

**WORK** stress

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

**Hazards  
Campaign**

## Summer 2010 Newsletter

Hazards Conference Report Edition July 2010

### Another Successful Hazards Conference at Keele

The weekend of July 10<sup>th</sup> saw yet again almost 500 delegates gathering for their annual injection of enthusiasm for health and safety campaigning. It was very encouraging to see so many new delegates there, and to hear that they wanted to stay on and indeed come back next year!

The Friday evening session was well attended and although the expected Ghanaian guest speaker was unable to join us a very moving session was created by the showing of the FACK DVD. Ian Draper opened the Conference and welcomed delegates, congratulating those who were attending for the first time and ensuring them of a good positive experience.

Dorothy Wright of FACK presented the film which recorded the heart-wrenching events surrounding a number of tragic work-place deaths, all of which could have been prevented by proper and effective safety management on the part of the employers. The families of those killed live on in pain for the rest of their lives. But in many cases the killers remain unpunished, and even uncaring.

A period of silence was observed following the showing of the film and delegates were advised that it was possible to order copies at the exhibition table.

The DVD can be purchased at £10.00 via the [Greater Manchester Hazards Centre](#).

Saturday morning's formal plenary provided opportunity to hear from Mick Murphy a member of [FACK](#) outlining how his son had been tragically killed. A presentation was also given by Prof Steve Tombs outlining the sad lack of real enforcement of safety law and how the new coalition Government's Young Review would be looking at how safety regulation might be changed.

Workshop sessions followed and delegates were able to browse the exhibition. Debates on specific topics were held in the afternoon and the Sunday morning was devoted to campaigning sessions followed by the closing session in which the "We didn't vote to die" campaign was highlighted.

#### **Stress Network Input**

As always the UK National Work Stress Network provided an exhibition table as well as three sets of workshops and a well-attended Campaigning meeting. Dave Jones ran two sessions on Stress and Risk Assessment, and his partner Dianne Jones presented a session on Mental Health in the workplace. Brian Robinson and Ian Draper jointly facilitated workshops on Stress Casework and the impact of the deregulation attitude to red-tape, bureaucracy and the imminent funding cuts across the board.

Reports on the workshop and network input at Keele will appear on the Hazards

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website and the Stress Network website.

The Workshops on Stress case work produced the following experiences from delegates.

### **Workshop summary:**

Two 2 hour sessions were run on the Saturday. Groups of delegates introduced themselves to each other and the groups then considered the varying experiences of members in relation to stress cases they had come across. Each group prepared a short summary that was recorded in table form and an analysis of the two groups' outcomes follows. Each was asked to identify key stress issues, and to explain what was good about it and what was not so good about the outcomes.

<u>STRESS ISSUES IDENTIFIED</u>	<u>WHAT POSITIVE OUTCOMES?</u>	<u>WHAT NEGATIVE ASPECTS?</u>
Revision of Policy	Identified management training needs	Lack of speed due to inter-union differences
Workload excess	Some minimal reduction?	Loss of goodwill following lack of urgency in responding
Violence and threats of violence from client group		Tacit response
Impact of fatalities – transport industry	Good levels of support	Union cut out of start of support process for workers
Phone rage		Client abuse of staff; failure to recognise problem and to provide support Lack of confidentiality via in-house support systems
Assaults		Lack of support and acknowledgement of problem
Poor Management style		Target led demands create poor managerial climate
Change; Re-structuring and reorganisation		Creation of a critical climate Lack of management experience, expertise and training
On site death from falls from height	Good return to work support and counselling	Initially no immediate support – challenged by unions
Bullying & harassment	Internal Stress survey reveals extent of problem Immediate moves to new dept	Bully remains in place Failures to support
Target based work		Use of procedures against 'alleged poor target outcomes'
Office relationships		An individual with sensory problems dominating the workplace with unnecessary noise etc
Sexual Harassment		Disbelief and inconsistent responses
Physical fitness demands		In and out of expected levels that are not maintained

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		consistently
Unprepared for sudden work changes		Lack of adequate manager training followed by inexperienced managers misusing procedures
Sickness abuse		Workers abusing system and managers abusing procedures

Following a detailed input on the current political and economic climate the issues of dignity in the workplace; quality of working life; anti trade union stances and increasing class war, a debate preceded consideration in one of the workshops of a set of case study issues. Groups were asked to consider each study as allocated and to feedback on how they would approach the subject, creating a plan and a strategy for resolution.

### ***Campaigning meeting***

In the Sunday morning session over 90 delegates attended and the following statement emerged which was presented to the closing plenary session.

- ✚ Under the new Fit Note arrangements it has become evident that a changing culture is emerging and that there is a need for better recognition of the need for ensured representation at return to work meetings and that proper assessment of what work is applicable in the circumstances to be properly assessed with support from effective and dependable Occupational Health assessment to ensure safe return to work arrangements are established.
- ✚ As the shape of the working week has further developed and shift and weekend working have been extended, greater pressure on the abilities of workers to secure an effective LIFE/Work balance has led to a drop in family and relaxation time. The impact on the abilities of shift workers in particular to secure a LIFE/work balance is significant. Conditions unreasonably imposed on workers in including on their leisure time need to be reassessed through collective agreement.
- ✚ It was apparent from contribution in workshops and at the plenary discussion that many managers lack the appropriate training in personnel skills and specifically in handling stress and bullying situations, return to work and absence management procedures and other associated aspect of their work. There is yet again an urgent need for all employers to provide appropriate, regular training with annual updates for all managers. It is also recommended that TU Stewards make themselves available to have input into such training and particularly to explain the roles of union representatives in casework handling.
- ✚ Evidence in the public sector in particular shows that a form of ageism is creeping in whereby pressures are being placed on the older elements of the workforce to prove capability in respect of fitness and capability to do the job. For example teachers over 50 are increasingly being singled out as less than adequate and some public sector works are being hounded to prove their physical fitness to match those of much younger work colleagues and new recruits. We call for a fairer and more reasonable approach to management of the workforce.

*As always Hazards Weekend is a great success, not least down to the hard work of the GMHC organisers, the input of all the helpers and of course the delegates. The University staff also are to be thanked for making the weekend go so well.*

## Stress Notes

### ***Important things they don't tell you***

There are some very important things they don't tell you on career day. Chief among them is that there is a good chance that at some point during your working adult life you will have an abusive boss — the kind who uses his or her authority to torment subordinates. Bullying bosses scream, often with the goal of humiliating. They write up false evaluations to put good workers' jobs at risk. Some are serial bullies, targeting one worker and, when he or she is gone, moving on to their next victim.

Bosses may abuse because they have impossibly high standards, are insecure or have not been properly socialized. But some simply enjoy it. Recent brain-scan research has shown that bullies are wired differently. When they see a victim in pain, it triggers parts of their brain associated with pleasure. [See 10 ways your job will change.](#)

Worker abuse is a widespread problem — in a 2007 poll, 37% of American adults said they had been bullied at work — and most of it is perfectly legal. Workers who are abused based on their membership in a protected class — race, nationality or religion, among others — can sue under civil rights laws. But the law generally does not protect against plain old viciousness.

That may be about to change.

Workers' rights advocates have been campaigning for years to get states to enact laws against workplace bullying, and in May they scored their biggest victory. The New York state senate passed a bill that would let workers sue for physical, psychological or economic harm due to abusive treatment on the job. If *New York's Healthy Workplace Bill* becomes law, workers who can show that they were subjected to hostile conduct — including verbal abuse, threats or work sabotage — could be awarded lost wages,

medical expenses, compensation for emotional distress and punitive damages.

Not surprisingly, many employers oppose the bill. They argue that it would lead to frivolous lawsuits and put them at risk for nothing more than running a tight ship and expecting a lot from their workers. But supporters of the law point out that it is crafted to cover only the most offensive and deliberate abuse.

The bill requires that wrongful conduct be done with "malice," and in most cases that it has to be repeated. It also provides affirmative defences for companies that investigate promptly and address the problem in good faith. [See "When Bullying Goes Criminal."](#)

The New York state assembly is expected to take up the bill next year. At least 16 other states are considering similar bills, and some employment-law experts think anti-bullying legislation may have real momentum now.

Legislatures are not the only ones standing up to bullies. In 2008, the Indiana Supreme Court struck a blow against workplace bullying when it upheld a \$325,000 verdict against a cardiovascular surgeon. A medical technician who operated a heart and lung machine during surgery accused the surgeon of charging at him with clenched fists, screaming and swearing. The formal legal claims were 'intentional infliction of emotional distress and assault', but the plaintiff argued it as a bullying case, and had an expert on workplace bullying testify at trial.

Ideally, employers should rein in abusive bosses on their own, but that rarely happens.

Many bullies are close to powerful people in the organization and carefully target less powerful ones. When John Bolton was nominated to be ambassador to the U.N a former subordinate told the Senate that Bolton was a "serial abuser" and — in a phrase that has since entered the bullying lexicon — a "kiss-up, kick-down sort of guy."

There are reasons workplace bullying may be getting worse now, including the bad

economy. In good times, abused workers can simply walk out of a job if they are being mistreated. But with unemployment raised and rising, many employees feel they have no choice but to stay put.

There is one easy way for employers to head all of this off: get more serious about rooting out abusive bosses before serious damage is done.

### ***UK workers pull the most 'sickies' in Europe***

A Europe-wide survey of sickness absence has found that employees in the UK take more non-genuine 'sickies' than workers in other countries. Employee risk and benefits management firm AON Consulting warned that the UK economy is suffering as a result of the *35 million sick days* taken each year for personal reasons rather than for a genuine illness.

In response to its survey of more than 7500 workers from across Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the UK, more than one in five of those questioned here said the last time they took a day off from work as sick leave they were only feigning illness.

Brits are more than four times as likely to feign illness to get time off work as Europe's most honest workforce, the Danish. Just 4 per cent of Danes took their last sick day for a fabricated illness, compared with 21 per cent of UK workers.

Overall, the UK accounts for more than a quarter of the 122 million 'sickies' pulled across Europe and the number was expected to increase this year, owing to people who took time off to watch the World Cup.

However, these latest results are somewhat at odds with the [EEF's recent survey of sickness absence](#) within the UK manufacturing workforce, which found that the rate has fallen over the last three years, and that almost half of employees took no sick days at all in 2009.

The results are also more damning of UK workers than those of the [annual CBI sickness absence survey](#), released in June, which put the total number of 'bogus' sick days taken at 27 million.

It is understood that over 35 million days taken as fictitious sick leave are costing the UK economy millions and these are probably conservative figures, considering the number of people who don't admit to faking sickness. Employers would be well advised to tackle the issues of sickness and workplace absence head on, as these seriously impact efficiency and hit their balance sheets.

52 per cent of Brits say they would not feel forced to take a day as sick leave if they could just be honest and have access to flexible working hours, or 'social days'. Of course, employers should also not ignore the fact that 16 per cent of people say that more interesting work would keep them in the office.

According to the research the top five things that would encourage UK workers to take less time off work are:

- Provision of flexible working (29 per cent)
- Substantial cash incentive (28 per cent)
- 'Social days' for non-medical, personal reasons (23 per cent)
- More interesting work (16 per cent)
- Reduced payment in case of sick leave (15 per cent)

### ***Long-term absence due to stress on the decline***

The proportion of long-term sickness-absence cases attributed to stress has fallen by 10 per cent in the past four years, according to research by insurance provider Unum.

Stress now accounts for 23 per cent of all long-term absences compared with 33 per cent in 2006. Unum's chief medical officer,

Professor Michael O'Donnell, suggested two possible reasons for the fall in absence caused by stress: either companies are gradually tackling stress issues in the workplace, or employees prefer to be diagnosed with something other than 'stress', owing to the perceived stigma surrounding the condition.

While [stress](#) may be less of a cause of absence, statistics published last week by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) point to a rise in the overall number of people signed off work on long-term sick leave.

Professor O'Donnell commented, "We need to be careful not to be premature in drawing conclusions from the ONS figures. It is inevitable that job losses will include those with mental ill health, including stress. Additionally, normal anxiety about job loss is rational and should not be confused with mental ill health."

The stigma attached to mental ill health was recently highlighted by mental-health charity Rethink, following a poll of more than 2000 adults. According to the findings, six in ten British workers admitted that they would feel uncomfortable talking to their line manager if they had a mental-health condition, such as depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder. Fear of losing their job was the main reason people gave for feeling uncomfortable, closely followed by concern about colleagues finding out about their condition. Nearly one in five (18 per cent) respondents said they would be concerned that their line manager would think they were "mad", or overlook them for promotion (17 per cent).

Commenting on the reluctance of people to be open about stress, Professor O'Donnell said: "It is a sad fact that stigma against mental ill health still exists at work, and many people do not feel able to talk about such problems with their employers. It's important to acknowledge that it is natural to experience stress, and there are ways to manage it, including: making use of employee assistance programmes, which are increasingly offered through the workplace;

careful financial planning and organisation; and communication with line managers, or HR, if the employee feels comfortable to do so."

He added: "There is much evidence to show that being in work is better for your health. We should therefore be very careful before encouraging people to go off sick with stress and into the very situation they are most frightened of – that is, being out of work."

### ***Happy employees could improve levels of productivity***



David Brent, played by Ricky Gervais in 'The Office', wanted to be remembered as 'the man who put a smile on the face of all who he met'. Research now suggests companies that try to make employees happy could benefit from improved levels of productivity.

Where Slough's most famous office manager leads, eminent economists follow. David Brent's declaration that he wanted to be remembered as "the man who put a smile on the face of all who he met" may once have been dismissed as management mumbo jumbo.

But it appears the Brentmeister General may have been on to something. A team of economists has now produced research that suggests there are clear links between workers' happiness and their productivity.

The team, led by Andrew Oswald, a professor of economics at Warwick Business School and a leading authority on the relationship between economics and mental health, said its research has important implications for the worlds of politics and business.

"We find that human happiness has large and positive causal effects on productivity," the team said. "Positive emotions appear to invigorate human beings, while negative emotions have the opposite effect."

The team conducted a range of exercises in their research. In one, students were asked to add a series of five two-digit numbers in 10 minutes. The subjects were paid an attendance fee, and a performance fee based on the number of correct answers.

Some were then shown a 10-minute film based on comedy routines performed by a well-known British comedian. The film succeeded in raising the reported happiness levels of those who saw it, compared to those who did not see it, or who watched a "placebo" film – a clip depicting patterns of coloured sticks.

Among the subjects who reported higher happiness levels after seeing the comedy film, productivity was significantly higher than for the other subjects, for both men and women. The Warwick economists noted: "Happier workers, our research found were 12% more productive. Unhappier workers were 10% less productive." Significantly, subjects who watched the comedy film but did not report higher levels of happiness were unable to demonstrate higher levels of productivity.

The findings led the economists to claim: "The increase in productivity seems to be linked to the increase in happiness, not merely to the watching of the comedy movie per se." The team also found that those who had experienced a death or illness in their families within the past two years performed 10% worse than others.

"Given the extraordinarily homogeneous sample of our subjects, the difference in productivity was unexpectedly striking," it wrote in the latest issue of the [University of Warwick](#)'s Economic Research Institute journal.

Questioning the students about their family backgrounds also led to interesting results.

The researchers, for example, found that subjects whose parents had recently divorced did not appear less happy or less productive. They noted: "One exception to our findings concerns the subject of parental divorce. Students whose parents have recently divorced did not report being less happy than others in the study, and they did not demonstrate reduced productivity.

"Though we do not know why this was the case, we surmise that divorce may well be harder to classify as a 'negative life event', in the sense that it might have been perceived by our subjects as a release from a more difficult situation and may also have been a longer-term issue granting additional time for the subjects to get used to the situation."

Economists have long debated how productivity can be raised through improved skills and the education of workers, or the introduction of new technology. But the Warwick team suggested that their work has opened up a new line of inquiry: "Our recent research investigates an important but often overlooked ingredient – that of human emotion."

The team suggested that their findings should "provoke thought among scholars in [psychology](#) and economics and in the business community".

They concluded: "If happiness in the workplace brings increased returns to productivity, then human resource departments, business managers and the architects of promotion policies will want to consider the implications."

### DIARY DATES

[European Hazards Conference](#), Leeds  
Sept 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>

Hazards Campaign Meeting 30<sup>th</sup> Sept,  
Manchester

[Stress Network Conference](#), Hillscourt,  
Rednal, Birmingham November 27/28<sup>th</sup>

**BOOKING DETAILS ON NEXT PAGES**



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

## Annual Conference 2010

### Stress Prevention to secure an effective workplace

Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, Nr Birmingham

Courtesy of NASUWT

**Saturday, November 27<sup>th</sup> 9.45 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. and  
Sunday, 28<sup>th</sup> 9.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. 2010**

*This conference is aimed at Trades Union Shop Stewards, Health & Safety Representatives, Health & Safety and Human Resources Specialists, Stress Management Consultants*

#### What does your employer do to prevent stress?

In November 09, NICE [the National Institute for Clinical Excellence] published a report on Mental Wellbeing at Work, acknowledging the importance of the interaction between the working environment, the nature of the work and the individual.

“Work has an important role in promoting mental wellbeing. It is an important determinant of self-esteem and identity. It can provide a sense of fulfillment and opportunities for social interaction. For most people, work provides their main source of income.

“Work can also have negative effects on mental health, particularly in the form of stress.

“Working environments that pose risks for mental and physical well-being put high demands on a person without giving them sufficient control and support to manage those demands. A perceived imbalance between the effort required and the rewards of the job can lead to stress. A sense of injustice and unfairness arising from management processes or personal relationships can also increase stress and risks to mental health. Other stressful conditions include physical factors such as material hazards, noise, dust and dirt.”

**ALL employers including Directors, Managers at all levels and workers themselves have a duty of care not to create high levels of stress. Failure to prevent a high-stress climate in the workplace should lead to enforcement and prosecution.**

**Prevention is central to success. Cures are too late and ineffective.**

#### PROGRAMME OUTLINE

##### SATURDAY MORNING — panel of speakers with Q&A session to follow

- Dr Colin Mackay HSE Speaker – progress with the HSE Management Standards
- Roger Neilson NHS Trust [Mindful Employers NW]
- Diane Jones, Mental Health in the workplace
- Stress victim OR a Safety Rep who has taken the issue up with Management
- John Usher – the case for mediation
- Network Speaker – Ian Draper, Convenor

##### SATURDAY AFTERNOON & SUNDAY MORNING

Workshop sessions guiding Representatives in supporting members, gathering evidence of Stress, dealing with casework, risk assessments and the pursuit of good management practices and commitment through workable in-house Stress Policy - full details to be confirmed in due course.

With an overnight stay in pleasant, comfortable rural surroundings to the SW of Birmingham, it is hoped that this weekend event will provide a wide range of networking opportunities for delegates.

**Don't delay – Book NOW to avoid disappointment and get the benefit of discounted delegate fees.**

**FINAL CLOSING DATE 31<sup>ST</sup> October 2010**



**PLEASE COMPLETE A SEPARATE FORM FOR EACH DELEGATE AND STAPLE TOGETHER IF NECESSARY. PHOTOCOPIES ARE ACCEPTABLE.  
PLEASE TYPE OR WRITE VERY CLEARLY**

<b>NAME (BLOCK CAPITALS)</b>	
<b>CONTACT ADDRESS (BLOCK CAPITALS)</b>	
	<b>Postcode</b>
<b>TELEPHONE No</b>	<b>MOBILE No</b>
<b>EMAIL Caps please</b>	
<b>ORGANISATION</b>	
<b>SPECIAL NEEDS (Use separate sheet if necessary)</b>	

<b>DAY DELEGATE (per person)</b>		
<b>One day (Sat):</b>	<b>£110.00</b> (Unwaged delegate or non delegate carer: £50)* (For B&B on Friday add £50 to above prices)	£
<b>Two days (Sat &amp; Sun):</b>	<b>£130.00</b> (Unwaged delegate or non-delegate carer: £60)*  (Fee includes buffet lunch and refreshments on Saturday and packed lunch and refreshments on Sunday)	

<b>RESIDENTIAL DELEGATE (per person)</b>		
<b>Two days (including Sat B&amp;B):</b>	<b>£210</b> (Unwaged delegate or non-delegate carer:£90)*	£
<b>TWO DAYS (INCLUDING FRIDAY &amp; SATURDAY B&amp;B):</b>	<b>£270</b> (UNWAGED DELEGATE OR NON-DELEGATE CARER: £140)*  (Fee includes bed & breakfast as booked plus refreshments lunch and dinner on Saturday and refreshments and packed lunch on Sunday)	

*\* Please note that there are no twin/double ground floor rooms in the Conference Centre. Delegates with mobility difficulties who need to share a room with a carer will be accommodated for bed and breakfast in a nearby Premier Inn (approximately 3 miles away) at an additional cost of £15 per person per night.*

**Please write total supplement here:**

<b>SUB TOTAL</b>	£
<b>Less Early Bird discount of 10% (Only if booking and full payment are received by 21<sup>st</sup> September 2010 )</b>	
<b>FULL TOTAL</b>	- £ £

Complete this section if you wish to share a room		
Name of person with whom you are sharing.		
Type of room (✓)	<b>TWIN</b>	<b>DOUBLE</b>
Is this person a delegate? (✓)	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Is this person a designated Carer? (✓)	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>

**CANCELLATIONS POLICY:** UP TO AND INCLUDING THE EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT CLOSING DATE, FULL REFUNDS [LESS AN ADMINISTRATIVE FEE OF £10] MAY BE MADE.

AFTER THAT DATE 75% REFUND ONLY MAY BE MADE UNLESS A CANCELLED PLACE IS FULLY FILLED BY ANOTHER NEW APPLICATION.

NO REFUNDS WILL BE MADE ONCE NUMBERS HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED WITH THE CONFERENCE CENTRE BY 31<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2010.

COMPLETED APPLICATION FORMS SHOULD BE SENT TOGETHER WITH CHEQUE(S)  
PAYABLE TO **UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS NETWORK** TO:-  
LES ROBERTS, CONFERENCE SECRETARY, 33 OLD STREET, UPTON UPON SEVERN, WORCS, WR8 0HN  
**EMAIL ADDRESS:** [UKWORKSTRESS@LIVE.CO.UK](mailto:UKWORKSTRESS@LIVE.CO.UK)