



# Stress In The Workplace

Stress in the workplace is one of the leading problems in today's hectic society. It creates health issues resulting in lost productivity, increased absenteeism, workers compensation claims and decreased corporate profits.

Clearly no employer or OHS / HR manager can afford to ignore the implications of this. Ongoing stress leads to loss of work hours through both physical and emotional illness (including depression) and expensive health care. Staff who don't feel well cannot possibly give their best into their work.

**Stress Management** - The NSW Work Cover Authority states, "the implementation of stress management in the work place is the employers responsibility under the health & safety act 1983 - Duty of Care" (Occupational Health & Safety Act).

## **Studies on Stress**

As a positive influence, stress can help compel us to action; it can result in a new awareness and an exciting new perspective. As a negative influence, it can result in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger, and depression, which in turn can lead to health problems.

High-conflict work environments, heavy workloads, financial pressures, skipped lunches, meeting after meeting, and fast pace of today's workplace is putting employees under more stress than ever. The by-products of stress include insomnia, high blood pressure, headache and backache - an enormous drain on your employees, and increasingly damaging to the corporate bottom line. (See NIOSH report below)

## **Australian National Occupational Health and Safety Commission Report, December 2003**

High stress levels lead to thousands of stress-related WorkCover claims every year.

According to a December 2003 National Occupational Health and Safety Commission Report, cases of Mental Stress had by far the highest median (8.5 weeks) and average (16 weeks) time lost, and accounted for 29% of all new cases of disease. This is way above the median of 3.4 weeks lost and average of 9.3 weeks for all new cases of injury or disease.

Mental Stress also had the highest median cost at \$9,700 compared to \$4,100 for all new cases. The report shows that Mental Disorders (95% of which is caused by Mental Stress) were most prevalent in the occupation groups Professionals (65% of all disease cases in this group), Associate Professionals (59%), Managers and Administrators (57%), and almost 50% each of disease cases for Advanced Clerical and Service Workers and Intermediate Clerical, Sales and Services Workers. Due to the high proportion of cases for Mental Disorders, the occupation groups, Managers and Administrators, Associate Professionals and Professionals had the highest median (7.6 weeks) and average (14.8 weeks) time lost.

The costs of job stress in developed countries like Australia, US, UK, and Germany have been estimated at \$200 to \$300 billion annually in absenteeism; diminished productivity; employee turnover; accidents; and medical, legal and insurance fees. Stress is blamed for 80% of all disease and illness, and 60% to 90% of all medical office visits in the US. Given these alarming statistics, it is no surprise that corporate Australia, America, UK and Germany are making a major commitment to stress management.

**United States National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health**  
According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, recent studies show the following:

- **Cardiovascular Disease**  
Many studies suggest that psychologically demanding jobs that allow employees little control over the work process increase the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- **Musculoskeletal Disorders**  
On the basis of research by NIOSH and many other organizations, it is widely believed that job stress increases the risk for development of back and upper-extremity musculoskeletal disorders.
- **Psychological Disorders**  
Several studies suggest that differences in rates of mental health problems (such as depression and burnout) for various occupations are due partly to differences in job stress levels.
- **Workplace Injury**  
Although more study is needed, there is a growing concern that stressful working conditions interfere with safe work practices and set the stage for injuries at work.
- **Suicide, Cancer, Ulcers, and Impaired Immune Function**  
Some studies suggest a relationship between stressful working conditions and these health problems. However, more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

These studies confirm the importance of integrating stress management into work. Not only will it benefit every person on a personal level but it will improve morale, staff loyalty and above all your bottom line.

For more information, or to make an appointment, call +612 93285899