

UK NATIONAL WORK-STRESS NETWORK NEWS

EUROPEAN AND UK HAZARDS CAMPAIGN

AUTUMN 2002

Hazards 2002 - successful conference weekend at UMIST

UK National Work Stress Network leads acclaimed workshops for over 200 participants

Ian Draper, *Network News Editor*

Manchester **UMIST** was the home for the second year running, of the Hazards Conference, and provided once more an excellent venue for over 550 delegates. The weather was mostly kind, the accommodation excellent, and the organization of conference as always, was first class.

Grateful thanks and congratulations were extended to John Bamford and Hilda Palmer and their team from GMHC, for a superb event.

We look forward to Hazards 2003, to be hosted in London.

Opening Plenary Session

Alan Manning of NW Region TUC declared Conference open and welcomed delegates to Manchester. He introduced Safety Representatives from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU UNISON Branch), Janice Bentham from AMICUS and Billy Baldwin from NW Region UCATT.

They outlined issues related to the work of Safety Representatives and how managers were responding (or not) to their work.

At MMU management had not taken on the tasks of Risk Assessments, and when issues were raised with

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TUC joins forces with UK Stress Network to promote European Safety Week

Stress - the focus of many events across the nation

Brian Robinson, *UKWSN Convener*

The Network has been involved in several events this Autumn.

On the 14th October at the TUC Conference we provided a speaker and a session Chair. The day was very interesting and valuable to us in that it gave the Network wide exposure.

Abdul Chowdry, HSC, spoke of the need for stress related issues to be tackled seriously and asked for comments and opinions to be forwarded to the HSC to help with their thinking. We are following this invitation and hope to make closer contacts with them. If any of our readers feel that they have something that would help the HSC form a more responsive policy on stress related matters perhaps they would like to contact them also.

Several of the Steering Group have been out and about taking part in Seminars and Workshops. These prove always to be interesting and educational. Personally I am always encouraged by the number of union reps and their commitment to the welfare of their fellow workers and by the caring attitude shown by some employers.

As always there is a 'but'. The unsympathetic response of other employers based it seems on trying to find the lowest level of commitment to worker welfare which would protect them against action for the damage caused still fills me with a sense of anger.

It is in this area that the HSC/HSE could be more helpful in creating advice which would encourage a more positive view of workplace health and well-being to replace these attempts to evade responsibility for the hurt caused to individuals families and society at large.

One last thought, I watched a large part of the debate on the modernisation of Parliamentary procedures (or the working conditions of MPs) and was greatly impressed by those supporting the case put forward to make the House more worker friendly and therefore more productive. Now we need to see these principles applied to other workers and workplaces. How about finding the time for that Robin Cook?

Brian Robinson, UKWSN Convener

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managers no action was forthcoming. Responsibilities were being ignored it seemed and complaints of MMU failings were registered with HSE.

HSE had appeared unwilling to act until a second complaint was lodged and on that basis Improvement Notices had been served.

Janice Bentham and Billy Baldwin outlined their involvement in the Work Safety Advisor pilots.

Their work was targeted at small and medium enterprise workplaces in construction, hospitality, automotive and voluntary sectors. In each case workplace visits involved meetings with managers and employees. Discussion focused on reviews of safety working practices, re-visits and follow-ups, and the development of consultation processes and a safety culture. A brief Q&A session followed with points made from the floor on the presentations.

Saturday Plenary Session

This session was addressed by Kevin Curran (GMB) Hugh Robertson (UNISON) and Hilda Palmer (GMHC) in the absence of a Minister responsible for H&S.

Kevin outlined the issues related to the failure of Government to prioritise H&S in ministerial terms, and rejected the recent move to minor status under the DoT. He reminded delegates of the 4,000 Asbestos related deaths and that this would continue for many years to come. He pointed to the disintegrated Occupational health strategy, and the clear messages that Government failings gave to cowboy employers and managers that they can easily get away with safety failures.

Hugh Robertson endorsed the view that in 7 years the H&S profile in this country had declined. He noted that Government put faith in employers 'not to kill or maim' the workforce, and that it placed minimal trust in the work of Safety Representatives. He noted the absence of a Safety Bill, of corporate killing laws and the supposed burden on employers of regulation had created an unwelcome culture around safety and well-being at work. He felt that Government seemed oblivious to the many calls for action, recognition of the need for legislation and protection for many thousands of workers.

He reminded delegates, and employers as well as Government of the costs of health and safety failings, and of the Human cost and the moral duty and obligations on employers.

Nigel Bryson (GMB) reminded Conference of the Revitalising H&S programme. It was anticipated that the long awaited Employee Consultation paper would emerge in December 2002. This would provide opportunity for improvements in the roles of Safety representatives. He called upon Government to develop its exemplar-role fully and provide good evidence of seriously thought through policy change, by revisiting the many RHS Action Points.

In concluding the session, **Hilda Palmer** spoke of the

failures of Government to appoint a Minister, and of the urgent need for Government to take its responsibilities clearly and directly upon its own shoulders and to make sensible progress towards a Safety and Well-being-friendly culture in all workplaces.

Closing Plenary Session

The Sunday plenary session was given over to a presentation from the Construction, Forestry, Energy Union of Australia. The campaigning issues for WorkSafe Victoria were outlined in the fields of Asbestos, Bullying, Clean Air, PINS, De-regulation and performance-based H&S.

A series of increased fatalities on Construction sites lead to an interesting sequence of events. 24 hour stoppages were followed with enforced site inspections being required before ANY workers would return to work. The outcome of this activity lead to re-instatements of the reduced H&S Inspection teams.

Finally, delegates were reminded of some key points in history. Back in 1906 the Edward Medal (now the George Medal) was commissioned to mark "Heroic Deeds" in particular within the context of industrial accidents. Workers called for NO MORE HEROES and NO MORE DISASTERS.

In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights included in Article 23 the "Right to work and for just and humane treatment at work" – delegates questioned where was this right now!

Workshops Report

Three 2-hour workshop sessions saw over 200 delegates attend sessions facilitated by Dave & Dianne Jones, Brian Robinson, Ian Draper & Jenny Monk of UKWSN.

The two main themes were "Stress Risk Assessment" and "Stress Policy".

It is never easy to predict the nature and experience of workshop participants. A broad mix of those who have some knowledge of the subject of Stress, and those who are coming new to the subject as Safety Representatives was found to be the case.

The fact that so many need to discuss the matter of work-related stress each year is clear indication that the problem is not getting better – it is conceivably getting worse.

A separate report on the Stress Policy workshop, which was highly commended by several participants, will be sent to those who attended and posted on the UKWSN Website for open access in due course.

Look out for details of Conferences

- Hazards 2003 – September, London
- European Hazards 2003 September, Denmark

NEW MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY APPOINTED

Nick Brown has been appointed as the new minister responsible for Health And Safety, Andrew Smith, Secretary Of State For Work And Pensions announced today. The appointment follows the decision by the Prime Minister that the Department For Work And Pensions (DWP) would take over responsibility for Health And Safety. Mr Brown will remain as Minister for Work and retains all his previous responsibilities.

UK BUSINESS AIMS TO CUT STRESS

Some of the UK's largest firms - including Barclays, Dixons and Marks & Spencer - are to take part in week of activities aimed at tackling work-related stress. The Work-Life Balance Trust says that at least one in 10 British workers has suffered from serious work related stress. The week is designed to promote the benefits of flexible working practices for staff and employers.

A survey by the Department of Trade & Industry (DTI) found that one in six people worked more than 60 hours a week, compared with one in eight two years ago. The Work-Life Balance Trust say that 7 million work days are lost each year to British industry through stress-related illness.

"Stress is a major killer in this country and at least one in 10 British workers suffers serious work-related stress," said Lindsay Cook, chairman of the Work-Life Balance Trust.

"Change is our aim, so that all people, both men and women, can 'get a life' for themselves, their families and for the nation as a whole."

FLEXITIME HURTS CAREERS?

Flexible working has failed to take off in Britain because many employees fear it will wreck their careers, a study reveals. Two thirds of professional and managerial staff would like to work more flexibly, perhaps by putting in some hours at home, switching to a job-share, or working outside normal office hours.

But eight out of 10 workers believe that they will ruin their promotion prospects, and bring their careers to a full stop, if they are not present in the office five days a week. The finding comes despite mounting evidence that employees outperform their colleagues when they change their working patterns so that they can see more of their family or spend time on other interests.

**STOP PRESS STOP PRESS
STOP PRESS STOP PRESS**

**UK NATIONAL WORK STRESS NETWORK
ANNUAL CONFERENCE:- SPRING2003**

Details soon on www.workstress.net



The UK National Work-Stress Network

WorkStress.Net

HOW WELL IS THE WEBSITE DOING?

- Riding on the success of European Stress Week, we have broken all records this month with an astonishing **11,050 requests for pages!**
- Average successful requests for pages per day: **363!** It was over 400 a day at times. Distinct hosts served: **2,915!**
- We have attracted a lot more attention worldwide on search engines with well over 500 links. Google, the biggest player in the Search Engine world, reports 154 links, including – very topically – the FBU!

HAVE YOU VISITED OUR WEBSITE?

HEALTH AND SAFETY CONFERENCE ON STRESS

The PCS Union's week-long series of talks on work-related stress culminated in a seminar on 18th October 2002 in Croydon. The event was organised by Dennis Heard-White of PCS Home Office Group.

The afternoon meeting involved two speakers, Elizabeth Gyngell from the Health and Safety Executive, and Hugh MacGrillen from London Hazards Centre. Elizabeth Gyngell outlined the government strategy on lowering work related stress.

She started with the HSE definition of stress; "... the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand on them."

Elizabeth pointed out that the common idea that some stress is healthy, is a misconception. Research shows that stress is unhelpful, and usually harmful to health. The government's approach is to work in partnership with employers, encouraging voluntary implementation of HSE's guidance available through their website and various pamphlets chiefly HSG 218.

Hugh emphasised the union point of view that a job should have a nil effect on one's health and well-being. Many people's working lives fall short of this, as evidenced by the fact that 6.5 million working days per year in Britain are lost because of stress alone!

Unions can combat stress by adopting a partnership approach with management, if appropriate, or by the more traditional approaches of bargaining and disputes. Hugh had received a lot of feedback from staff that stress is prevalent in the Civil Service. This is caused by three main problems; understaffing, a culture of constant change imposed from above without consultation, and a lack of occupational training.

Also managers had not received any training in how to deal with stress in the workplace.

Hugh then moved onto the legal aspects of work related stress. The TU movement needs to press for working time legislation to be tightened up.

LONG-HOURS CULTURE HITS FAMILY LIFE

Nearly half of British fathers barely see their children grow up because they work too hard. One in four work early mornings and more than twice as many regularly work in the evenings up to 8.30pm. A recent study found that one in three fathers regularly breach the 48 hour limit set by the European Working Time Directive.

Mothers also put in long hours at the expense of family life, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. In general, the time parents spend together as a couple is the main casualty of modern working arrangements.

One in five mothers and twice as many fathers were at work between 6.30 am and 8.30 am. In the evenings, 25% of mothers and 45% of fathers regularly worked between 5.30 pm and 8.30 pm. Parents working atypical hours tended to operate a "shift" system whereby at least one of them is looking after the children.

People in professional jobs put the long hours down to their career aspirations and family needs. By contrast, working class parents were more likely to say their employers gave them no choice.

WORK-LIFE FLEXIBILITY WOULD REDUCE SICKNESS ABSENCE

Sickness and absenteeism would fall dramatically if staff were allowed to control their own work lives say many managers. Research among 195 human resources bosses showed they agreed with workers that "demanding" hours had a negative effect on family life and society as a whole. But four out of 10 employers said they could not offer work-life flexibility to the majority of their staff.

Most of those questioned by Human Resources magazine and consultants Ceridian Centrefile said there would never be full trust between employers and workers.

BOSSSES FROM HELL

Many UK workers are suffering at the hands of boorish bosses. One in five recently described their boss as either incompetent, disinterested or a dictator. An e-learning network investigation, found 90% of respondents would like a boss with strong, inspirational qualities. Only 5% of the 1,000 people polled want their boss to be a "mate" or "a laugh down the pub".

47% rated people skills as the most valuable asset in the workplace. Richard Branson was overwhelmingly voted the "dream boss" with David Beckham second and Sven-Goran Eriksson third. Learndirect says too

many bosses resemble the hapless David Brent, portrayed by Ricky Gervais in BBC's The Office.

Helen Milner of Learndirect said: "It is disconcerting to see that as many as one in three of the working population suffer from a lack of supportive leadership."

NEW SHIFT EXHAUSTS POSTIES

Postal workers are struggling to deliver mail on time under a controversial pilot single-delivery service. Mail workers have become exhausted delivering all the day's mail in one trip rather than two and the scheme is now to be extended for a further four weeks - if unions agree - in an attempt to find a solution to "teething problems".

MANAGERS MORE LIKELY TO DROP OFF AT WORK

Researchers in Sweden found the risk of falling asleep at work was greater for staff in senior positions. Higher socio-economic grouping was one of the biggest factors associated with sleeping at work, along with night shifts. The Stockholm Institute for Psychosocial Factors and Health studied 5,589 individuals to find what influenced unintentional sleeping.

People found to have high demands placed on them at work were also found to be more likely to fall asleep in their leisure time, than at work. Researchers reported, "High level white collar workers showed an increased risk."

High work demands were associated with an increased risk of involuntary sleep during leisure rather than work time.

WORKERS 'UNHAPPY WITH EMPLOYERS' LEADERSHIP'

The majority of workers is unhappy with managers and unimpressed with employer leadership qualities.

Lack of trust was the main cause of dissatisfaction. Only two out of five were satisfied with the quality of leadership in their organisation. Executives with good skills at influencing and persuading staff are valued more than managers with a traditional "command and control" style. Trust, good communications and decisiveness are seen as the most essential leadership qualities.

Most supported the emerging trend of "persuasive" leadership.

European and UK Hazards Campaign