

9 January 2006

To: The Chairman and Secretary, All Branch Boards
Health and Safety Leaders

Dear Colleagues

WORK-RELATED STRESS - A GUIDE FOR SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES

This circular sets out the policy of the Police Federation of England and Wales with regard to work-related stress and its consequences to our members.

We support the approach taken by the HSE and the TUC.

Introduction

Workplace stress has been viewed as a major problem by trade unions since the 1980's. Due in part to work by unions stress is now recognised as one of the main ill health concern in the workplace.

Unfortunately while many employers have accepted that stress is a major problem in their workplace, few have any idea how to tackle it effectively.

There is now clear guidance available from the HSE, which will help organisations identify practical solutions to the problem. These are the Management Standards for Work-related Stress which builds on the existing HSE guidance booklet "tackling work-related stress".

The TUC believes that every safety representative should encourage their employer to implement these standards in their organisation.

Unions (and for Health and Safety issues the Police Federation is treated as a union) have a major part to play in ensuring that the employer takes their responsibilities to tackle work-related stress seriously. Dealing with stress at work highlights the fact that health and safety is not divorced from the rest of a staff association's or union's activity. Unions and employers working together to invest in health and safety can result in a vast improvement in other aspects of industrial relations and a working environment in which stress is managed properly.

This guide is to help Police Federation Safety Representatives encourage their employer to work with them to implement the HSE standards on managing stress at work. The standards were launched in 2004 following extensive development and piloting. They are an effective tool to assist organisations to identify the causes of workplace stress and implement practical solutions to manage the risks. They are now the main standard in use in the UK.

This guide gives:

- A background to the problem of stress;
- Outlines what the standards are;
- Says what you and your employer must do;

- Explains the process;
- Tells you where to go for additional information.

Background

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define stress as "The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them".

This definition is widely accepted.

We all recognise that a certain degree of pressure is part and parcel of all work and helps to keep us motivated. However excessive pressure can lead to stress that undermines performance, is costly to employers and can lead to ill health.

HSE commissioned research indicates that about half a million people in the UK experience work-related stress at a level they believe is making them ill. It also shows that work-related stress costs society about £3.7 billion every year (at 1995/6 prices).

Stress continues to be a major workplace issue for trade union safety reps and their members. This was borne out, yet again, by the 2004 TUC biennial survey.

58% of the 5,800 safety reps who responded to the survey said that stress was the main hazard of concern to workers. Overwork or stress was 18% higher than the next most frequently cited hazard, repetitive strain injuries (40%). The picture is similar for all sizes of workplace, different regions/countries and most economic sectors:

To identify the causes of overwork or stress, the TUC survey asked safety reps to identify what were the major stress factors or problems at their workplaces. The results are in the following table:

Table - Factors linked to overwork or stress

Factor	Problem issues 2004 survey	Problem issues 2002 survey	Problem issues 2000 survey	Problem issues 1998 survey
Workloads	79%	80%	74%	60%
Cuts in staff	9%	50%	53%	60%
Change	7%	52%	4%	No equivalent
Long hours	7%	41%	9%	28%
Bulling	7%	28%	30%	21%
Shift work	22%	22%	30%	22%
Cramped working conditions	17%	19%	16%	14%
Redundancies	14%	12%	17%	15%
Sex or racial harrassment	3%	4%	6%	5%

Trade Unions have been campaigning for specific legislation to make risk assessment for stress a legal duty on employers but to date that has not happened.

However, the HSE agrees with the TUC that work-related stress should be treated as any other workplace hazard. It also emphasises that it is subject to risk assessment as required by the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999. To assist with this process, HSE has developed Management Standards to assist employers in carrying out this duty.

The Health and Safety Executive Management Standards for Work-related stress The Management

Standards and accompanying guidance have been designed to assist employers in identifying causes of stress in the workplace and develop and implement solutions to minimise the effects on workers. The TUC and affiliated unions have welcomed this development as it gives real support to employers wishing to tackle stress at work. The standards also give health and safety enforcement officers a means of assessing whether an employer is failing to manage stress.

The TUC and unions want the standards to be used to enforce the Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999 when employers fail to manage stress at work despite the assistance and advice given in the standards by the HSE.

The TUC believes that, in the absence of specific legislation, the HSE's Stress Management Standards are the most effective way of dealing with stress. However, it is important that unions are involved in the introduction of the standards at every stage. If employers simply try to introduce them without proper consultation they are unlikely to be effective.

The Standards aim to simplify the risk assessment process and at the same time provide a yardstick by which organisations can gauge their performance in tackling the key causes of stress.

The standards classify the principle causes of work-related stress into six key areas:

Demands - Includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment;

Control - How much influence the person has in the way they do their work;

Support - Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues;

Relationships - Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour;

Role - Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles;

Change - How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

For each of these factors the HSE Standards give a state which each employer should aim to achieve. These are:

Demands - Employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs

Are members able to deal with workloads and deadlines? It may be that the work is dealt with but it is a matter of 'coping' all the time. Is the feeling of being under pressure all the time the general attitude of members or is it just one or two people? If a general attitude then it is probably an organizational issue. If down to individuals, then it may be that they have not been trained properly and do not have the right skills for the job. This is an example of why a dialogue following the survey is key - it helps identify the local issues and develop practical solutions.

Control - Employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work

Having established what they do and if they have been trained to do the job, workers need to know how flexible the working arrangements are. Are members able to vary the routine or the way in which the work has to be carried out? For instance this may be because members work on a production line or they are call centre workers and forms have to be completed in a set way or phrases said in a particular format.

Support - Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors

You need to establish that there is a clear line of responsibility or supervision or that the member is clear about the kinds of decisions they can take on their own. Asking if they know who their line supervisor is and whether that person is readily available to give guidance and support would be useful.

Is teamwork or communication between colleagues encouraged or does the work set-up prevent this? Do members have time to talk to each other?

Relationships - Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviour, e.g.

bullying at work

This follows on from the last heading. Does the work pattern or job set up enable people to build constructive and supportive relationships at work? If you identify problems you may need to negotiate an agreement on dealing with bullying at work. Check if there is a grievance procedure. If there is one, do members think it works? You may need help from your union official to help set up these discussions or get guidance.

Role - Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities

You need to establish that members are clear as to what their job is and what it is they are expected to do.

Change - Employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change

Change itself may not be a bad thing. However, it is key that structures are in place so that members are informed and consulted on change, particularly at times of fundamental restructuring when redundancy might be on the cards.

The Practicalities - What you and the Police service need to do

The first step for an organisation implementing standards is to set up a group to oversee the stress risk assessment process. We recommend that this is done at force level and involves the Health and Safety Leader. This can be the existing force safety committee or a group set up specifically for this purpose. There should be Police Federation and other union involvement, but it is also important that both HR and occupational health specialists are on the group. The group will be responsible for introducing and implementing the standards.

It is important that the group has realistic timescales and that the organisation is committed to providing the resources necessary to implement the findings of the risk assessment. Tackling stress is not something that can be done overnight and it will involve both management and safety reps in a long process. That means that unions must ensure that safety reps are going to be given sufficient time off to deal with the additional demands.

Management must also realise that simply using the standards to produce reports will achieve nothing. The process should lead to proposals for change that must be implemented. These can include some quite uncomfortable options in some cases, such as tackling a long hours culture or increasing staffing levels. That is why it is crucial to get commitment from the top. There is no point in starting the process if half way through management backs out because they are not prepared to fund the changes needed. That will just feed the frustration of your members.

The Police Federation of England & Wales would also recommend that all members of the group receive full training on the standards right from the start, although at some stage all managers and safety reps will need training.

A good communications strategy is also key, as the workforce must feel both informed and involved at every stage.

Often the impetus to tackle work-related stress will come from the unions, but the first step is to gather information on the current state of the organisation. The employer is advised to carry out an audit or a survey to establish a picture of what is happening and to give an overall view of the work place, this will allow organisations to measure how they are currently performing against the standards.

JBB's can also do their own surveys locally to find out the levels of stress and the **causes**. The TUC has produced a simple "Stress MOT" that safety reps can use to find out if there is likely to be a major problem.

The Process

The next step is the Risk Assessment process. Risk assessment is designed to help prevent people being harmed at work, physically or psychologically. If work causes stress, then all the risks - not just the psychological risks - must be assessed. Sometimes this will take you out of straightforward health and safety issues. You may have to deal with employment rights and welfare issues such as job descriptions or parental leave or care for a dependent.

The approach to the risk assessment is the same for stress as for other risks. It needs to focus on the causes, not just the effects. But there are different methods that can be used. It is important to get the starting point right. The HSE recommends using the five steps to Risks Assessment that are used for other risks. The Stress Management Standards have been designed to follow the five steps to risk assessment process. Your employer is responsible for carrying this out, although they should consult you at each stage.

The five steps (along with some examples) are:

Step 1 Look for the hazards - what could cause harm and how?

The employer can use the survey results and can also carry out an inspection of the workplace to check for physical sources of stress. For example, under 'Demands' they could check to ensure the proper design and installation of machinery to avoid muscular-skeletal problems or RSI. Check on noise levels and vibrations. Even noise levels that do not cause damage to hearing can have a negative effect on the heart and circulatory systems. They can look for toxic chemical or biological hazards that can have an increased risk for stressed workers because of the body's reduced ability to fight off infection. Also they should check on environment issues such as temperature and ventilation and on the lighting conditions. Working in poorly lit rooms without any natural light can be very demanding and sometimes painful on the eyes causing stress-inducing headaches etc.

Provision and maintenance of toilets and staff rooms are an indication of management's regard/respect for staff or staff's opinion of the workplace.

Step 2 Identify people at risk who could be harmed, and how? Is anyone particularly vulnerable?

For example under 'Support' the employer should have established what lines of supervision exist, but is there an issue of competency of those supervisors? Is there a need for training and if so what kind? This is a good issue to involve learning reps in. Remember also that people may be vulnerable because of what is happening in their life outside of the workplace. In these circumstances the organisation's attitude toward flexible working, carers leave or recognition of staff medical conditions can play a vital role.

Step 3 Evaluate the risks

What preventive measures are in place? - Preventive measures are summed up in the Standards. For instance members have some 'Control' over their working life or their 'Support' includes appropriate training where necessary on a regular basis.

What else needs to be done? -- Is the information flow sufficient and appropriate? For instance are employees involved, as well as informed, of 'Change' in the organisation? Does the organisation have access to personnel or occupational health advice? Many organisations, especially small businesses, may not need such advice in the short-term on a full time basis but as a safety rep you could discuss the need for such advice with management and the possible ways this could be provided, including ensuring a close working relationship with the HSE.

What are the priorities? - The survey should have given the employer an idea of where the gaps are in the organisations approach to the Standards. They can also use the factor table within the standards as a checklist.

Step 4 Record the main findings (and implement them!)

By now the organisation should have a story to tell which is packed with information. It is essential that this information is accurately recorded. This will be the basic reference point. The employer will be using it

to inform others of the stress issues at the workplace and working with them to form possible solutions.

You and other union officers will be able to use the document, or indeed the set of documents, as a checklist against the activities of the organisation as they develop their stress management programme.

Having collected the information let members know the outcome of your investigation and report the outcomes to your health and safety committee.

Ensure that the implementation of the HSE Standards in your workplace is a regular item on the Health and Safety Committee agenda. Your findings will be an important tool in how management, in discussion with the Committee, carries out their own risk assessment and ensures the HSE standards are met.

The Committee needs to establish a programme of work to implement the Standards. If such a committee does not exist then discussions directly with the employer will be needed. If your employer is uncooperative then call the HSE. The implementation of the standards is a key HSE priority and they can help.

Step 5 Monitor and review the effectiveness of any control measures (revise them if necessary)

Have control measures been implemented properly?
Are they working effectively?
Are they still valid?
Has anything changed?

This is why keeping a record of your findings is important.

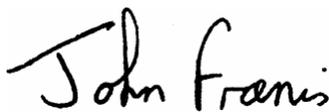
A risk assessment carried out by an organisation is a 'live' document and needs to be kept up to date. Workplaces physically change, the staff change and technology and ways of working change. The stress risk assessment needs to reflect and take account of those changes. Ask yourself if the employers approach to implementing the standards is delivering the intended outcome of preventing and controlling stress at work? Is it answering all the union's concerns you have identified through your survey and assessment? Unfortunately there is no easy solution to getting your employer to manage stress at work, but the survey, the factor table and the risk assessment, in conjunction with the HSE Standards, are tools to point you in the right direction.

Monitoring

The Joint Central Committee intends to monitor the Service's response to this initiative through the Health and Safety Leaders meetings. We recognise that some Forces may already have dealt with this issue or are in the process of so doing.

The appendix to this circular is a copy of a stress survey to assist in this process.

If you have any queries regarding this initiative or the associated methodology you should contact Paul Lewis the Secretary of the national Health and Safety Sub Committee.



JOHN FRANCIS
General Secretary

STRESS

What is Stress?

According to the HSE, stress is “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them”. The HSE explains: "Pressure is part and parcel of all work and helps to keep us motivated. But excessive pressure can lead to stress which undermines performance, is costly to employers and can make people ill". (See the HSE work-related stress web page at www.hse.gov.uk/stress) but it is important to remember that stress effects everyone differently.

Below is a guide to assist you in assessing whether there is stress in your workplace and guidance on how to progress the issue if you have.

Work-related stress

Instructions for use

An MOT for your car comes in two parts: a vehicle survey and a test for the amount of environmentally damaging emissions it produces.

The Stress MOT follows the same principles: a survey of the workplace to find out what is creating stress for the workers, and a test of how well the organisation addresses the workers' problems it produces.

First use the People survey

The Organisation survey is only really appropriate if there is a problem with stress in your workplace, so you need to do the People survey first. That will tell you if you have a problem - if there's no evidence of such a problem, then the Organisation survey isn't really worth doing.

Getting it filled in

Fill in the name of the part of your workplace which you are studying (at the start of the form), the date by which it should be returned and who to return it to (both at the end of the form) and then run off enough copies to give to everyone in the part of the workplace being surveyed.

Distribute copies to officers in whichever part of your workplace you want to study. Remember to give the survey to as many people as possible, including agency and temporary workers. Remind them about the deadline for returning the form, and who to return it to.

People may want to give the information completely anonymously so you may need to arrange a post box or similar system where members can drop off their survey sheets. When the answers have come back, check what percentage of forms have been returned. A return rate of over 50% is very good, and should give you confidence in the results - the lower the rate of return, the less you can depend on the findings of the survey (and if hardly anyone returns the form, that may just mean there's not a big problem).

Make a workplace stress map

Draw a sketch of your workplace (it doesn't have to be to scale, or a work of art!) Write in each area surveyed the percentage of workers answering 'yes' to question 2.

Identify the main stressors

Count up the number of '5s' circled for each stressor. If more than a quarter of the people who responded have circled '5' for any stressor, that issue is a major problem which needs to be addressed.

For each part of the workplace where there are high levels of stress, work out what the main stressors are by listing the number of '5s' each stressor received. The more '5s', the more of a problem that stressor is.

Ask for more!

Once you have developed the stress map, and what the main causes of stress are, put them on notice boards and produce a short report of the survey findings (including how many people showed the health symptoms of stress) and give everyone a copy. Then set up a suggestion box for people to make their own suggestions about how their stress could be reduced - they might come up with ideas you haven't thought of, and their views may help you to persuade management.

What to do with the Organisation survey

Either on your own or with other safety reps, complete the Organisation survey. If the answer to a question is yes, write 'Pass' - if the answer is no, write 'Fail'. If you don't know the answer, leave it blank (but make every effort to find out). Because you need to find out some detailed information, you may not be able to complete the survey in one go.

If there are five or more questions left blank, the organisation may have failed or it may not, but the first priority should be to find out the answers to those questions - only then can you tell if you've got a problem (and you probably have!)

If the organisation has fewer than five 'Fails', and fewer than five left blank, that doesn't mean the organisation is healthy - but you will need to decide whether to focus on the areas where the organisation has not scored a 'Pass'.

Did your workplace 'pass' or 'fail' the MOT?

This system is not designed to decide whether *your* workplace is stress-free. All workplaces are likely to have some sort of problem with stress, and just because yours isn't a raging inferno of stress doesn't mean the problems need to be tackled. But purely as a guide:

- if more than a fifth of respondents exhibited one or more health symptoms (in the 'how are you?' section of the People survey); or
- if there are any stressors where more than a quarter of respondents circled the '5' (people who don't circle the '5' can be considered to have circled '1' for this calculation); or
- if there are five or more 'Fails' in the Organisation survey...

then your organisation has 'failed' the Stress MOT and needs action urgently - the next section sets out what to do next.

What if your workplace 'fails' the TUC Stress MOT?

Write up a report for your fellow safety reps, safety leader and safety committee or meeting with management, including the stress map. Write up the People survey under each heading:

- say what percentage of people answered yes to Question 2, and how many people have the symptoms of stress, and
- under each heading of the what makes you stressed at work section, set out which stressors got the highest number of '5s'. These are the main problems which your managers need to address.

Write up the Organisation survey by separating out the issues where the organisation got a 'Pass' and a 'Fail', and list the questions you weren't able to answer. You may need to give some explanation of why you answered each question the way you did.

Then:

- present the report of the findings of the survey;
- draft an action plan (with a realistic timetable for implementation) on how you think excessive workplace stress should be tackled to present to your employer. Make sure areas that are suffering the highest levels of stress are high priority for action;
- ask for a working group to be set up to do this work. Make sure the group itself has a deadline for agreeing the action plan;
- press your head of department / chief officer to fulfil their duty to assess the main risks and make sure that you and other safety reps are consulted on the risk assessment process and action plan, and about its implementation and monitoring; and
- ask your head of department / chief officer to provide training for managers and employees on dealing with workplace stress and its victims.

Partnership

The Police Federation strongly believes in a partnership approach to tackling stress. You will need allies especially if head of department / chief officers do not treat workplace stress as a serious issue.

Organisation survey

Write 'Pass' against questions where you are able to answer 'yes' and 'Fail' against questions where the answer is 'no'. Where you do not know the answer (do try hard to find out!) leave the question blank.

1. Does your department head / chief officer collect details of stress-related sickness absence?
2. Is the overall sickness absence rate in the organisation below the national average of 9.3 days a year per employee?
3. If someone took sick leave for stress-related reasons, would your department head / chief officer attempt to identify whether the stress was work-related?
4. Does your department head / chief officer have a policy for dealing with workplace stress?
5. Does your department head / chief officer's policy on workplace stress cover health and safety, equality and human resources issues?
6. Were safety reps or the JBB consulted in the development of your organisation's stress policy?
7. Are audits or risk assessments carried out for workplace stress? 8. Are safety reps involved in stress risk assessments?
9. Does your department head / chief officer have/provide copies of HSE guidance on preventing work-related stress?
10. Are managers given training on managing workplace stress? 11. Are staff given information on workplace stress?
12. Are staff generally confident that they can report suffering from stress, or give stress as the reason for sickness absence, without fear of discipline? 13. Do/would managers act in a sympathetic way to people suffering from workplace stress?
14. Are confidential counselling or similar services available for workers suffering from workplace stress?
15. Would your department head / chief officer be prepared to alter working conditions or practices (such as hours, workload or specific tasks) to help someone suffering from stress?

People survey

Work area:

Q1 Do you feel you are stressed by your work? YES/NO

Yes: Please proceed to the next question. No: thanks for taking part. Q2 Is the level of stress unacceptable/causing you harm? YES/NO Yes: please carry on to the next section. No: thanks for taking part.

Section A: how are you?

Do you generally suffer from these symptoms (or have you suffered from them a lot recently)?

- Frequent headaches YES/NO
- Depression YES/NO
- Anxiety attacks YES/NO
- Sleeplessness YES/NO
- Indigestion YES/NO
- Continual tiredness YES/NO

If you know these are nothing to do with work or the product solely of events outside work, answer 'no' - but only if you are really sure - your work may be affecting you more than you know, and if your work is making these symptoms worse, please answer 'yes'.

Section B: what makes you stressed at work?

Below are some known causes of work-related stress (the Health and Safety Executive calls them 'stressors'). Please think about how much stress each one causes you. If a stressor causes you high levels of stress, circle the '5' - if it causes you low or no stress, circle the '1', and if it causes you moderate or occasional stress, circle the '3' (the '2' and the '4' are to give you options between 'high', 'medium' and 'low'). If you don't know or can't answer, don't circle any of them.

This survey only covers stressors at work. It's not meant to include stress caused outside the workplace, although that can add to your work-related stress.

A. Demands of the job

- | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | A1. Long working hours |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | A2. Too much work |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | A3. Too little work |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | A4. Repetitive or monotonous work |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | A5. Insufficient time to do your job |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | A6. Not enough rest breaks |

B. Lack of control

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | B1. Lack of control over work |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | B2. Work monitoring by computer or video |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | B3. Pace of the work dictated by machines |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | B4. Deadlines which are regularly too tight |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | B5. Unremitting pressure to perform well |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | B6. Over-harsh discipline |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | B7. Too much supervision |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | B8. Too little supervision |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | B9. Too little job/task specific training |

C. Work-life balance

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | C1. Inflexible working hours (causing child care/domestic problems) |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | C2. Unsympathetic management |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | C3. Unfair pay system |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | C4. Failure to recognise achievements |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | C5. Skills not being fully utilised |

D. Relationships at work

- | | |
|-----------|--------------|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | D1. Bullying |
|-----------|--------------|

- 1 2 3 4 5 D2. Sexual, racial or other harassment
- 1 2 3 4 5 D3. Discrimination or prejudice from colleagues or managers
- 1 2 3 4 5 D4. Risk of violence and abuse from customers or service users
- 1 2 3 4 5 D5. Working alone
- 1 2 3 4 5 D6. Lack of communication between colleagues

E. Change

- 1 2 3 4 5 E1. Uncertainty about your future
- 1 2 3 4 5 E2. Lack of job security
- 1 2 3 4 5 E3. Introduction of new management techniques
- 1 2 3 4 5 E4. Restructuring
- 1 2 3 4 5 E5. Lack of consultation over changes

F. Conflicting roles

- 1 2 3 4 5 F1. Unclear job responsibilities
- 1 2 3 4 5 F2. Conflicting responsibilities
- 1 2 3 4 5 F3. Confused demands

G. Working environment

- 1 2 3 4 5 G1. Heat or cold in the workplace
- 1 2 3 4 5 G2. Poor lighting or lack of natural light
- 1 2 3 4 5 G3. Untidy or unclean working areas
- 1 2 3 4 5 G4. Overcrowding or cramped work areas
- 1 2 3 4 5 G5. Excessive noise, fumes or dust
- 1 2 3 4 5 G6. Poor eating and rest facilities
- 1 2 3 4 5 G7. Badly designed, unsuitable or uncomfortable equipment