

Health and Safety Bulletin

January blues

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Although the New Year offers a chance for new beginnings and optimism for the future, there is also a chance that the end of the holiday celebrations, the colder weather and the shorter days results in what is known as the January blues.

A recent report by the Mental Health Foundation and London School of Economics and Political Science states that mental health problems cost the UK economy £117.9million annually – that is 5% of the UK's GDP. Almost three quarters (72%) of this cost is due to lost productivity – good health and safety is good business.

Tips to combat the January blues

Since hibernation is not an option for most of us, we would do well to follow the words of Benjamin Franklin – “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” There are actions we can take to reduce the risk of worse consequences than the blues.

- Recognize good work – combat demotivation by doing more than just expecting good standards, especially safety standards. A quick thank you and a smile can have a miraculous effect on morale
- Encourage workers to go and see the sun when it shines – it's quite possible during the shorter days to both arrive and leave work in the dark. Encourage people to get outside and see the sun during breaks – it lifts your mood
- Consider having a Samaritans “Brew Monday” – originally focused on the third Monday in January (claimed to be the most depressing day of the year), Brew Monday is an opportunity for employees to gather for some tea (and cake if anyone is feeling generous). The Samaritans have a number of resources on their website like posters, and leaflets to help you organize the get together at [Brew Monday downloadable resources | Support us | Samaritans](#). What they would love you to do is to collect donations for the Samaritans at the same time
- Plan for the “time to talk” day on 1st February 2024 – this about creating opportunities for mental health conversations and reduce the stigma around the topic. Resources to publicise the event are available at [Time To Talk Day](#)
- Support workers who are struggling – signs include unusual mood variations, not wanting to mix socially, or making rash or reckless decisions. Give people the opportunity to talk, or if you don't feel comfortable doing this, point them in the direction of help. Depending on the resources you have available this may include a Mental Health First Aider, an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) helpline or a charity helpline such as Mind, CALM, Together or the Samaritans.

Conclusion

Mental wellbeing is as important as physical wellbeing – living with a mental health problem can impact daily life, making things we take for granted more difficult. Many people find that working is good for their mental health – it provides income, identity, contact and friendship – but it needs a positive and supportive environment.

Recently issued health and safety information:

- HSE's free online learning for preventing stress at work [HSE Workplace Stress \(focusgames.com\)](#)
- NHS Personalised mental health action plan [Your mind plan \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
- IChemE's Lessons learned database – a summary of major incidents in the process industries [Lessons Learned Database - IChemE](#)
- RoSPA's Keeping your workers and their families safe away from work [Keeping your workers and their families' safe outside of the workplace - With our health and safety resources - RoSPA](#)
- Mental Health Promotion and Intervention in Occupational Settings" [Home - MENTUPP | Mental Health Promotion in Occupational Settings \(mentuppproject.eu\)](#)

HSE annual statistics

HSE published their annual work-related health and safety statistics in November for 2022 to 2023. They show: -

- 1.8 million working people suffering from a work-related illness, of which
 - 875,000 workers were suffering work-related stress, depression or anxiety
 - 473,000 workers were suffering from a work-related musculoskeletal disorder
- 135 workers killed in work-related accidents - the work-related fatality figures are now unfortunately returning to pre-COVID levels
- 60,645 injuries to employees reported under RIDDOR
- 35.2 million working days lost due to work-related illness and workplace injury
 - 31.5 million due to ill-health
 - 3.7 million due to work-related injury

.More details are available from the HSE's summary booklet [Health and safety statistics 2022 \(hse.gov.uk\)](#)

Case Law update

This issue focuses on civil cases associated with mental health.

A branch manager at a builder's merchants who was advised by his doctor not to return to stressful work after suffering a stroke was awarded nearly **£400,000** in compensation after he lost his job. In 2009 the manager suffered a severe stroke - he had been averaging over 60 hours' working time per week and was not taking his full entitlement of holidays. He had reportedly signed a 48-hour opt-out agreement and his lawyers said there was "a clear expectation that branch managers would work far in excess of their contracted hours." Even his employers implied the job was inherently stressful and characterised by

long hours After the stroke, the employee's doctor reported that he needed to avoid stress at work and after five months of sick leave his employer dismissed him on the grounds of incapacity. At a liability hearing it was found the dismissal was unfair and amounted to disability discrimination by reason of failure to make reasonable adjustments, such as reallocation of duties and additional managerial support creating a less stressful environment

A housing officer, employed by a local authority discontinued a claim following the disclosure of her social media accounts. The claimant stated that she was unable to return to any employment without

extensive psychological treatment and was unable to leave the house for social activities because she was suffering with depression. However, the defence obtained access to Youtube videos taken while she attended a television presenter training course, photographs of her attending photoshoots and Facebook entries showing her attending holidays and music concerts

HSE asbestos webpages refreshed

The HSE has recently updated its asbestos webpages to improve navigation and update the content. This includes: -

- An introduction to asbestos safety – its dangers, how to identify it, carrying out a risk assessment, training and information on asbestos, complying with relevant legislation
- An overview of the legal duties to manage asbestos in buildings and the role of dutyholder
- A worker's guide to asbestos safety (website and videos) – what they should do if they find it and where people are most likely to occur

The link to the main website is [Asbestos - HSE](#)

About Clwyd Associates..

We are a management consultancy, focusing on health and safety, and SAP based in the Midlands.

In business since 2000, we employ consultants with at least 15 years practical experience backed up by recognized professional and academic qualifications - ensuring our clients receive first class service.

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Seasons Greetings to all our readers!



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