European Campaign 2014-15

Manage stress for a healthy workplace

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Unite Safety Representatives

Organise for the European Campaign 2014-15
Use this leaflet and other Unite resources and European Campaign materials to organise to prevent stress in your workplace.
www.hse.gov.uk/campaigns/european
www.healthy-workplaces.eu

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Healthy workplaces manage stress

The 2014-15 European health and safety campaign is focusing on managing stress at work. Unite wants to encourage all our safety representatives to organise around the campaign. This could include carrying out special inspections, investigations and surveys.

This is something that many Unite members are already doing around stress at work but this campaign gives an added impetus for this action.

Work-related stress and psychosocial risks: the facts in Europe

Over half of European workers report that work-related stress is common in their workplace. Around 4 in 10 workers think that stress is not handled well in their workplace.

Workers are likely to take a significant amount of time off work when suffering from work-related stress and other psychological problems, or turn up for work but not be able to function at full capacity.

Psychosocial risks and work-related stress give rise to significant costs for organisations and national economies alike.

The total costs of mental health disorders in Europe (both work and non-work related) are estimated to be EUR 240 billion per year. Psychosocial risks can be assessed and managed in the same systematic way as other occupational safety and health risks.

Though women are more likely to report stress, men are equally at risk: managing stress and psychosocial risks at work is good for everyone.

What are work-related stress and psychosocial risks?

Work-related stress occurs when the demands of the job exceed a worker's ability to cope with them. It is one of the most important outcomes of a poor psychosocial work environment — not least because workers experiencing prolonged stress at work may go on to suffer serious mental and physical health problems.

Psychosocial risks relate to the negative psychological, physical and social outcomes that arise from unfavourable organisation and management in the workplace, as well as a poor social context at work, including, but not limited to:

- excessively demanding work and/or not enough time to complete tasks;

- conflicting demands and lack of clarity over the worker's role;

- mismatch between the demands of the job and the worker's competence — underusing a worker's skills can be a source of stress just as much as overstretching them;

- lack of involvement in making decisions that affect the worker and a lack of influence over the way the job is done;

- working alone, especially when dealing with members of the public and clients, and/or being subject to violence from a third party, which may take the form of verbal aggression, unwanted sexual attention or the threat of or actual physical violence.

Work-related stress occurs when demands at work are beyond a worker's ability to cope with them:

- a lack of support from management and colleagues, and poor interpersonal relationships;

- psychological or sexual harassment in the workplace — the victimising, humiliating, undermining or threatening behaviour of supervisors or colleagues towards an employee or group of employees;

- an unjust distribution of work, rewards, promotions or career opportunities;

- ineffective communication, poorly managed organisational change and job insecurity;

- difficulties in combining commitments at work and at home.

Risk assessment

Employers have duties under health and safety law to assess risks in the workplace. Risk assessments must be carried out in order to decide what preventive and control measures are needed.   This should be applied to stress at work.

Psychosocial risks can be assessed and managed in the same systematic way as other OSH risks using the risk assessment model and following the participative approach.

- Identify the hazards and those potentially at risk. Awareness is key: ensure that managers and workers are aware of the psychosocial risks and the early warning signs of work-related stress, and that both are involved in the risk assessment.

- Evaluate and prioritise the risks.

- Plan preventive action: if risks are not avoidable, how can they be minimised?

- Implement the plan: specify the measures to be taken, the resources required, the people involved and the time frame.

- Monitor and review on an ongoing basis and amend the plan in response to the results of monitoring.

Worker participation

Although employers have a legal responsibility to ensure that workplace risks are properly assessed and controlled, it is essential that workers are also involved. Workers and their Unite safety representatives have the best understanding of the problems that can occur in their workplace. By sharing that knowledge with managers and employers, they can help to shape planning and implement solutions.

Worker participation requires more than just feedback from the bottom up. It needs a two-way dialogue between employers and the workforce, which involves both parties:
- talking to one another;

- listening to each other's concerns;

- sharing views and information; and

- making decisions together

Worker involvement is particularly crucial to dealing successfully with stress and psychosocial risks in the workplace because, by consulting and involving workers, managers should be helping to create a climate of trust in which workers will feel comfortable about raising concerns.

Involving workers in developing preventive measures will also improve overall morale and ensure that the measures put in place are both appropriate and effective.

Healthy Workplaces

European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
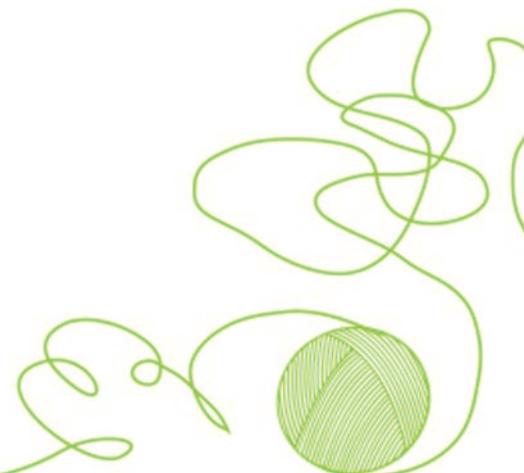
Unite safety representatives are a key to providing better health and safety for Unite members at work.

Safety reps have specific legal rights and functions. These enable them to:

- Inspect the workplace regularly
- Investigate employee complaints concerning health and safety issues at work
- Investigate accidents, dangerous occurrences and potential hazards
- Represent workers on health, safety, and welfare matters to their employer
- Inspect health and safety documents
- Receive information from HSE Inspectors
- Establish a joint union-management safety committee
- Receive time off to fulfil these rights and receive training.

Employers are required to consult safety reps, especially about:

- Measures introduced at a workplace that may substantially affect health and safety
- Arrangements for appointing health & safety competent persons and emergencies
- Health & safety information required to be provided to employees
- Health & safety training arrangements for the workforce, such as induction training
- New technology to be introduced and planned at work, regarding the consequences to health & safety.

Employers must provide safety reps with the resources to carry out their role. ACAS suggest:

- Room with desk and chairs at work, for carrying out interviews and meetings
- Secure facilities for storing documents
- Access to internal and external telephones and word processor (now IT facilities)
- Access to duplicating facilities
- Notice board.

Other facilities should include copies of relevant statutes, regulations, Approved Codes of Practice and HSE guidance, copies of safety journals, and legal and international standards that are relevant to the workplace.

More information about preventing stress at work

Unite Health and Safety Unite:
email healthandsafety@unitetheunion.org

Unite: stress at work guide and other resources are online at:
www.unitetheunion.org/unite-at work/ informationresources/healthsafetyresources/ psycosocialstressrelatedrisks/

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)
The HSE has developed a wide range of guidance and tools based around the Stress Management Standards which are guidance for employers on managing stress at work.

www.hse.gov.uk/stress

European Agency for Safety and Health Stress Campaign
www.healthy-workplaces.eu/