

RISK News

Issue 23

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Tackling stress together

(Has your get up and go got up and gone?)

The reality is that we are all under pressure both at home and at work. Changing work practices including increased emphasis on customer service, service delivery and individual performance may benefit an organisation as a whole but has added to the pressures on staff.

Research has shown that change in itself can be a cause of stress. It's hardly surprising that stress accounts for a significant percentage of sickness absence in Norfolk County Council. The authority intends to introduce various measures to tackle this important area, for the benefit of all employees.

Likely proposals to reduce the risk of stress and ill health at work include:

- A new corporate stress management policy
- Practical guidance for managers and employee information



- A new risk assessment form designed to help spot if stress is a problem for teams or sections
- A review of sickness absence procedures to help prevent recurrent absence due to stress
- Information for senior managers to understand the impact on the organisation.

Pages 6 and 7 sets out some helpful tips on how to recognise stress in yourself or others, and also ways that individuals can deal with it.

Special features

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Produced by Norfolk's Risk Management Group, published by the DF.



Norfolk County Council

Comment

Welcome to the latest issue of Risk News.

Our main feature is about tackling stress, looking at what the County is looking to do, and what individuals can do to help themselves and their colleagues. This important area has been looked at before but as well-being is emerging as one of the key issues facing the authority, it is a topic worth covering again.

Everybody probably knows someone who has suffered from stress at some time, so if people can be shown how to cope, this will have a huge benefit.

Thank you to all of you who replied to the short survey in the last issue. Your comments are welcomed, especially as Risk News is felt to be useful and informative by most of you. However, we will also introduce certain changes, based on your views, to improve the overall look.

If you would like to contribute an article to a future issue of Risk News, please contact any of those below.

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Aren't trees lovely?

Of course they are, but how safe are they?

Generally speaking trees are safe and integral parts of our lives. However in order to keep them that way, they have to be maintained. If not then bits can fall from them, they can topple over or their roots can cause damage. A number of high profile incidents have happened recently, in some cases with devastating effects.

2003 - A tree fell over onto a school playground in Surrey killing a young girl and injuring three others.

2002 - A tree fell over in a Norfolk High School landing on the school kitchen and dining room causing extensive damage (see above). Fortunately the building was empty at the time. Cost £137,000.

1999 - A roadside tree fell over in Birmingham at traffic lights killing 3 occupants in a car waiting at the lights. Birmingham CC was fined £150,000 and £56,000 costs.

To ensure these kinds of incidents are reduced, the Risk Management team has reviewed NCC's arrangements for the identification and inspection of trees on our properties. As a result, work will start soon to ensure we adopt a proactive approach to adequately control the risk.

Don't panic, this does **not** mean we are going to chop down all of our trees. Rather we are going to inspect them more closely to assess what risks they pose, and then manage those risks.

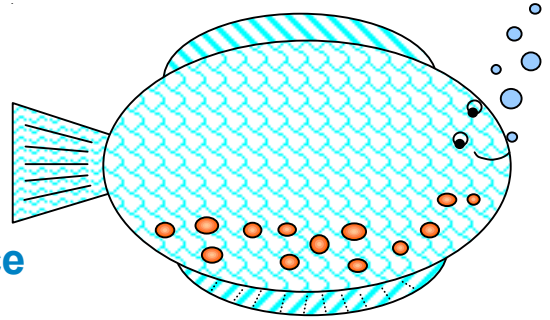
Risk Awareness Week is coming

back by popular demand, it will be on

10th - 14th November 2003

with the theme of

Well-being – Making a Difference



Many council departments are working together to present Risk Awareness Week for you. The overall theme is **well-being** and will focus on ways that people can improve their own well-being, at work and at home.

There will be a variety of active sessions during the week ranging from half day workshops to 15 minute head massages, as well as many other linked activities. The sessions are open to all NCC employees and are all free! Make a note of the dates in your diary.

A full programme of events will soon be available so 'watch out for the fish'. If you want any information in advance, please contact Mandy Knowlton-Rayner or Clare Briers in Risk and Insurance on 01603 223822 or 222827.

Know what I mean??

We all communicate in writing, but do you get your message across?

To avoid confusion it is important to get your point across in a clear and accurate manner. In this way, the reader gets the message you intend to deliver.

These few simple rules will help to ensure clear and accurate communication.

- Always draft first, then proof read
- Keep it short and to the point, avoid jargon
- Make sure you have said...*who, what, why, where and when*
- Most sentences should be less than twenty words
- Use a style to suit your audience
- If you use acronyms explain them, then you can use them as often as you like
- Try to replace long words with shorter ones
- Check the punctuation and spelling
- Avoid using multiple clauses

Imagine you are writing for an average 12 year old. This should ensure everyone understands what you are saying. For more information and advice look at DIY Communications on the NCC intranet or contact the NCC communications team on 01603 222972.

Managing asbestos

The duty to manage

The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002 introduces an **explicit duty to manage** asbestos in non-domestic premises. As we reported in the last issue of Risk News, this important legislation tackles the biggest occupational health killer in the UK – asbestos-related disease.

Vulnerable groups at considerable risk from accidental exposure to asbestos include: **painters, maintenance staff, carpenters, builders, plumbers, electricians, roofing contractors and anyone else who may have to access the fabric or fittings of a building.**

How does this affect us?

The Regulations stipulate that if you own, occupy, manage, or have responsibilities for premises that may contain asbestos, you will either have:

- A legal duty to manage the risk from this material
- A duty to co-operate with whoever manages the risk

What are our responsibilities?

Norfolk County Council has a legal duty to prevent anybody who works in/on or visits our sites from being exposed to asbestos. This requires the authority to inform those who could come in to contact with asbestos during any activity of its presence, location and condition.

New legislation coming into force in 2004 also requires the authority to formally “manage” any asbestos on sites. This includes the requirement to keep an up to date record of asbestos on sites, including the type and condition of the material.

What have we done so far?

NPS Property Consultants Ltd undertook a major sampling exercise to identify the locations of asbestos at our sites. The results were then presented in site “Asbestos Registers” that were sent to all Norfolk County

premises. The information in the registers advised premises managers that they should show the registers to contractors and any other person that may be working in an area that could contain asbestos. A “sign-off” sheet should be completed to confirm that the register contents had been read and understood.

As part of the Health and Safety Audit plan for 2002/3, an audit of the effectiveness of our site asbestos management was carried out. The audit identified that the “inform and manage” requirement for all premises was not always happening, despite numerous initiatives to remind all duty holders.

What are we doing in the future?

- Departments will be required to actively monitor standards. New and updated arrangements are being drawn up between departments, NPS and Corporate Health and Safety.
- Premises that independently manage building works and repairs will need to ensure they have arrangements in place to comply with NCC protocols.
- NPS, are introducing site checklists, (for sites they manage on NCC’s behalf), that will require their staff to check that contractors are complying with asbestos management instructions.
- NPS will send out an information sheet to all contractors currently logged on their database.



This project will coincide with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) European Health and Safety Week, one of the main issues being the management of asbestos. For further information regarding this initiative, look up www.hse.gov.uk/campaigns/asbestos

Any further queries, contact your departmental H & S Officer or Corporate Health and Safety - 01603 222912

Harassment and bullying at work . . .

Don't become a statistic!

50% of female and 10% of male employees feel they are bullied or harassed at work, according to a 2001 Equal Opportunities Commission survey. Yet only 5% make a complaint to their employer. There is either no one to complain to or they feel too embarrassed.

If you believe you are being bullied or harassed at work you can contact one of our trained Personnel Support Officers. You may feel more comfortable speaking to someone outside your department. They are there to give you impartial advice, guidance and support. You can speak to them in confidence about the issues you face at work and they will help you work out how best to resolve them, quickly and informally.

Don't feel that your problem is too small, or that they will think you are making a fuss about nothing. Bullying and harassment is not acceptable and the Support Officers will help you deal with it.

Harassment Personnel Support Officers	Telephone No.	Department
Carol Bayes	(01603) 224342	Social Services
Tracey Bennett	(01603) 222630	P&T
Sandra Boyce	(01603) 222065	Chief Executives
Carole Human	(01603) 223836	Education
Lesley Macdonald	(01603) 222911	Chief Executives
Marion Parslow	(01603) 819755	Fire Service
Stewart Shaddock	(01603) 223477	Education
Steven Strike	(01603) 222340	P&T

Further details and employee guidance leaflets are available from departmental personnel sections and on the Intranet under Chief Executive – Personnel - Corporate Personnel - Guidelines for Employees, or via the A –Z.

Norfolk County Council does not tolerate harassment and bullying in any form and will deal with all complaints very seriously. Everyone is entitled to dignity, fairness and respect in the workplace.

All this for free!

Did you know that free health and safety information is at your fingertips by accessing the Health and Safety Executive web site?

You can find plenty of free HSE leaflets ranging from hot topics such as display screen equipment, manual handling, and stress, to working near water or machinery safety. There is advice for employees and employers.

The information is arranged alphabetically by topic heading. You can click on the topic of interest to find a list of all the titles on that subject.

To access this advice go to the HSE website www.hse.gov.uk, go to the menu on the right where you will find the link to 'free leaflets'.

Tackling stress together

What is stress?

Stress is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands put upon them.

Who does it affect?

We all react differently to the pressures we face, even those who are usually very hardy can be vulnerable to stress, both in and out of work.

Most people, at some point in their lives, will face situations that may seem unmanageable and which can lead to stress. Rather than seeing this as a sign of weakness it should be seen as a realisation that we are human. There are many factors that can lead to stress such as poor health, problems with relationships, insecurity and work demands. Many signs of stress are noticeable. Some of the indicators of stress include combinations of physical, mental and behavioural factors.

Possible signs of stress

- Finding it harder to make decisions
- Losing concentration
- Becoming forgetful
- Less tolerant of mistakes by others
- Taking offence more easily
- More short tempered
- Feeling lethargic
- Unable to relax
- Muscular aches and pains
- Increased number of colds and other illnesses
- Headaches and migraines
- Increased consumption of alcohol, cigarettes, other substances
- Disrupted sleep patterns
- Not eating properly
- Disruption to eating patterns
- Skin problems
- Perspiring easily
- Feeling nervous, anxious, worried
- Achieving less

It can often be difficult for the person who is suffering to take any positive action. Instead, they may turn to junk food, cigarettes and alcohol as a short-term solution. A knock on effect is the potential for further mental and physical damage to themselves and the effect this can have on friends and family.

But, there are several positive steps that can be taken. One of the most important is to acknowledge that there might be a problem to begin with so that action can be taken to make things more manageable.

Tackling stress together

Some tips to reduce stress

- Eat a balanced diet containing fresh fruit and vegetables (important for a healthy immune system) and complex carbohydrates such as wholemeal bread. Enjoy food but don't over eat. Eat meals at normal times of the day.
- Give time to plan the day by getting up a few minutes earlier. If you feel in control, you will feel less stressed.
- Take lunch breaks away from your desk.
- Try snatching some quiet periods of relaxation to do things that you want to do for yourself. This might be reading a book, listening to music or it could be doing some exercise.
- Develop, or at least don't give up, external interests and hobbies.
- Don't feel guilty about taking holidays or time off – you need a break to unwind and recharge your batteries.
- Drink plenty of water and moderate your caffeine and alcohol intake. Don't become dependant on alcohol, have some alcohol free days. While trying to drown stress with alcohol may seem like an easy – and at the time pleasurable - solution, the following morning's hangover would certainly suggest otherwise.
- Plan a time to give up smoking; it doesn't help as it acts as a stimulant.
- Don't say "yes" when you mean "no" – be assertive. If you can't carry out an additional task, say so.

The best advice is to work at addressing what is causing the stress and don't be afraid to talk to people about it, whether it be to a trained counsellor, a colleague, a relative or a friend. Two heads are often better than one and that 'extra' head may well be able to identify a solution to your stress that you hadn't even considered.

10 ways to improve your workplace

1. Clear out the clutter on your desk and on your computer
2. Bring some of the outside in – plants and fresh flowers will brighten up your desk or work-area
3. Cheer up large blank walls with a couple of pictures or posters
4. Organise a team evening out once every couple of months - for example go out for a meal, go bowling, go to a comedy evening the list is endless!
5. Put up a staff notice board for important information (this can include ideas for nights out) so that everybody knows what is going on
6. Get out in the sunshine – make the most of the last of the warm weather by taking a walk or sitting out at lunchtime (even if it is only for 10 minutes)
7. Ensure that your desk is well lit – if necessary consider using desk lamps
8. Let some fresh air in by opening the windows
9. Take regular breaks – get up and walk around, look away from the computer screen
10. Smile – it will make you and those around you feel better!



Mobile phones – new legislation



Driving while using a mobile phone will become a specific offence from 1 December this year. Initially offenders will be fined £30 and it is planned that there will also be a three point penalty added to the drivers licence. Should the matter go to court, the maximum fine rises to £1,000 or £2,500 for drivers of goods vehicles or vehicles that can carry more than nine passengers.

It will be an offence while driving to use a handheld device to:

- Speak or listen to a phone call
- Use a device interactively to access any sort of data, including the internet, text or other images
- Hold a hands-free phone at any point while driving.

The use of a handheld phone, even when stationary (ie in a traffic jam, at traffic lights) will remain an offence

Drivers who use a hands-free phone while driving can also be prosecuted if their driving is deemed to be dangerous or reckless because of the distraction.

Employers who provide phones to their driver employees will not be committing an offence, but to force an employee to use the phone while driving will make them liable.

Our advice is not to use a handheld or a hands-free phone when driving. Instead pull off the road to make or return the call. You are four times more likely to have an accident if using a phone when driving.

Phone scam variations

This involves contact being made to individuals or organisations which requires the recipient to phone the sender (or caller). The reasons given by the sender include inability to access the recipient's web site, or problems accessing their fax machine. Reports are being received that if the phone number is rung, the caller is either held in a loop to premium rate lines, or is requested to ring another phone number, which is again at premium rate.

Also beware of calls to your mobile. We have heard of calls being made where these are only allowed to ring once before the caller rings off. Recipients see the missed call and ring back and – you've guessed it – it's to a premium rate line. Moral of the story – if you don't recognise the number, don't ring back.

Stopping the scams

Individuals are still being targeted by fraudsters. A common example is where the person is told they have won a prize but that a fee must be paid before the goods/prize can be released. These scams work because the old adage about a fool and his money is still true. Increasingly, these scams arrive via e-mail.

Well now you can do something about it. Where these are received via e-mail, you can cause the fraudster(s) a certain amount of inconvenience by sending a copy of the e-mail to the e-mail provider (e.g. abuse@yahoo.com, or abuse@hotmail.com, or abuse@compuserve.com). This will ensure that the account is closed and to continue the scam they will have to set up a new e-mail account. It will also ensure that those foolish enough to try to respond will not be able to contact them.

Local committee risks

In our last edition we ran a feature about organising events. We concentrated on some of the practical safety issues and mentioned the need to maintain adequate public liability insurance.

This article is the first in a short series on the legal and insurance issues relating to work on local committees. Last time we indicated that if your Committee does not hold appropriate liability insurance, the committee members themselves could be personally liable for the loss. So why is that the case?

The answer is that most of the local committees we see (Fete Committees, PTA's, Friends of A N Other Social Services Home, Playing Field Committees etc.) are what is known in law as "unincorporated associations". This means they have no separate legal personality in their own right and are the sum total of the individuals who make up the membership. If the committee commits a legal wrong causing another person to seek compensation the members are each personally responsible.

In one case a few years ago a local "neighbourhood watch committee" in the Midlands decided to run a fete to raise funds for a range of security measures the committee wanted to support. They entered into a series of contracts for sideshows and entertainments. The event was rained off and they were left with debts of in excess of £10,000. (Luckily their local Chief Constable stepped in and helped them out).

Local groups and voluntary bodies are the lifeblood of local communities. A common sense approach by the members can help to avoid some of the problems sometimes encountered.

If you are a committee member you should ensure that your group:

- does not take on financial obligations it may not be able to meet, either from existing funds or another secure funding route.
- insures any property owned or borrowed where the group would not otherwise have the funds to replace it.
- holds adequate public liability insurance (at least to £3m).
- makes sure that external suppliers themselves have public liability cover of at least £3m.
- holds employers liability insurance to a minimum of £5m if the group has its own employees (this is a legal requirement).
- makes sure that the vehicle owners properly insure any vehicles used in connection with your event.
- undertakes sensible health and safety risk assessments as outlined in our last issue.

By following these common sense guidelines local committees and their events can thrive and make local communities richer places.

In our next edition we will look more closely at the issues that arise if you are appointed to serve on a local group or other organisation as part of your job.

If you would like this newsletter in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language, please contact the helpline, 01603 222820.



Data protection

The Data Protection Act states that the data user must ensure information is surrounded by proper security.

These guidelines will help you comply

- When you are away from your computer you must make sure you have logged off the system or have a password protected screensaver in place to stop unauthorised use of your computer. Password protected screensavers should activate within 10 minutes.
- Adopt a clear desk policy and a clear screen policy to reduce the risk of unauthorised access, or loss or damage to information.
- Confidential paper information should either be shredded or placed in marked confidential waste bags when no longer needed.
- Be vigilant when taking telephone calls from someone unfamiliar asking for information.
- Be aware that email attachments sent over the Internet are not secure and could be intercepted by others. This applies to emails you send from work to a personal email address. You must not send emails containing sensitive or confidential information across the internet.



If you require further information please see **Corporate Information Security Policy Guidelines For Users**. This policy can be found on the Intranet/A-Z/Security Guidelines or contact your Departmental Information Security Officer.

School minibus drivers!

The County's Motor Policy imposes certain conditions on our drivers and establishments. One is that all employees who drive a NCC insured minibus on school business must undertake a driving assessment and achieve a satisfactory standard.

The deadline for achieving this is 31 December 2003. After that date, no one will be insured to drive on school business unless they have met the standard.

All relevant schools were contacted several months ago about the arrangements, but some have yet to respond. Don't leave it until the last minute as the assessors may not be able to fit you in – book your assessments soon.

If you have not yet taken an assessment contact Iain Temperton, Senior Road Safety Officer (Training), on 01603 223362.

The Risk Management team

The team, which is part of the Department of Finance, provides free advice and guidance on every aspect of risk management to all parts of Norfolk County Council, including schools. Everything from health & safety to security, from liability risks to driving issues, and from corporate governance to raising awareness.

Key areas that we are currently working on include:

- Identifying all the risks within the County Council (risk profiling)
- Organising the forthcoming Risk Awareness Week (see page 3)
- Co-ordinating and advising schools on the risk ranking surveys carried out by our external insurers
- Designing a specific Risk and Insurance intranet website



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Risky business

School cheque fraud

A member of a school's staff noticed that a cheque had been debited to their bank account for almost £20,000, but did not recognise the payee name. The number of the cheque was also not in the sequence of those being used.

They obtained a copy of the cheque, and noticed that there were a number of differences in format from the official cheque stationery in use. It appears that this could be the result of a scanning operation.

There is a possibility that the payee named on the cheque was also a victim of the scam, as the company name used seems to be a genuine company. Police have been informed, and are investigating.

Finance staff in schools, and other council establishments and sections, should be aware of this type of scam. They need to ensure that checks performed on bank accounts are prompt and thorough to pick up this type of fraud as quickly as possible.

Incident investigation

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) will issue new guidance later this year to help employers investigate incidents that cause injuries

and ill health in the work place.

They will monitor the effectiveness of the guidance. If there is no improvement in incident investigation they may consider recommending new legislation.

Covert surveillance

New legislation (The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000) is designed to ensure that public bodies respect the privacy of members of the public when carrying out investigations. The Act sets out criteria for when and how covert investigations can be carried out legally.

Possible instances might include a Trading Standards investigation, an insurance claims investigation where the claimant is exaggerating their injuries, or trying to catch a sneak thief in a work building. There may also be other examples in the future.

To ensure that any evidence gathered is legally admissible, NCC guidance states that permission to carry out the surveillance must be obtained from a designated "authorising officer". These will be Assistant Chief Officers or above.

A list of authorising officers and guidance can be found on the Legal intranet site in Chief Executives dept.



When the clocks go back

It's not just the weather that can increase your chances of having a driving accident.

When the clocks go back in October, insurers expect a 17% increase in motor accidents in the following week. This arises because people are suddenly driving home in a different light. The previous week they were driving in good light, whereas now they are faced with a dusky twilight. They may initially struggle to cope, failing to use headlights or misjudging speeds and distances.

And finally . . .

Why . . .

do supermarkets make sick people walk all the way to the back of the store to get their prescriptions, while healthy people can buy cigarettes at the front?

do we leave cars worth thousands of pounds outside our house and fill the garage with junk?

can a pizza get to your house quicker than a police car?