

The Health & Safety Executive's Management Standards for Stress

On November 3rd 2004 the Health & Safety Executive announced the final version of their Management Standards on Stress.

These standards were developed after extensive academic research followed by a pilot programme where the standards had been tested within 25 organisations across a wide variety of occupational settings.

The Standards provide organisations with clear guidelines in how to prevent stress at work.

The standards are aimed at stress prevention rather than symptom management and comprise:

- Simple statements about good management practice that all organisations can aspire towards.
- Six key categories in which organisations can assess themselves

The HSE make it clear in their new guidelines that organisations should do the following:

- Ensure that the senior management is committed to tackling the issues of workplace stress
- Design a policy on workplace stress and communicate it effectively
- Provide training for managers in how to recognise the signs of stress and how to risk assess for potential stressors in their work environment
- Carry out appropriate risk assessments for stress within the workplace using the framework of the six key categories
- Formulate an action plan to deal with the issues that arise from the risk assessment
- Review the interventions implemented to assess their effectiveness

Senior management must acknowledge the fact that workplace stress needs to be dealt with in the same way as any other Health & safety hazard and that measures should be adopted to prevent it affecting the health of both the workforce and the business.

The HSE does not expect every employer to meet the standards at their first attempt. The standards are goals that employers should be working towards through an ongoing process of risk assessment and continuous improvement.

The Six Key Categories

The Standards look at the six key areas of work that, if properly managed, can help to reduce work-related stress:

- **Demands** - Includes issues like workload, work patterns 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 they do not have conflicting roles.
- **Change** - How organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

The Risk Assessment Process

- 1) **Identify the Hazards** – All managers should become familiar with, and understand the detail of, the Management Standards and the rationale behind them.
- 2) **Decide who might be harmed and how** – In this context, this means ensuring that all managers recognise that the six risk factors can affect different people in different ways. Managers must also accept that tackling work-related stress requires a partnership approach based upon openness, honesty and trust.

Managers need to understand that some individuals may cope better with work pressures than others. In particular, it might affect those exposed to excessive pressures in the six areas covered by the Standards.

- 3) **Evaluate the Risk and Take Action** – This is regarded by the HSE as the most important step of all. To evaluate the risks of stress in the workplace the HSE recommends using a blend of data gathering methods that may include questionnaires; statistics on absence, employee turnover, productivity and accident rates and so on, together with qualitative-type information from staff obtained through focus groups. Although the HSE offer an assessment tool on their web site they acknowledge that an organisation is free to use existing questionnaire to achieve the same purpose.
- 4) **Record your Findings** – Organisations should ensure that the results of any risk assessment are recorded in the form of an action plan. This should be created in consultation with employee representatives and communicated to all employees throughout the organisation. The action plan should highlight the issues that need to be addressed and what needs to be done in response. It should also show key milestones and dates for them to be reached.
- 5) **Monitor and Review** - There are two elements to this final step. Organisations are expected to monitor their action plans to ensure that agreed actions are taking place and also to evaluate the effectiveness of any solutions that have been implemented. How this is done will depend upon the solution that has been applied but again, it is likely to involve a data gathering exercise to enable the current situation to be compared with the situation before the interventions were applied. If a survey approach is used in Step 3 then the HSE suggest that a follow-up survey can be used for this means.

DEMANDS

(Includes issues like workload, work patterns, and the work environment)

The standard is that:

- 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.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation provides employees with adequate and achievable demands in relation to the agreed hours of work;
- People's skills and abilities are matched to the job demands;
- Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of employees; and
- Employees' concerns about their work environment are addressed.

CONTROL

(How much say the person has in the way they do their work)

The standard is that:

- 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.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- Where possible, employees have control over their pace of work;
- Employees are encouraged to use their skills and initiative to do their work;
- Where possible, employees are encouraged to develop new skills to help them undertake new and challenging pieces of work;
- The organisation encourages employees to develop their skills;
- Employees have a say over when breaks can be taken; and
- Employees are consulted over their work patterns.

SUPPORT

(Includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues)

The standard is that:

- 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.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues;
- Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it;
- Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job; and
- Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

RELATIONSHIPS

(Includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour)

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, e.g. bullying at work; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation promotes positive behaviours at work to avoid conflict and ensure fairness;
- Employees share information relevant to their work;
- The organisation has agreed policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour;
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to deal with unacceptable behaviour; and
- Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to report unacceptable behaviour.

ROLE

(Whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that the person does not have conflicting roles)

The standard is that:

- Employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities; and
- Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the different requirements it places upon employees are compatible;
- The organisation provides information to enable employees to understand their role and responsibilities;
- The organisation ensures that, as far as possible, the requirements it places upon employees are clear; and
- Systems are in place to enable employees to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

CHANGE

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

The standard is that:

- 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.

What should be happening / states to be achieved:

- The organisation provides employees with timely information to enable them to understand the reasons for proposed changes;
- The organisation ensures adequate employee consultation on changes and provides opportunities for employees to influence proposals;
- Employees are aware of the probable impact of any changes to their jobs. If necessary, employees are given training to support any changes in their jobs;
- Employees are aware of timetables for changes;
- Employees have access to relevant support during changes.

Useful links

For more information about ICAS' Stress Management Services please click on the links below:

Click here for information about [Stress Auditing and Risk Assessment](#)

Click here for information about [Stress Management Training](#)

To talk to an ICAS consultant about your organisation's particular stress management needs contact ICAS' Consultancy and Training services on 01908 285200.

For more information about the HSE Management Standards go to the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk

