

**Hazards
Campaign**



www.workstress.net

The UK National Work-Stress Network

Winter 2004/05

5th Annual Network Conference ... a great success!

Saturday November 20th 2004, saw the successful conclusion of a year's planning for our annual conference, with some 70 delegates and speakers attending – the best ever figures yet.

Many grateful thanks to those who gave up their Saturday to attend what was acclaimed as a very successful day.

With the very generous support of NASUWT in provision of their excellent Hillscourt Conference facilities, we had a good setting for many old friends and new faces to engage in discussion about the issues raised by our four speakers.

Falling hot on the heels of "Stress Awareness Day" and November 3rd HSE launch of the long-awaited "[Stress Management Standards](#)" we were lucky to have a presentation from **Steve Lee** [HSE] who had played a key role in the development of the pilot project and the Standards themselves.

Warrinder Juss, and **Simon Dewsbury** from the Birmingham offices of **Thompsons Solicitors** gave an excellent reflection on the legal issues post Hatton Appeal judgements and the Lords' consideration of the Barber case.

Tom Mellish, Principal TUC Officer for Stress, confirmed the Trades Union continuing approach to the eradication of the causes of stress, the development of anti-

stress and workplace bullying policies.

He reflected on the fact that despite the length of time it has taken to achieve publication of the Management Standards, they are merely guidance, they are not compulsory and although there is the backing of Health & Safety Law particularly through Management Regulations, there is no significant penalty against employers for failing to implement and utilise the Standards.



Following speakers' input, a brief Q&A session led to lunch, with good networking opportunity.

Workshop sessions enabled a wider discussion of the issues raised. In the closing plenary session, Ian Draper, Network Convener summarised the outcomes of the day, and explained the work of the Network and invited participants to volunteer to help the national Steering Group in its work.

Conference Information is available through the links indicated on this page. You can access the following downloads:-

- [Photographs of the day](#)
- [PowerPoint Presentations](#) by Steve Lee and Tom Mellish
- [Handouts](#) from Warrinder Juss and Simon Dewsbury, of Thompsons
- [Workshop reports](#)

Further stress documents are available via the Network website.

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Workshop discussions

Following the morning plenary session a break for a good lunch and good opportunity for networking, Conference delegates attended one of the four workshop sessions. Free-ranging discussions on individual experiences enabled everyone to have their say, and to ideas. In such discussions it is often heart-rending to hear of personal problems that have arisen in individual workplaces. We wonder at times, how it is that some workplaces create such impossible conditions.

All too often individual situations develop where totally unreasonable demands and impositions are made on workers, and when their health breaks down, then a hostile approach from managers leads to a worsening problem and eventually to serious physical and psychological damage.

Workshop reports

Brief reports on each of the four workshops can be accessed via www.workstress.net/downloads.htm

Broadening our influence

We are delighted to announce that interest from HR organisations in our work, has led to us being invited to provide input into specialist sessions for company HR teams, and that our work is now well recognised alongside legal contribution focussed on legal cases and Health & Safety requirements on directors and managers.

Network Convener, Ian Draper recently addressed an audience of over 30 HR people at a day conference organised by [DBM](#) for their local clients in Liverpool, and this event will be repeated again for a wider audience in York. We are grateful to DBM for their support for our work.

We are also invited to make contributions to a Health & Safety Representatives' day-conference organised by the joint unions group in Cheshire.

The Network can, where possible provide speakers or workshop facilitators, and at expenses-incurred costs only, plus a donation to support our website work.

Contact us via www.workstress.net for any help in facilitating workplace or union group discussion on the subject.

We remain unable to provide individual guidance and assistance to workers suffering from stress-related illnesses and workplace bullying.

Enquirers should direct their calls for help to their Trades Union, their local CAB, or perhaps to a no-win - no-fee legal firm.

Web success

Our Webmaster analyses monthly activity on the Network Website. It is pleasing to note that we continue to figure top of the list of sources of Stress information and for search engine recommendations.

In December 2004:-

- ✓ almost 3,500 distinct hosts were served,
- ✓ 10,600 successful requests for pages were completed,
- ✓ 6,600 downloads of files and information were completed,
- ✓ 345 daily requests were successfully completed on average,
- ✓ 2,000 visits were made to the forum,
- ✓ 500 viewed Conference pictures,
- ✓ 150 used the 'send a postcard facility', and
- ✓ 180 visited the guest-book.

We welcome all requests for information, and are pleased with this regular level of support. Monthly statistics show that we receive anywhere between 9,000 and 12,000 'hits' every month.

Hazards Conference 2004

The weekend of July 18th 2004, saw over 500 delegates gather again at UMIST, for perhaps the most successful Hazards Conference of recent years.

Once more the UKWSN team (*Dave & Dianne Jones, Brian Robinson and Ian Draper*) facilitated workshop sessions on Stress and Risk Assessments (100+ delegates) and on Stress Policy (50+ delegates). We met many old friends and made new acquaintances from across the UK. Our workshop sessions were as always well-received by delegates.

Conference theme was *'The Brutality of work'* with a keynote speech from Asbjörn Wahl of the European Network.

Other speakers included the Minister for Health & Safety, Safety reporting on workplace bullying and the dangers identified before the tragic explosion at the Glasgow plastics factory, and Hazards Magazine Editor, Rory O'Neill.

Delegates celebrated the presentation of the first **ALAN AWARD** in memory of the late Alan Dalton. This wonderfully crafted two-fingered salute was awarded by Alan's partner, Eve Barker, in recognition of dogged determination against employer's attempts to sideline health and safety.

Diary Dates

UKWSN Steering Group, Saturday Feb 12th 2005
10.00 to 12.30, NASUWT, Hillscourt Centre, Rednal,
B45 8RS (0121-457-8370)

Hazards Conference 2005 – Leeds University,
Friday 29th to Sunday 31st July - to Sponsor this
event, contact:-
<http://www.gmhazards.org.uk/2005app.doc>

UKWSN 2005 Conference – date to be agreed
in November

HSE Stress Management Standards

November 2004 saw the launch of the long-awaited HSE Management Standards on Stress. Sadly they have no teeth, and despite the insistence of over 75% of initial consultation respondents over three years ago that ACoP, Legislation and Enforcement were required – employers are under no compulsion to implement the standards.

Lengthy research by HSE and much additional development work has revealed no more than the Network could have predicted over 12 years ago now.

This knowledge is that workers who have little or no control over their work, their working conditions, the demands placed upon them, and a wide range of other well-known factors, are all likely to be highly susceptible to stress-related illness.

The following extracts are taken from advice from HSE on the implementation of these new Standards.

"The legal case: The law requires employers to tackle stress"

The Management Standards are not new laws.

However, employers *already* have duties:

- Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999:
 - To assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities.
- Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974:
 - To take measures to control that risk.

HSE expects organisations to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for stress, and to take action to tackle any problems identified by that risk assessment.

The Standards are intended to help and encourage you to do this and to show that you have done so.

"The business case: Tackling stress brings business benefits"

Research has shown work-related stress to have adverse effects for organisations in terms of:

- Employee commitment to work
- Staff performance and productivity
- Staff turnover and intention to leave
- Attendance levels
- Staff recruitment and retention
- Customer satisfaction
- Organisational image and reputation
- Potential litigation

It is also worth thinking about the impact that work-related stress could have on your unit or team. For example, losing one colleague for an extended period with a stress-related illness can have a dramatic impact on the workload and morale of the rest of the team.

"The moral/ethical case: Tackling stress prevents ill health"

There is now convincing evidence that prolonged periods of stress, including work-related stress, have an adverse effect on health. Research provides strong links between stress and

- **physical effects** such as heart disease, back pain, headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances or various minor illnesses; and
- **psychological effects** such as anxiety and depression"

Visit our downloads page on

www.workstress.net/downloads/standards.pdf

for the HSE document in .pdf format, and to re-route to the HSE Website Stress section.

The UK Work-Stress Network acknowledges that the new standards go some way towards the goals that we have highlighted since our inception.

However, we remain seriously disappointed that they fail to go the further step towards enforced requirements on employers to develop and implement workplace policies committed to the eradication of all causes of stress in the workplace.

All too often we hear of employers who are totally ignorant of their psychological duty of care to the workforce – it is time that HSE took the bit between its teeth and served more Improvement Notices on employers who refuse acknowledge the need for a properly committed approach to dealing with all aspects of worker-stress.

Does your workplace care? Has your employer examined the new Standards? Are they being implemented? **If not, WHY NOT!**

Stress Snippets

Fixed Retirement Age 'consigned to the past'?

LEGISLATION designed to outlaw fixed retirement ages will mean most people will work at least until they are 65. Ministers announced today that a fixed retirement age will be 'consigned to the past', but added it will bring forward legislation to set a 'default' retirement age of 65. Currently firms can set whatever retirement age they like, with many people stopping work at 60 or even younger. But under the new reforms, retirement ages below 65 will be allowed only if they can be shown to be necessary.

The Government is also creating a new right for people to work beyond the compulsory retirement age, which employers will have a duty to consider.

The new proposals will be implemented by October 2006 as part of a new European employment directive

Teacher Stress levels remain high

Thirty per cent of all teachers in England and Wales schools took sick leave last year as a result of job-related stress. More than 213,000 days were lost to stress, anxiety or depression suffered by the teaching profession at an annual cost to schools of over £19m.

Teachers were off, on average, for 11.5 days in 2003 - more than two full working weeks - to a study by the Schools Advisory Service reveals. The main three reasons given were stress, broken bones and sciatica.

Stress was largely ascribed to excessive workload, lack of support from management and co-workers, lack of communication and the pressures of having to deal with poorly behaved children and difficult parents.

The Schools Advisory Service is the largest independent provider of teacher absence insurance in the UK.

The survey was based on its experience of dealing with some 1,500 individual schools. It also pointed to government's figures which showed that teacher absenteeism had grown by 11% over the last five years. The total number of days taken as a result of sickness was 639,077 last year.

John Randall of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "Work-related stress is one of the main reasons for staff absence in schools and is a concern to Headteachers. The early identification of

symptoms and support for staff is important, as prevention is always better than cure."

Lee Marshall, director of SAS, said: "It is clear that stress is a major contributing factor in the rising trend of absence in the education sector. There is a need nationally to tackle this from all fronts.

"We need to work together with the unions and employers to make an extra effort to tackle the problems of the individual."

The DfES collects information centrally on the number of teachers taking sickness absence, but not on the cause. But it said that its own most recent figures showed that in 2003 the average number of days lost to sickness absence per teacher was only 5.4. The school standards minister, David Milliband, said: "This compares favourably with other occupations in both the public and private sectors. We nevertheless have a range of measures to ensure that teacher health and well-being is taken seriously, which include a focus on tackling sources of stress and excessive workload."

Massaging stressed workers

Glasgow call centre has hired a full-time masseuse to help workers beat stress. Staff at BCW offices deal with irate customers, sending tension levels soaring. But thanks to Julia McAulay, who gives them neck and shoulder massages at their desks, the 400 workers have an on-tap stress-buster. Julia, 41, from Carmyle, thought she would be donning headphones and calming angry customers when she applied to work for BCW, which has the call centre contracts for bank giants HBOS, Scottish Power and Heineken.

Name and Shame bullies

Trade Union threatens to name and shame employers who fail to tackle bullying at work. AMICUS receives hundreds of complaints every year from members who claimed they had suffered bullying in the workplace. It said it would start naming firms it felt were not adequately dealing with the problem from 2005.

It is estimated that almost 19 million working days are lost every year in the UK as a result of workplace bullying.

Mandy Telford, anti-bullying campaign co-ordinator at AMICUS, said: "We know that in the worst cases victims suffer from similar trauma to soldiers after combat. "The resulting economic

damage to the UK in terms of sick days and lack of productivity is increasingly serious.

"We held back from naming firms overlooking their duty of care to their employees in 2004, but next year we will take no prisoners."

The union set up a special hotline over summer for staff at Gatwick and Heathrow airports. It revealed a "horrendous culture" of bullying, including at least five airlines.

The union also hopes to have bullying made illegal and wants companies to sign an anti-bullying charter.

Health hazard

The dangers of sleep deprivation are now considered a major health hazard.

Sleep facts

- Average night's sleep is 7.04 hours
- 36% have trouble getting to sleep
- 20% have trouble getting up on time
- Married men sleep less than married women
- 80% are in bed between 10pm and 1am
- 5% sleep less than five hours
- 6% sleep more than nine hours

A lorry driver was recently jailed for 18 months after killing a 20-year-old woman when he fell asleep at the wheel of his 17-tonne truck on a road in Somerset.

Road safety experts now believe tired drivers may account for more accidents than drunk drivers. With more shift work, longer trading hours and round-the-clock supermarket facilities, Britain and many other developed countries are moving towards a 24-hour society.

'Faulty wiring' stress death link

Stress can prove fatal for people with 'faulty wiring' between the brain and the heart, research has suggested.

Those at risk could suffer heart failure at emotionally stressful events such as family gatherings or New Year parties. University College, London scientists say their findings could lead to ways of identifying and treating those at risk.

The combination of heart and brain irregularities means that heart failure could occur during a stressful or emotional event like a family gathering or even a boisterous New Year party, according to Peter Taggart, UCL Centre for Cardiology.

Stress is thought to be responsible for around 20% of sudden cardiac deaths, but scientists have not known how.

The researchers say people who already have heart disease are particularly at risk, but it is the brain that may be most responsible.

The new study suggests that uneven brain activity, in a region where nerves link directly to the heart, seems to result in an uneven distribution of signals across the heart, which stops the heart from contracting normally.

Sickness absence records access

HR and managers can access sickness records without breaching the Data Protection Act 1998 according to the final piece of guidance issued from the Information Commissioner.

The fourth piece of guidance "*Information about Workers' Health*" is to help employers comply with the Act and covers issues such as collecting and keeping sickness records and drug testing employees.

Assistant Information Commissioner David Smith said the guidance had been amended after consultation on the draft guidelines earlier this year revealed it would not be practical for only occupational health professionals to hold information on sickness. The draft guidance had said that HR and managers could access absence records but not details about the sickness causing the absence. Smith warned that managers should only be given access "*so far as they need to know*"; for example, when looking at an individual's high absence rate. Ben Willmott, CIPD adviser, employee relations, welcomed the report. He said the supplementary guidance would help HR to ascertain if company policy protects them from breaching the Act.

Streamlining legal changes

As always, 2004 has been a busy year for HR professionals with new employment legislation and case law to keep up with. What will 2005 hold in store?

The following are some of the main changes that will be implemented next year and which organisations should be planning for:

- 1 January 2005: **Freedom of Information Act** requires disclosure of information by public bodies;
- 6 April 2005: implementation of the **Information and Consultation Directive** takes effect;

- New tribunal claim and response forms become mandatory (introduced in October in parallel with the new dispute resolution regulations);
- 5 October 2005: Amendments to the definition of "harassment" to include both sexual harassment and harassment related to a person's sex.
- There will also be extensions to the Disability Discrimination Act, to include a statutory duty on public bodies to have regard to the need to eradicate unlawful discrimination against and harassment of disabled people and to extend the scope of the Act to include people with HIV, multiple sclerosis and cancer.
- **The requirement that mental impairment be "clinically well recognised" will be removed. The effect of this in relation to cases of "stress" will be interesting to watch.**
- Common commencement dates following the success of the DTI pilot in respect of employment law, the Chancellor announced in his pre-budget speech the extension of this practice to other areas of legislation, including health and safety, to apply on 6 April and 1 October.

Fear of taking holiday entitlement?

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux has called for a Fair Employment Commission to protect workers' rights after estimates showed that up to 50,000 employees have not received their statutory four weeks' holiday entitlement.

Employment-related reports from individual citizens advice bureaux show that 10% complaints related to paid holidays.

Richard Dunstan, NACAB employment expert, confirmed that a commission was needed because the gulf between rights in law and their enforcement in the work place is growing.

The establishment of a Fair Employment Commission is opposed by employers' bodies, which believe it will add further burdens to their legal duties.

Increasing move to home working

Media professionals want to work from home or on the move according to research by recruitment and HR consultancy Hudson.

The research revealed a rise in independent working within the industry with 72% of media professionals expecting future employees will often work on a flexi-time basis and nearly half, (44%)

believe they will eventually set up their own business.

Hudson claim that 70% of media professionals expect to work at home and a further two thirds (64%) anticipating freelance and contract work.

Over two thousand employees from UK organisations were surveyed on their attitudes to the current workplace and expectations about work in the future, of which a hundred worked in the media.

The media respondents also believe that this change in work behaviour will mean employers will look for different qualities in prospective employees.

More than one in two (58%) believe media businesses will look for recruits to be autonomous and independently minded, and half (51%) think media businesses are beginning to employ recruits with diverse work experience and skills.

Richard Baker, at Hudson UK, said: "Media employers are already ahead of the game when it comes embracing flexible working practices and encouraging independence in the workplace. It is clear from our research that they need to be, with media professionals expecting to have much more say on their future working patterns."

He added: "To retain the best recruits and prevent a drain of talent into the freelance or self-employed field, media employers should ensure they are equipped to accommodate these more flexible working practices."

One revelation from the research which was wholly unsurprising was that *money* was the most important factor in job choice.

However as well as this 51% said they would opt for a sabbatical over a cash bonus.

Media professionals obviously value their quality of living, as the vast majority (81%) said they "worked to live" rather than "live to work".

Laptops may be fertility risk to men

Researchers warn that high operating temperatures could affect quality and quantity of sperm.

Laptops, which reach high internal operating temperatures, can heat up the scrotum which could affect the quality and quantity of men's sperm. "The increase in scrotal temperature is significant enough to cause changes in sperm parameters," said Dr Yefim Sheynkin, associate professor of urology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook.