

World Mental Health Day: Supporting staff must be a priority for employers

- Workplace regulator HSE offers free advice for employers to help protect mental health
- 17 million working days are lost due to stress, anxiety, or depression every year in Great Britain
- Tackling this could bring economic benefits
- Reminder comes on World Mental Health Day (Monday October 10)

Good mental health in the workplace must be a priority for employers.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) believes supporting staff wellbeing is not only the right thing for bosses to do but could also benefit Britain's economy.

The workplace regulator is reminding employers of the importance of mental health support on International Mental Health Day (Monday October 10).

HSE offers free advice for employers on supporting their staff's mental health through its Working Minds campaign, which is aimed at addressing the impact of work-related stress.

Around 17 million working days are lost due to stress, anxiety, or depression every year in Great Britain. Stress is thought to be responsible for almost half of working days lost. Research by HSE found of the people suffering from a work-related illness in Britain, 822,000 were reporting signs of work-related stress, depression, or anxiety.

Reducing this will not only help people lead happier lives but could also have significant economic benefits at a time when attention is focused on growing the economy.

HSE says a supportive working environment can improve productivity and performance, and workers are more likely to stay with an employer that prioritises good mental health. A report found evidence that UK bosses will receive an average return of £5 for every £1 spent on mental health.

Events are taking place today (Monday October 10) to mark International Mental Health Day; a global event organised by the World Health Organisation to protect and improve mental health across the world.

HSE's Working Minds campaign aims to help businesses recognise the signs of work-related stress and make tackling issues routine. The campaign was launched after research showed mental health issues are the number one reason given for sick days in Great Britain.

Employers have a responsibility to assess and act on the risks in the workplace, not just in terms of physical safety but also mental health.

Sarah Albon, chief executive of HSE, said: “World Mental Health Day is a good opportunity for employers to check they have the right support in place for their staff when it comes to mental health. Taking action to improve workplace mental health not only benefits individuals, but also supports business growth and productivity. Employers should have an open environment where staff can share concerns and discuss options to ease pressures they face.”

[A recent survey from Deloitte](#) suggests one in six workers experience a mental health problem at any one time and that the total annual cost of poor mental health to employers has increased by 25% since 2019, costing UK employers up to £56 billion a year. Deloitte’s findings also suggest that UK bosses will receive an average return of £5 for every £1 spent on mental health.

Guidance on how businesses can spot the signs of work-related stress and prevent issues before they become a problem can be found through HSE’s Working Minds campaign:

<https://workright.campaign.gov.uk/campaigns/working-minds/>

Notes to editors

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain’s national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. [hse.gov.uk](https://www.hse.gov.uk)
2. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>
3. The Working Minds campaign is supported by Mind, Lifelines Scotland, NHS, ACAS, Mates in Mind, the Farm Safety Foundation, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Plastics and Composites Group, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Civil Engineering Contractors Association, the Federation of Small Businesses, CONIAC and the UK Home Care Association.
4. Information about World Mental Health Day can be found here: [World Mental Health Day 2022 \(who.int\)](#)

[Scientist who played a key role in the pandemic response is appointed chair of a new HSE committee](#)



Cath Noakes, picture courtesy of Leeds University

A leading scientist who played an important role in Britain's response to the pandemic has been appointed chair of a new science committee.

Professor Cath Noakes led a sub-group of SAGE (UK Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies) during the COVID-19 crisis. She will now chair a new committee that will offer assurance to Great Britain's workplace regulator the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Professor Noakes, who is professor of Environmental Engineering for Buildings at the University of Leeds, has a background in ventilation, air quality, and infection control.

She will lead the new Science Quality Assurance Group (SQAG) at HSE, which will provide the workplace regulator with independent assurance on the relevance and quality of its scientific research. The advisory group will ensure important research into workplace health and safety is relevant, robust, and fit for the future.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Professor Noakes co-chaired the Environment and Modelling sub-group for SAGE. She also advised the NHS, the World Health Organisation and several government departments. She was awarded an OBE for her services to the pandemic in 2020.

Professor Cath Noakes said: "It's a real honour to be appointed to this role as chair of a new committee that I believe can play an important part in ensuring science-based evidence used to protect people and places is of the highest quality.

"I have had the pleasure of seeing at first hand HSE's scientific expertise being put to full use during the pandemic ranging from fundamental studies on transmission through to the production of information videos on ventilation that helped inform workplaces of good practice in stopping the spread of the virus.

"External experts drawn from relevant science and engineering disciplines, who are recognised as leaders in their fields, will now be asked to join the group which I'm privileged to lead."

Chair of HSE, Sarah Newton, added: "Professor Noakes brings with her a wealth

of scientific experience and her expertise and knowledge is a perfect fit as chair of our new committee.

“The newly formed Science Quality Assurance Group will consider how science and evidence delivered by HSE helps to maintain Great Britain’s record as one of the safest countries to work in while supporting our 10-year strategy. We look forward to working with the group and welcome Cath as chair.”

The Science Quality Assurance Group will have 12 members who will be independent, external experts drawn from relevant science and engineering disciplines. Members will be organised into four subgroups. Each subgroup will review scientific research carried out to support one or more of HSE’s strategic objectives in detail.

The four subgroups will be:

- Health and Safety
- Net Zero
- Chemicals Safety
- Buildings Safety

HSE is currently inviting applications for Independent Members of its new Science Quality Assurance Group (SQAG). To find out more click [here](#).

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Cath Noakes background information:

Professor Noakes is a chartered mechanical engineer, with a background in fluid dynamics. Her expertise is in building physics and environmental engineering, and she has led research into ventilation, indoor air quality and infection control in the built environment.

She joined the School of Civil Engineering at University of Leeds in 2002 as a postdoctoral researcher modelling air disinfection systems and was later appointed as a lecturer in 2007 and then promoted to Reader in 2010 and Chair in 2014.

Professor Noakes was Director of the Pathogen Control Engineering (PACE) research institute 2010-2014, and Director of Research and Innovation for the School of Civil Engineering 2014-2020. She is currently Deputy Director of Leeds Institute for Fluid Dynamics and Co-Director for the EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Fluid Dynamics.

During the COVID-19 pandemic she co-chaired the Environment and Modelling sub-group for the UK Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) and contributed to multiple advisory groups and initiatives through IMechE, CIBSE, the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Academy of Medical Sciences, WHO, the NHS and several government departments.

She was Faculty of Engineering Athena Swan Lead 2014-2017 and led a successful Silver Athena Swan submission covering all five schools in the faculty. She was chair of the University Women at Leeds network 2013-2017 and

in December 2021 was one of the guest lecturers in the Royal Institution Christmas Lectures.

Awards and professional recognition:

2022 – Honorary Fellow, Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE)

2021 – Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering

2020 – OBE for Services to the COVID-19 Pandemic

2020 – Royal Academy of Engineering Presidents Special Award for Pandemic Service

2018 – Academy of Fellows, International Society for Indoor Air Quality (ISIAQ)

2016 – University of Leeds, Women of Achievement Award

2014 – Recipient of IMechE Construction and Building Services Division Prize

2014 – Fellow of Institution of Mechanical Engineers (FIMechE)

2013 – Fellow of Institute of Healthcare Engineering and Estates Management (FIHEEM)

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2. HSE news releases are available at: <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

[Chemicals company fined after releasing cloud of chlorine gas into factory](#)

A chemicals company has been fined after releasing a cloud of toxic chlorine gas that spread through its factory, yard and surrounding area resulting in staff needing hospital treatment and significant damage to the factory.

On 12 June 2019, Wiltshire company GEA Farm Technologies (UK) Ltd mistakenly

mixed an Intermediate Bulk Container (IBC) containing approximately 700 kg of concentrated sulphuric acid into a mixing vessel which already contained 1,600 litres of sodium hypochlorite solution.

The chemicals reacted releasing a large cloud of toxic chlorine gas, which CCTV footage showed as it permeated the factory and surrounding area. There was no clear evacuation plan for workers caught on-site, with several taken to hospital with breathing difficulties – fortunately no one suffered long-term effects.

A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found the incident happened because a dedicated mixing plant had not been brought back into service after maintenance work, and the company had failed to introduce effective records management for the temporary manual system.

GEA Farm Technologies (UK) Ltd, based on Watery Lane, Warminster, Wiltshire pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and were fined £40,000 and ordered to pay costs of £22,000 at Basingstoke Magistrates' Court on 4 October 2022.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE Inspector, Malcolm Whyatt, said: "In this case several workers were put at risk from a cloud of chlorine gas which drifted uncontrolled through their workplace.

"The company had previously designed their system to eliminate the possibility of human error, by reverting to a manual process they created a situation where mixing incompatible chemicals was possible. Chlorine can have severe health effects at very low levels, and they were fortunate that no-one was more seriously injured."

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 2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: [legislation.gov.uk/](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/)
 3. More information about working with chemicals can be found at: [Chemicals at work \(hse.gov.uk\)](https://www.hse.gov.uk/chemicals-at-work)
 4. HSE news releases are available at: [http://press.hse.gov.uk](https://press.hse.gov.uk)
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[Time to register for HSE's Health and Work Conference 2022](#)

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has announced the date for this year's Health and Work Conference, with the free, interactive, event taking place on 15 November 2022. [Registrations](#) for the virtual all-day event are now open.

Building on the success of last year's conference, which saw huge demand, HSE has increased the capacity five-fold to provide 5,000 spaces for delegates.

The conference is part of HSE's approach to inspire and promote better prevention, management and control of the common risks and causes of work-related ill-health across Great Britain.

At the conference HSE will unveil how it is supporting the government's response to the Health is Everyone's Business (HiEB) consultation, as well as discussions on topics including work related stress and mental health, occupational health, musculoskeletal disorders, and occupational lung disease.

Delegates at the event will see how health and work is evolving not just in response to the pandemic, but also around the actions we need to take collectively as employers, employees, regulators and others to prevent harm caused by work-related ill-health.

Ali Wellens, HSE's head of health and work branch, said: "Health in the workplace needs to be a priority for everyone.

"This conference is a unique opportunity to engage with HSE's regulatory inspectors, scientists and health topic specialists.

"There will also be the chance to connect with peers and delve deeper into the topics that are of interest to you via a selection of elective workshops on priority areas of health and work.

"The day will include discussions around work related stress and mental health, occupational health, musculoskeletal disorders, occupational lung disease and COSHH and much more."

Spaces are limited, so please [register](#) for the Health and Work Conference 2022 today.

For more information on HSE and its health and work priorities visit www.hse.gov.uk

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2. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

3. To view the full conference agenda click [here](#)

[Worker hurt falling from gantry – company fined £27,000](#)

A refrigeration company has been fined £27,000 after a worker sustained significant injuries when he fell from an incomplete gantry.

GEA Refrigeration UK Ltd was replacing a cooler unit located on a gantry 10m above the warehouse floor at an Iceland depot in Swindon on 1 February 2017.

This required a section of the gantry floor to be removed. A GEA employee fell 2.5 metres through the gap created by this removal and on to a cherry picker, suffering fractured ribs and internal injuries.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found the company had failed to properly plan, co-ordinate and supervise the work, including the removal of the gantry floor to ensure the work was carried out in a safe manner to control the risks of falls.

GEA Refrigeration UK Ltd, of Ludgate Hill, London, pleaded guilty to breaching Section 4(1) of the Work at Height Regulations 2015, and was fined £27,000 and ordered to pay £35,000 costs and a victim surcharge of £170 at Bristol Crown Court on 30 September 2022.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE inspector Leo Diez said: “This incident could have been avoided by identifying and implementing effective control measures and safe working practices.

“Falls from height remain one of the most common causes of work-related injury and fatalities and the risks associated with working at height are well known.”

In his victim personal statement, the injured worker said: “The effect of the accident on my personal and work life has been huge and has had a lasting effect.”

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2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: legislation.gov.uk/
3. Guidance on working at height can be found here: [Work at height – HSE](#)
4. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>