



## HS Broadcast – Stress

The Health & Safety Executive has released figures regarding cases of stress, depression and anxiety. The total number of cases of work-related stress, depression or anxiety was 488,000. The number of new instances was 224,000. The impact of these cases was 11.7 million lost days. These numbers are frighteningly high. From our experiences I have seen an increase in issues relating to this type of illness and therefore I am not at all surprised by the numbers.

It is tricky trying to work out what the causes actually are for these types of illness; what the employee believes to be the issue is often very different from what management believes. I tend to believe that a person's perception is indeed their reality, whether or not that may actually be the problem.

In the majority of cases I come across, issues of management (i.e. poor management) are very often at the centre of the problem. The perception that an employee is being treated unfairly or simply being treated wrongly is pretty common, as is the ability of management to deal with the workload pressures of its employees. These can include the expectation of too much work in too little time, unreasonable and unrealistically tight deadlines and poor man-management skills.

In terms of health & safety issues it is the construction sector that usually leads the way when it comes to health and safety statistics, but this is not the case with stress issues. Hitting the headlines in this area is the

otherwise low-risk service sector, in particular those employees working in public sector roles such as healthcare and teaching.

Please remember that stress is just as much a hazard in the work place as any other hazard. There needs to be a stress policy in force and stress should be considered in terms of risk assessing. The HSE are quite prepared to prosecute employers who fail to take reasonable steps to protect their employees.

As readers of previous HS Broadcasts will know, health & safety comes under criminal law, but there is also civil law to be concerned about and I need to state that there have been a number of successful civil claims brought against employers who have failed in their duties to their staff.

I have heard that health & safety inspectors, whether HSE or Local Authority are starting to look at occupational health and reports of work-related stress are taken very seriously. So your managers need to keep a very close eye on staff and take action when they see warning signs.