truth of the tragedy***

Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) is pleased to be supporting this week's anti-Atos demos at up to 144 assessment centres around the country.

The protests are taking place against the backdrop of the floods, with David Cameron's admission that Britain is a rich nation and that money is no object when it comes to alleviating the misery of potential Tory voters.

We can only take this statement to mean that the austerity measures which have been used to push disabled people into a life of daily fear and poverty are, as we always thought, purely ideological policies - nothing to do with the money having run out.

Atos is a transnational corporation which rakes in hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money for providing flawed and failing assessments of disabled - and often dying - people's ability to work.

There are almost weekly horror stories of disabled people being hounded to death by these assessments, or driven to suicide.

The Department for Work and Pensions' own figures show that 10,600 employment support allowance and incapacity benefit claimants died within six weeks of their claim ending after Atos assessments between January and November 2011.

The DWP has since conveniently stopped collecting this data.

## ***Bitter Sweet Day for Work-Stress.net***



On April 28<sup>th</sup> we remember worldwide the many thousands who die in workplace "accidents". Millions die of occupational diseases. Union organisation is part of the remedy. Prevention is the only cure for all those who are killed or who die at or because of work. Many deaths are as a result of accidents which could have been avoided had proper care been taken by employers. We all have a responsibility for our own and others Health and Safety. However, we at workstress.net join others in insisting that Health and Safety is fundamentally a corporate responsibility.

For people who die at work from stress-related illness and

conditions, it is much more difficult to identify causes. Employers will attempt to challenge any responsibility for stress related illness let alone stress –related death. Stress is often an accumulative experience with work stress feeding stress at home which feeds further work stress. It is often difficult to prove but the signs are often easy to see.

In our recent conferences we have been identifying the stresses experienced by Trade Union Reps and Stewards. Our information has come from Health and Safety Stewards who report increasing workloads, less time, more aggressive employers and more distressed members. Unions report a shortage of people coming forward as stewards, and delegates at our conference confirm this. More work, more stress, fewer stewards to deal with cases with less facility time.

We, at workstress.net, attend many meetings at the request of unions to talk about the effects of work stress. On March 2nd, one of our steering group attended RMT Black Workers Conference in Birmingham.

Bob Woods, who has himself been hospitalised with a stress related illness primarily from workload as a Branch Secretary met Mo Taj, President of the TUC, and Bob Crow, General Secretary of RMT.

Tragically as we know, Bob Crow died of a massive heart attack only 10 days later. He was just 52.

Was it work stress? Was it the accumulation of the immense efforts, long hours, huge commitment, long times away from home etc. that many TU reps and officers put in over many years? Nobody knows.

But we all know reps and stewards who have struggled with the stress that comes from all directions.

***So, on International Workers Memorial Day we say:  
whilst you are looking after your members, please  
remember to look after yourself!***

## **Work-Stress.net Annual Conference 2014 announcement**

### ***What next?***

#### ***Tackling work-stress in an uncertain future - we're dying to ease the burden on business!***

This conference takes place as we approach a General Election and a possible change of Government.

Saturday November 22nd to Sunday 23rd, 2014

**HILLCOURT CONFERENCE CENTRE, REDNAL, BIRMINGHAM B45 8RS**

Guest and Network Speakers and a full programme of workshop sessions will examine the future of health and safety with particular reference to the mental health of women and men in the workplace. It will provide a forum for discussion for Safety Representatives and others on the front line.

Speakers will include **Dr David Whyte, Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology Dept., Liverpool University**; co-author with Steve Tombs and others "Reappraising Regulation - the politics of regulatory retreat in the UK"

**Tracey Harding, National Officer H&S, UNISON**

**Rebecca Norris, NHS Scotland, Work and Wellbeing**

Conference Chair, **Carolyn Jones, Director, Institute of Employment Rights, Liverpool**

**Prices held at 2013 level** - *early Bird discount 10% by booking before 16th September 2014.*

**To access the booking details and form via [PDF](#) and [MSWord](#) follow the links!**