

Don't stand by and let your mates be abused

This was the message from the Workers Memorial Day events in London a week before the general election when hundreds of building workers and safety campaigners marched from the Olympic site at Pudding Mill Lane, to the Westfield site in Stratford, where hundreds more left their site to pay respects to Shaun Scurry and Henry Sherriden, also known as Harry, killed on construction sites in the area. They were joined by relatives of both families and heard speeches from Len McCluskey, AGS of UNITE union, Jerry Swain, London Region Secretary UCATT, and Simon Hester, PROSPECT and HSE Construction Inspector.

As we go to press we know we have the first hung Parliament since 1974 but we don't know what type of government we are getting. We do know that the fight for workers safety goes on and that with the Tories as the biggest party in terms of votes and numbers of seats, we have to be even more vigilant about the threats of deregulation to our Health and Safety framework. And to remind people that the majority of votes cast on 6th May were not for the party of privilege and wealth.

In the run up to the election, Cameron's sillier comments on health and safety at a Policy Exchange think tank conference, suggest his speech writers have not even glanced at the HSE website recently. He complained children had been



PIC STEFANO CACONINI/REPORT DIGITAL

Workers at the Building Worker statue Tower Hill remembering all those killed at work. 28th April 2010.

told to wear goggles to play conkers and trainee hairdressers had been banned from using scissors. All myths.

More worryingly he said:

- ▲ Former Trade Secretary Lord Young would lead a review into how the health and safety culture can be curbed.
- ▲ A Conservative government would seek to renegotiate EU regulations such as the Working Time Directive, which limits junior doctors' hours.
- ▲ He called for changes to the laws governing compensation claims, although these were not elaborated on.

The Conservatives had earlier announced that if elected they would allow companies to undertake independent safety audits. Once these were completed companies would be able to bar Health and Safety Executive inspectors entering their sites, unless there was an emergency.

UCATT warned this policy would increase workplace deaths and the day before Workers Memorial Day protested outside Conservative Head Quarters.

On the same day, 27th April, RMT were also protesting about Conservative safety plans for the Tubes. They blamed London Underground and the Tory Mayor Boris Johnson for trying to ram through unsafe working practices by axing hundreds of station and platform staff to save money.

"Boris Johnson is the Tory politician with the most power in this country today and if you want to know what a Cameron government would be all about you only have to look at the attack on passenger safety that is being unleashed on the tube as part of the Mayors multi-billion pound cuts plans" according to Bob Crow RMT General Secretary, adding that "RMT will fight these proposals all the way."

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Deregulation – removing burdens on business – was core policy of Thatcher and Major, with Deregulation Task Forces established by Heseltine and cuts in HSE budgets were routine. This period saw some of the worst UK incidents:

- 1984 Abbeystead explosion 16 deaths,
- 1987 Kings Cross fire 37 deaths
- 1987 Zeebrugge ferry 193 deaths
- 1988 Piper Alpha explosion 167 deaths
- 1888 Clapham train crash 35 deaths

And throughout this period there was “a Piper Alpha every year” in construction, according to the Construction Safety Campaign.

Trade union rights by and large were not improved in the last 13 years and the UK remains in breach of many International Labour Organisation standards. However we have a right and a moral obligation to refuse to go to work to die – a right that must be defended.

No more deaths.



The march from Pudding Mill Lane to the Westfield site.

Winding up on asbestos

Just before the general election was declared the government dealt with some asbestos business.

Pleural plaques

The government confirmed it would not legislate to overturn the Law Lords October 2007 judgement. A Court of Appeal ruling, that pleural plaques is not a condition for which compensation can be claimed remains in place in England and Wales. Compensation for this condition can be claimed in Scotland. There have been many lobbies on this issue and 224 responses to the government consultation. The Ministry of Justice said:

“There is no available medical evidence to show that pleural plaques become malignant or lead to mesothelioma or other asbestos-related diseases. Current evidence indicates that it is a person’s exposure to asbestos that produces any increased risk of developing a serious asbestos-related disease rather than the pleural plaques themselves.”

£5,000 for claims made before 17th October 2007

An extra-statutory scheme has been set up to help those with claims in the pipeline. The payment of £5,000 broadly reflects the level of compensation likely to have been received. There is a telephone helpline to see if you qualify for a payment.

- ▲ Pleural plaque helpline: 020 3334 3334.

Fast tracking mesothelioma claims

A successful pleural plaque claim did establish liability for negligent exposure to asbestos, useful for those later diagnosed with mesothelioma or lung cancer to speed up the more serious compensation claim. This will no longer happen and is of concern since patients often die soon after mesothelioma is diagnosed leaving little time to trace records. To try to address this issue the government is setting up a working group composed of claimant solicitors, trade unions, insurers, the judiciary, and civil servants to examine litigation practices and procedures for such compensation claims and identify options for streamlining them in order to reduce the time taken to conclude cases.

Insolvent Employers

In November 2009 the Third Parties (Rights against Insurers) Bill was introduced so claims against insolvent employers could be brought against the employers’ insurer. It simplified court procedure and removed the need for dissolved companies to be restored to the register of companies.

Small increases in DWP asbestos benefits from 1st April 2010

The Government increased payments made under the Pneumoconiosis etc (Workers’ Compensation) Act 1979 by 1.5 per cent and also increased payments made due to mesothelioma under the Child Maintenance and Other Payments Act 2008 so that they equal payments

made under the Pneumoconiosis etc (Workers’ Compensation) Act 1979. Payments to all dependants under the 1979 Act and the 2008 Act were increased by up to £5,000, so that their awards are closer to those paid to sufferers.

Tracing Employers Insurers

Many asbestos victims, as many as 3,210 in 2008 when a count was made, do not obtain full compensation because they cannot trace the employer’s insurer. Since 1999, the Association of British Insurers and the Lloyds Market Association have had a voluntary Code of Practice for tracing.

The government would consult on two proposals:

- ▲ The creation of a UK-wide Employers’ Liability Tracing Office (ELTO) to manage an electronic database of EL policies and to operate the existing tracing service, the Office to be run on a voluntary basis at first.
- ▲ The establishment of an Employers’ Liability Insurance Bureau (ELIB) providing a compensation fund of last resort for individuals across the UK who are unable to trace EL insurance records.

National Centre for Asbestos-Related Disease

Mesothelioma is now the twelfth most common cancer killer in men and the cancer of most rapidly increasing incidence in women. The Department of Health has been asked to look at creating a National Centre for Asbestos-Related Disease to expand medical research in this area. It would be a collaborative network of funded researchers looking at prevention, cure and alleviation. The insurance industry is to set aside £3million and the government was set to put money in.

Kenton Underground Station tragedy: RMT demand the truth

A fatality at Kenton on the Bakerloo Line, in March, when a lady died after falling under a train, presented a number of safety concerns for RMT and their safety reps who were, firstly, concerned for the family of the victim.

RMT safety reps asked the Bakerloo Line management for a copy of the Electronic Incident Reporting Form (EIRF) on the Friday, the day of the incident and it was over 3 days before they finally managed to get a copy. The reps were shocked to see there were 4 unanswered Mayday calls and that it had taken 23 minutes to discharge traction current. The union demanded an immediate emergency meeting, which was at first denied. Only later when the incident hit the news, did management agree to meet the reps.

London Underground subsequently disputed the 4 unanswered Mayday calls and claim that current was discharged in 4 minutes; but RMT were not given paperwork to support these claims.

The drivers willingly believed there were 4 unanswered calls because all too often the radio is not answered north of

Queen's Park – a problem raised and documented on numerous occasions over far too long a period of time.

RMT station reps reported that the only member of staff on duty at Kenton when the lady fell, was agency staff, without the proper training to assist with evacuation and with no knowledge of how to power down the UTS gates. The emergency services had to climb over the gates to gain access to the station. RMT stress this is in no way a criticism of this member of staff, who, performed heroically on the day.

Senior LU station managers have claimed that the training agency staff receives is sufficient for the role they play; events on the day would strongly suggest otherwise. Despite requests to view exactly what training these agency staff receive, and assurances that this would be possible, at this time, again, no documentation has been forthcoming.

The pressure brought to bear by RMT safety reps meant LU agreed to have a full Line Investigation Report (LIR) into the events at Kenton on that day.

"We need answers as to why our radio calls are ignored and we need answers as to the suitability of the training of staff at stations north of

Queen's Park" a RMT rep told us.

"We were labelled irresponsible scaremongers by LU as a result of media coverage but we were not scaremongering, we were raising legitimate concerns based on a LU report. Our thoughts are with the family of the lady who died."

Note: The reps have now established that the first Mayday call was, thankfully, answered after a couple of minutes.

Worse to come throughout the Underground

At regional level RMT has revealed that cuts have left tube stations unstaffed on 439 occasions in the past 6 months and there is worse to come if Tory Mayor Boris Johnson bulldozes through his plans to axe a further 800 station posts. The latest figures obtained by RMT show that from October 2009 through to March 2010 surface level stations on the District, Central, Metropolitan, Circle & Hammersmith and Northern Lines were left unstaffed for entire shifts on a total of 439 occasions. One station, Mill Hill East, was left unstaffed for 95 entire shifts.

Stressed out nurses

The British Heart Foundation has highlighted Danish research showing a link between heart disease and work related stress in women below the age of 50 years. The study was carried out on a large sample, over 12,000 nurses, over a long period – the women were first examined in 1993. The researchers have found that work pressure that was self-reported as too high significantly increases the risk of heart disease. Of the 580 cases developing in the sample that needed hospital admission, nearly a quarter, 138, were admitted with heart

attacks. In Denmark, like the UK, more than a third of deaths amongst women are caused by cardio vascular disease, the disease affecting as many women as men. A 1991 Danish study showed twice as many women as men employed in jobs characterized by high job demands and a low degree of control; in other words many women are exposed to potentially hazardous factors at work.

▲ See: **British Heart Foundation 6 May 2010 and Occupational and Environmental Medicine 2009, 67 318-322**

Breast Cancer and shift work

Denmark began paying compensation to women who have developed breast cancer after working night shifts for many years in March 2009. This followed the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) re-designating shift work as a 'probable' carcinogen in 2007. Danish women with a family history of breast cancer have had their claims rejected. The Health and Safety Executive has commissioned a full analysis of the evidence linking night shifts to breast cancer and the research is due to be completed in 2011.

Workers Memorial Day 2010

PICT: STEFANO CAGNONI/REPORT DIGITAL



He said "if you think it's not safe, you are probably right." And as well as saying join a construction union he said "to those of you not in a union, and I can't understand why you would not be, I urge you to not take abuse from the employer and not to stand by and let another guy get abused." And "They don't pay for you to risk your lives. Without your participation we (the union) cannot function. Don't be scared to take up the challenge. You will have UCATT's full support."

Dave Allen, UCATT convenor for the Stratford Westfield site, read out a statement from the Scurry family. "In December our lives changed forever and it will never be the same. He will never see his son grow up and get married He will never celebrate another birthday. He will be missed terribly by all our family and everybody who knew him and loved him. Until we find out exactly what happened all we can do is carry on the best we can."

Jerry Swain said: "They don't pay for you to risk your lives."

Jerry Swain, Regional Secretary for UCATT's London and South East Region, said: "Every workplace death is an individual tragedy. For the families the pain and anger will still be there years after."

To the building workers from Stratford City, The Olympic Village and the main Olympic Park, the largest development in Europe, who had turned out to remember Shaun Scurry and Henry Sheriden, he made a call for them to take safety seriously and to act to make sites safer.



Tony O'Brien, Construction Safety Campaign, with Simon Hester of PROSPECT union

HSE face 20% cuts

Simon Hester HSE Construction Inspector and Prospect union representative praised the Construction Safety Campaign and the unions for their campaigns on safety.

Recalling an accident he attended as part of his job, Mr Hester said: "I had one case where a 15-year-old was killed when the wall he was demolishing collapsed on him.

"He should not have been there and was being paid £25 a day. This is 21st-century Britain."

Mr Hester said the "Health and Safety Executive was facing 20 per cent cuts and 90 per cent of accidents were left unattended due to underfunding. There are only 26 construction inspectors to cover the thousands of sites across London. This means that only 8 percent of all reported accidents are properly investigated."

"He was only 21"

Len McCluskey, UNITE Assistant General Secretary, said that UNITE would resist all attempts by any government to undermine safety standards. He drew attention to some recent fines like £105,000 for Laing O'Rourke after a death at Heathrow, and £400,000 for Centrewest Buses... which although high the companies concerned can easily accommodate. "it does not hurt them". He asked the question what chance did Peter Juszczysz have when he was killed on a totally unregulated job, for which the company was fined only £750, and he was only 21. McCluskey also urged UNITE branches to join London Hazards Centre and support its work.

RMT warns of “deadly consequences” of rail and tube cuts

Specialist Transport Union RMT has an ongoing fight against the “jobs carnage” in the transport industry which will leave rail and tube services chronically short of key staff, compromising safety and creating a poisonous cocktail of corner-cutting and risk-taking in a lethal gamble fuelled by the drive to slash budgets, potentially having “deadly consequences” for staff and passengers:

Network Rail – plans to axe 1500 safety-critical maintenance jobs dragging us back to the days of Railtrack and creating the perfect conditions for another fatal rail disaster.

Jarvis – following the collapse of the company, 1200 staff carrying out essential renewals work on the railways left facing the prospect of being thrown on the dole.

London Underground – 800 station and platform staff jobs lined up for the chop with ticket office closures and the impact at platform level turning tube stations into death traps.

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow said: “On Workers Memorial Day at RMT we specifically remember the rail workers, seafarers, oil industry staff and bus crew who have lost their lives while carrying out the most basic human function of trying to earn a living.

“we also renew our fight for safe working conditions and in our industries that means stepping up the battle against the jobs carnage on rail and the tube “

On Workers Memorial Day RMT took their protest over the Jarvis job cuts to the headquarters of Network Rail .”

Death toll for the Commonwealth Games

In India 43 workers have died building the facilities for the Commonwealth Games due to take place in New Dehli. A monitoring panel, led by Arundhati Ghose, a former representative of the United Nations and a Labour Secretary of the Delhi Government, revealed nearly 415,000 workers at were not being paid adequately by private contractors. Conditions at the construction sites are poor and many accidents go unreported, workers work without proper safety gear, work places are extremely unclean, unhygienic and unsafe.

▲ see www.insidethegames.biz

Play some music or tie up your boss

Malcolm McLaren, died on 8th April, aged 64, of the asbestos-related cancer mesothelioma. He is believed to have been exposed to the deadly material when he shattered the ceiling of his Kings Road punk shop Sex. “When Malcolm created Sex he broke open the ceiling to make it look like a bomb had hit it”, said Young Kim, his partner. “It was board asbestos and it was in the early Seventies and I don’t think anyone did anything about it.”

At a routine chest scan in 2008 a doctor noticed “benign” spots on McLaren’s lungs which looked like pleural plaques from asbestos exposure. By January last year, he was convinced he had lung cancer, and a few months later, his left lung had filled with fluid and he was diagnosed with mesothelioma.

The headline is a quote from McLaren’s son at the funeral. From the *Independent on Sunday*.

Adam Gosling only 15 years old

Adam Gosling was killed in Hadley Wood, London, on 23rd April 2007, making him the youngest victim to be killed on a UK building site. Colin Holtom was sentenced to three years imprisonment at the Old Bailey July last year, after pleading guilty to manslaughter, by gross negligence. The judge instructed he should serve at least half of it and said Holtom showed a “cavalier and irresponsible attitude to the safety of his employees”. He left a 15 year old and his 18 year old brother Dean, alone and unsupervised while they carried out the demolition of an unstable brick wall.

Simon Hester, the investigating inspector said:

“The management and setup of this small construction project was appalling. Adam Gosling should never have been there at all as 15-year olds have been banned from working on construction sites since 1920. There was a complete disregard for basic health and safety requirements –the workers were not even covered by Employers Liability Insurance.”

Holtom, 65, failed to get his jail term reduced in a London Court of Appeal hearing in April this year.

COMING SOON

Construction Safety Campaign over 20 years fighting for workers health and safety

This is the story of the campaign told in pictures and including the leaflets, letters, poems, banners, T-shirts and reports of their events as they happened. It is a fitting tribute to those killed in the industry and to all who have joined them in the campaign over the years.

Order it from CSC, PO Box 23844 London SE15 3WR • Price £10 plus £2 postage.

Tory safety plans

An exclusive interview in Construction News with John Penrose, at the time shadow business minister, revealed they planned to allow "low risk" companies to secure immunity from HSE Inspections. Companies approved as low risk would be able to arrange their own independent audits and refuse entry to HSE inspectors outside exceptional circumstances. He refused to comment on whether companies with recent fatalities would be eligible to use the proposed new system. He would not say whether the current RIDDOR system would survive. Firms with immunity may not have to report accidents to HSE. He said the system would allow contractors "to be the masters of their own destiny". Construction News 11th March 2010.

UNITE to survey 60,000 Charity Workers

More than 90 per cent of voluntary sector staff feel their well-being is undermined by the financial crisis facing charities. The union will get its 2,500 reps surveying their members. UNITE aims to reinforce the message that employers have legal obligations to manage and prevent workplace stress. It also wants effective implementation of 'best practice' policies so that staff with work-related stress are provided with appropriate support.

GMB SafeGuard

In the past 2 years 1,550 security staff working for just 35 companies out of 600 plus companies have been injured on duty by violent attacks – some very seriously. GMB, the main union for security staff, has launch a new SafeGuard campaign to tackle the increasing number of attacks on security guards at work. GMB is asking all Britain's security companies to sign the GMB SafeGuard Charter committing them to act to tackle the attacks on 350,000 licensed security staff in the course of their work. Security guards can log details of attacks on a new website www.GMB-Security.org.uk

London Hazard Centre to work with the Latin American Workers Association



London Hazard Centre will be working with the Latin American Workers Association in their campaign for migrant workers rights at work. The Association was launched in 2003 by Latin American workers working in London and is rapidly growing and now has members from Poland, Lithuanian, Africa and Asia. They join forces with trade unions and Latin American solidarity campaigners

and employment rights groups to discuss ways to achieve solidarity with Latin American workers and other nationalities organising at work.

London Hazard Centre met with Alberto Durango on the 25th March 2010 to discuss how we can assist them.

USING THE CENTRE

London Hazards Centre June 2010 training programme

We are running taster courses throughout London to provide a basic introduction to health and safety at work. They look at the relevant laws and at practical solutions to creating a safe working environment. The next course are at:

- ▲ **Thursday 3rd June** 2pm to 5pm at **The Forum@Greenwich**, Trafalgar Road, SE10 9EQ: this is in conjunction with GAVS, Greenwich Action for Voluntary Service.
- ▲ **Thursday 10th June** at **Epi Centre**, 41 West Street, Leytonstone, E11 4LJ, there is a £30 cover charge for this event.
- ▲ **Wednesday 16th June** 10am to 4pm at **Lewisham Irish Centre**, Davenport Road. This course covers the basics of health and safety law and there is a £40 cover charge.

Who are the courses aimed at?

All welcome, but there is a focus on problems faced by black, Asian, minority ethnic workers and women. They are useful for community groups:

- ▲ Looking for practical knowledge and skills to enable them to create a safe and healthy workplace.
- ▲ Who are unclear about their duties to staff, volunteers, the public.
- ▲ Who want to find out more about the trade union role.

Workshops and stalls

Saturday 5th June at **Hackney Unites** at Stoke Newington School. We will have a stall or share one with Hackney TUC and take enquiries.

We are running a workshop at a National Volunteering Event organized by Haringey CVS in June.

Visits

We are hosting a visit by Japanese Construction Trade Union, Kenkourou, on 3rd June. This is an invite only event.

Stress at work

Occupational stress arises when workers perceive they cannot adequately cope with the demands made on them or with threats to their jobs and the circumstances in which they are carried out. Stress is on the increase as employment conditions become tougher and new systems of staff supervision are introduced (CCTV, electronic productivity monitoring); it disproportionately affects people at the lower end of the job hierarchy. It is an issue for safety representatives because workers health, jobs and careers are on the line and because for many years now it has been the top concern of people at work in the UK.

Stress is a controllable factor in a work environment. When workers perceive they cannot adequately cope with the demands made on them or feel their jobs are threatened, it constitutes harmful stress. Excess amounts of stress can lead to a lack of productivity, loss of confidence and the inability to perform routine tasks. It can lead to long term (chronic) health problems that lead to premature death.

Occupational stress encompasses a host of other factors within the working environment that include chemical agents, physical agents (noise, heat, radiation, cold), hazards that cause fear and an uncomfortable work area. These can contribute to single or multiple factors that impact upon the worker to induce stress at work.

Causes and Symptoms

Stress can result in both health and behavioural problems. They can be categorised as physical symptoms (headaches, stomach problems, over & under eating, sleep disturbances, chronic mild fatigue, muscle aches & pains and skin rashes) and psychological symptoms (forgetfulness, anger, frustration, anxiety, irritability, use of alcohol, cigarettes, drugs and sleeping pills), depression, feeling powerless and isolation. These can be

transferred into absenteeism, increased accident rates, relationship problems and drug and alcohol abuse. The most extreme form of stress is sudden death, i.e. people work themselves to death. However, many symptoms are transient and disappear when the source of stress is removed. But if stress is prolonged, permanent illness, either physical and/or mental may result. Common long term symptoms of stress include physical conditions (hypertension, heart disease, strokes, diabetes, ulcers, infectious diseases and spastic colon) and psychological problems (serious depression, accidents, domestic violence, suicidal behaviour, substance abuse and other debilitating psychological disorders). It is important to note that stress affects different people in different ways while some take workplace stress home others make personal adjustments and changes to deal with stress.

Duty of Care – Legal Requirements

Employers have a duty to safeguard the health and safety of their employees under Section 2 of the 1974 Health and Safety at Work Act (HASWA).

Under Regulation 3 of the 1992 Management of Health and Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations, employers are obliged to carry out an assessment of the risks in jobs and reduce these as far as possible. These legal duties apply to occupational stress. Employers are legally required to consult with safety representatives on all aspects of health and safety, including stress risk assessments.

It is an issue for safety representatives because workers health, jobs and careers are on the line and because for many years now it has been the top concern of people at work in the UK.

HSE's management standards for stress

These standards point out the issues to be taken into account when addressing

occupational stress. While they are only guidance and therefore carry no weight in criminal law, they can be useful for safety reps and safety committees in negotiations, especially on the content and extent of stress risk assessments, which should cover all the aspects spelt out in the HSE standards. They are not as useful a tool as new laws on stress would be but can offer supporting processes that encourage employers, employees and reps to work in partnership to address work related stress. It also provides a yardstick by which organisations can gauge their performance in tackling the key causes of stress.

It is to be noted when a stress compensation claim is being considered in the Civil Courts, the courts will use these HSE standards to judge whether an employer as gone "as far as is reasonably practicable" in addressing the issue of stress brought to their attention by the stressed worker or their trade union safety representative. This fact is also persuasive when negotiating.

The Management Standards cover six key aspects of work

- ▲ **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.
- ▲ **Relationship:** 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.

Disability law

- ▲ Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – stress may turn out to be the sign of an underlying condition that would amount to a disability. Under the Act, employers are required to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace, such as reducing the employee's workload or pressures on an employee who is under stress. While this is a useful piece of law it is not simple to apply in these circumstances and help should be sought if trying to use it in a stress case.
- ▲ Discrimination legislation – if someone is being treated unfairly by, say, a line manager who treats female staff in an overbearing and dominating way, they may be able to argue that such behaviour amounts to sex discrimination.

Strategies for combatting Job Stress

Since stress at work has multiple causes, it suggests it should have multiple solutions. Interventions with the individual although important will not solve the problems of occupational stress but organisational change must also occur. There are three major changes that must occur in any well designed stress reduction application. Firstly there must be individual change that encourages the individual to cope more effectively with stress for example, diet, exercise, assertiveness, relaxation etc. Secondly, small support group interventions which help workers develop more social support both at the job and at home for example, team building, family counselling, sensitivity training around racism and sexism etc. Thirdly, structural or organisational changes towards improving the conditions at work, for example,

modifying shifts, reducing physical hazards, job rotation, workers decision making, increasing skills level etc.

Safety representatives

Safety reps are trade union reps created by the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1978 which entitle them to:

- ▲ inspect the workplace
- ▲ investigate incidents and accidents
- have paid time off for training and for the performance of their duties
- represent their members interests on health and safety

Safety reps must be consulted by employers on all issues around occupational stress, especially risk assessments.

Education and Awareness

Whilst stress is such a major issue of concern to workers they may need to be persuaded that their health is at risk or that action by themselves and their safety rep can improve their conditions. This can be done by:

- ▲ circulating leaflets, feature articles and posters on the hazards of stress.
- ▲ holding discussions at workplace meetings, perhaps with an invited speaker.
- ▲ investigating key indicators of stress such as sickness absence figures.
- conducting a survey of the incidence of stress among members
- encouraging employees to risk assess themselves to find out for example which muscle group is more used while doing their job.

Representing Individual Members

The first priority is to protect the workers health and job where these are threatened by stress or by management responses. The second is to try and

secure the solution the member wants. This could entail:

- ▲ ensuring behavioural problems are not treated as a disciplinary issue.
- ▲ negotiating leave, a transfer or reallocation of work.
- ▲ obtaining a second medical opinion if required.
- ▲ resisting retirement on medical grounds or dismissal on grounds of inability to work.
- ▲ helping the member access the right sort of professional help.
- ▲ pressing the management to remove or reduce the causes of stress.

Collective Agreements

These can be of two types, an overall agreement aimed at eliminating or reducing stress or specific agreements on particular employment conditions. The alternative is to negotiate anti-stress provisions into employment conditions such as staffing levels, working hours, shift patterns, performance etc. The two approaches are not incompatible.

Employer Responses

Employer responses to occupational stress have favoured the provision of counselling, occupational health programmes, employee assistance programme and healthy life-style campaigns. These do not address the factors in the job which produce stress and they tend to transfer responsibility for the condition from the employer to the individual worker.

Also see

- ▲ TUC stress resource pages www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index.cfm?mins=37
- ▲ Management standards for stress HSE www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/standards.htm

Factsheets online www.lhc.org.uk London advice 020 7794 5999



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