Tackling stress: The Management Standards approach

Introduction

The Management Standards approach has been developed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to reduce the levels of work-related stress reported by British workers.

The overall aim is to bring about a reduction in the number of employees who go off sick, or who cannot perform well at work because of stress. We want employers to work with employees and their representatives to implement the Stress Management Standards and introduce a process of continuous improvement. This will be good for employees and good for business.

The Management Standards approach gives managers the help they need to achieve these aims. It demonstrates good practice through risk assessment, allows measurement of the current situation using surveys and other techniques, and promotes active discussion with employees to help decide upon the practical improvements that can be made.

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).

What are the Management Standards for Work-related Stress?

The 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 Management Standards define the characteristics, or culture, of an organisation where stress is being managed effectively. They are listed here and can also be found on www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards along with a comprehensive tool kit.

The Management Standards cover six key areas of work design that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence. In other words, the six Management Standards cover the primary sources of stress at work. These are:

- **Demands** – such as workload, work patterns and the work environment.
- **Control** – such as how much say the person has in the way they do their work.
- **Support** – such as the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.
- **Relationships** – such as promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.
- **Role** – such as whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles.
- **Change** – such as how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation.

Employers have a duty to ensure that risks arising from work activity are properly controlled. The Management Standards approach helps employers work with their employees and representatives to undertake risk assessments for stress.

How do I assess performance against the Management Standards?

- Use existing information to see how your organisation shapes up. Sickness absence or staff turnover data could help, as could any surveys you have undertaken to get the views of employees.
- Use a survey that HSE has developed to give an indication of performance against the Standards.
- Look at the Management Standards website www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards for more information and to use HSE's survey ('Indicator tool for work-related stress').

It is important to remember that if you use existing data or HSE's survey you still need to talk to employees and their representatives to verify the findings and assess what is happening locally.

What if I do not want to use surveys?

- Go straight into discussion with employees.
- Outline the importance of tackling stress and discuss the statements in the Standards with a representative sample of your employees.

- Ensure employees are able to express their honest opinions, eg consider involving someone else in the process so that employees are not afraid to say what they think.
- Record what employees say, which will help you prioritise and give you a record to check back on in the future.
- Continue to use existing methods to talk to employees about issues that affect them at work, eg regular staff meetings, toolbox talks, or performance reviews.
- Look at HSE's guidance book *Tackling work-related stress* (HSG218) which is only available in the *Real solutions, real people* pack.

What if I discover problems?

If you find you have working conditions that are causing concern to your employees, work with them and their representatives to find practical solutions. Examples of what other organisations have done are in *Real solutions, real people* (ISBN 0 7176 2767 5 available from HSE Books, Tel: 01787 881165, www.hsebooks.co.uk), and on the HSE stress website pages www.hse.gov.uk/stress.

The Management Standards for Work-related Stress

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, eg 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.

Further information

HSE priced and free publications are available by mail order from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA
Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995
Website: www.hsebooks.co.uk
(HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops and free leaflets can be downloaded from HSE's website: www.hse.gov.uk.)

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline
Tel: 0845 345 0055 Fax: 02920 859260 e-mail: hseinformationservices@natbrit.com or write to
HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.