

I'm already using HSE's existing guidance - do these new Standards mean I have to stop and start again?

No. There are practical things that organisations can do now to manage the risks associated with work-related stress. In particular, they can develop solutions to manage these risks using HSE's action pack *Real solutions, real people* (ISBN 0 7176 2767 5). The pack includes:

- *Tackling work-related stress: A managers' guide to improving and maintaining employee health and well-being* (Guidance book HSG218) – to identify the risks associated with work-related stress. (This publication is no longer available separately.)
- *Real solutions, real people. A managers' guide to tackling work-related stress* – to help employers develop individual solutions to manage the risks associated with work-related stress in their organisation.
- *Tackling work-related stress: A guide for employees* (Leaflet INDG341).
- One A2 action planner, six prompt cards and eighteen case study cards.

Following the advice in the pack will put organisations in an excellent position to measure themselves against the Stress Management Standards.

The Standards will be supported by new HSE guidance that builds upon a familiar risk assessment approach. This is being developed to coincide with their launch in November.

What are the percentages in the Standards there for?

During the development of the Stress Management Standards, stakeholders from a range of organisations told HSE that it would be helpful to be able to measure their performance and identify hotspots where solutions could be targeted.

The percentages reflect HSE's current understanding of the levels of stress in organisations in Britain today. Setting these levels does not mean that it is acceptable for employers to expose a certain number of people to

stress, nor does it mean HSE will be enforcing against these percentages.

Will HSE be prosecuting employers who don't meet the percentages?

HSE's approach to tackling work-related stress is not enforcement led, as demonstrated by the handful of enforcement notices on stress that HSE has issued to date (May 2004).

HSE advises organisations to undertake a risk assessment based on the approach in its current guidance. An organisation would be unlikely to be subject to enforcement action by HSE provided it could demonstrate it was taking steps to address any problems identified in the risk assessment.

Where is the evidence that doing this will actually help prevent stress?

HSE's approach is based on a convincing body of research. If you go to www.hse.gov.uk/stress/research.htm you should find most of the information you require. This includes links to download research reports and to order them from HSE Books.

How can I have my say?

HSE is running a consultation exercise on the Standards from 25 May to 27 August 2004. The consultation questionnaire can be accessed and completed via HSE's stress web pages.

The web pages also feature detailed information on the development of our approach, as well as resources and case studies designed to help organisations tackle stress.

The pages can be found at:
www.hse.gov.uk/stress

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Consulting on HSE Stress Management Standards



Frequently asked questions

There is a Management Standard for each of the following broad categories of stressors.

Demands

Includes issues like workload, work pattern and the work environment.

Control

How much say 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.



What is stress?

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them.

There is a clear distinction between pressure, which can create a 'buzz' and be a motivating factor, and stress, which can occur when this pressure becomes excessive.

Why do we need to tackle stress?

- About 1 in 5 people say that they find their work either very or extremely stressful.
- Over half a million people report experiencing work-related stress at a level they believe has actually made them ill.
- Each case of stress-related ill health leads to an average of 29 working days lost. A total of 13.4 million working days were lost to stress, depression and anxiety in 2001.
- Work-related stress costs society between £3.7 billion and £3.8 billion a year (1995/96 prices).

Is there a stress epidemic?

No. However, the number of people reporting that they are experiencing work-related stress at a level they believe is making them ill appears to be increasing – over half a million in 2001/02.

Research has also shown that as many as 1 in 5 people report their work to be either very or extremely stressful. We need to ensure that the people working in these jobs are able to express their concerns to protect their health. The Stress Management Standards can help.

Is HSE trying to eliminate hard work?

No. HSE's approach is to ensure the risks to employees of exposure to work-related stress and subsequent ill health are properly controlled.

That is why HSE is working to reduce exposure of the whole workforce to elements of job design, ie management systems and work organisation, that have been linked to ill health. The aim is to reduce the number of working days lost and the number of people suffering from stress-related ill health.

Isn't it inaccurate just to rely on what people tell you in questionnaires?

HSE does *not* rely solely on self-reported data to assess trends in work-related stress. Other sources such as reports from psychiatrists and occupational physicians are also used.

However, self-reported data is a valid measure because 'stress' is dependent on people's perceptions. Simple self-reporting via large surveys is also the most practical way of collecting data that can indicate the scale of work-related stress in the British working population.

What are the Stress Management Standards?

The Stress Management Standards and supporting processes are designed to:

- help simplify risk assessment for stress;
- encourage employers, employees and their representatives to work in partnership to address work-related stress throughout the organisation;
- provide the yardstick by which organisations can gauge their performance in tackling the key causes of stress.

The Standards have been developed with a range of partners and piloted in about 25 organisations in the public and private sector.

Each draft standard consists of three parts:

- a percentage against which organisations can measure their performance;
- a statement making it clear that the employer's duty of care to individual employees still applies even if the organisation as a whole meets the standard;
- a 'state to be achieved' which provides simple statements about good management practice.

Why is HSE advocating a Management Standards approach?

Each organisation is unique. Evidence shows that what works in one organisation won't necessarily work everywhere. However, evidence also shows how the management of specific aspects of work is linked to ill health.

Therefore, HSC decided to condense what it knows about good management practice in these areas into a framework of Management Standards. This will enable managers to get an idea of their organisation's performance and identify areas for improvement.

Why isn't HSE proposing new laws or an Approved Code of Practice?

HSC/E believes that, if presented with a simple approach, clear standards against which to measure progress, and a convincing business case, organisations will not only realise the benefits of tackling work-related stress, but will be in a better position to do so.

Is my organisation now required by law to tackle stress?

Employers *already* have duties:

- under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities; and
- under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to take measures to control that risk.

The Standards are intended to help and encourage employers to meet these existing legal obligations.