

Measuring Workplace Stress: A Guide to your Organisation's Duties

Our management briefing document for January 2006 looked at psychological health issues in the work place from a general perspective. Achieving a healthy work place both psychologically and physically not only benefits employees, but also improves your companies overall performance.

You will be aware of the Health and Safety Executive guidance on the subject of psychological illness, primarily “stress”, which are intended to help employers assess and manage these issues within the work place.

Psychological pressure is an unavoidable part of every day life. Its positive facets help us stay alert and protect us from danger. Unfortunately, for many individuals such stress becomes excessive and leads to negative health effects. These health issues result in negative performance and absence from work due to illness.

Work related stress according to the Health and Safety Executive has now become the leading cause of occupational ill health in the UK. Creating a healthy work place will help you as an employer and minimise sickness absence reduce staff turnover and improve the performance of your organisation.

To help employers manage stress in the work place, Health and Safety Executive have developed management standards for six keys areas:

- Workload
- Working patterns and the working environment
- Control over work
- Support from colleagues
- Conflict in the workplace, understanding an individuals role within the organisation
- The impact of change

UK employers have a responsibility under UK Health and Safety Law to minimise the impact of psychological pressure, or stress, on employees in order to maintain their health, safety and welfare whilst at work.

Employers are required to assess the risk of stress related ill health arising from workplace activities and to take the appropriate steps to control the risk in the same way that they have to assess and control risks from other occupational hazards, such as noise, dust and manual handling.

What can you do?

If you suspect that some of your employees are suffering from the effects of stress, it is important to note that illness is not inevitable and there may well be ways to address the problem within the work place.

First you must identify the issue, second measure the level of psychological pressure and thirdly monitor the extent of stress in the work place.

Work place stress may be assessed by:

- An employee stress risk assessment
- Employee focus groups
- Analysis of sickness absence data

20% of the UK's top organisations are successfully managing work place stress. In order to join these organisations, we would urge you to consider the full importance of assessing stress within your work force and particularly considering a risk assessment tool.

Preventative Healthcare is working with Health-e-Solutions to provide an online **StressMeter**. This is a stress risk assessment tool, designed to simplify and automate the process, by allowing you to follow the health and safety executive guidance and satisfy your legal requirements under health and safety law.

StressMeter will provide you with the information you require to make effective decisions with regards to the psychological health of your work force and help you achieve and maintain a healthy and productive work place.

StressMeter is a web enabled tool, allowing you to gather information online from your employees. Its aim is to save you time, reduce your costs, improve the accuracy of your data and provide you with useful management information. The service is secure, confidential and reliable. Alternatively, paper based questionnaires can be provided if preferred.

StressMeter is supplied and supported through a network of credited providers.

The **StressMeter** system is available in two forms. **StressMeter** is the standard package for small employers, while **StressMeter pro** has the additional power, flexibility and access required by larger organisations.



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The service uses the HSE questionnaire with enhanced filter questions. It produces and prints reports and action plans, it allows you as the employer to control the administration of the system and allows you management access to the online data collection for reporting and action planning.

Further information with regards this particular service, or any other occupational health service, can be obtained by calling Jane Puncher on 01622 775285 or email her j.puncher@phcohealth.co.uk.

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