

HSE New Stress Priority Programme Puts the Pressure on Employers

According to the new Draft Management Standards for Stress released by HSE in June 2003:

“Work related stress is a serious problem for organisations, but there are things organisations can do to prevent and control it; and that the law requires them to take action.”

The HSE defines stress as: “**the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.**” HSE website (link?)

Research commissioned by HSE shows:

- **about half a million people experience work-related stress at a level they believe was making them ill;**
- **up to 5 million people in the UK feel “very” or “extremely” stressed by their work; and**
- **work-related stress costs society between £3.7 billion and £3.8 billion every year (1995/96 prices). (HSE Website – Link?)**

It has long been known that stress contributes to other issues such as musculoskeletal problems, substance abuse issues, mental illness and there is a direct link between bullying, harassment and violence in the workplace and excessive. The HSE guidelines make these connections clear and this has very serious implications for employers.

“Employers may face legal action if they don't deal with excessive stress in the workplace. A new initiative released by the government aims to keep the pressure off workers and improve life in the office.” (Channel Four News June 2003)

The HSE have developed a new Stress Priority Programme which sets draft Management Standards for stress and offers best practice guidelines and benchmarks. This will encourage organisations to take a multifaceted and holistic approach to tackling stress which will make it as important as other areas of business policy.

At WholeHeart Works we are taking a leading edge approach which we call Holistic Social Responsibility that looks at how excessive stress negatively impacts your business, key stakeholders, customers, and the community. The new HSE guidelines demonstrate that tackling Stress needs to be highlighted as a major area of business policy and activity. Focusing on wellbeing at work means you are contributing to the health of your organisational objectives.

The HSE's Draft Management Standards cover stressors which affect the majority of employees in an organisation. HSE commissioned research showed

“powerful evidence that the demands placed upon employees, the control employees have over their work, and the amount of support employees receive are associated with health outcomes.”

The areas HSE are focusing on are:

- * **demands**
- * **control**
- * **support**
- * **relationships**
- * **roles**
- * **change**

HSE Draft Standards suggest the following benchmarks for each of the areas:

Demands

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

- at least 85% of employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Control

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

- at least 85% of employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Support

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

- at least 85% of employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Relationships

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

- at least 65% of employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours (eg bullying) at work; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Role

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

- at least 65% of employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

Change

The organisation has achieved the standard if:

- at least 65% of employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change; and
- systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

At Wholeheart Works we are specialists in well being in business, we have the experience to help organisations take a holistic approach to stress in which everyone takes responsibility. This is our business and we feel passionately committed to providing the very best for all stakeholders.

Our services portfolio includes Holistic Social Responsibility internal brand consultancy, stress management solutions, facilitation, coaching, workshops, therapeutic interventions and e-learning solutions. To find out more information about our services contact Wholeheart Works on 020 8566 4350 or e-mail info@wholeheartworks.com or visit www.wholeheartworks.com

Links:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/stresspilot/standards.htm>