

Example risk assessment on work-related stress in a small business

Setting the scene

This company provides financial services and has 40 staff. Work can peak around deadlines and the end of the financial year. There was a history of stress-related ill health in the company, which prompted the office manager responsible for health and safety to do a stress risk assessment.

How the risk assessment was done

The manager followed the guidance at:
www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/risk-assessment-advice.

- To identify the hazards, the manager:
 - looked at HSENI's stress web pages at www.hseni.gov.uk/stress, to learn about stress risk factors;
 - talked to members of staff to listen to their concerns and opinions about stress in the workplace.
- He then wrote down who could be harmed by the hazards and how.
- For each hazard, the manager wrote down what controls, if any, were in place to manage these hazards. Where he didn't consider existing controls good enough, he wrote down what else needed to be done to control the risk.

- He discussed the findings with staff and emailed the risk assessment to all employees. He put it into practice, making sure that each identified action was done and ticking each one off as it was completed. He also decided to make it part of the induction process for new staff.
- The manager decided to review and update the risk assessment every year or straightaway if any major changes in the workplace happened.

Important reminder

This example risk assessment is not a generic risk assessment that you can just put your company name on and adopt wholesale without any thought. This would not satisfy the law – and would not be effective in protecting people. Every business is different – you need to think through the hazards and controls required in your business for yourself.

Date of risk assessment: 17/03/17

What are the hazards?	Who might be harmed and how?	What are you already doing?	What further action is necessary?	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
Demands	Accountants, particularly around tight deadlines and end of financial year Support staff, at the same time of year Sales staff, at the end of each quarter and at the end of the financial year All staff, at times of new legislation All staff, dealing with difficult clients	■ Understanding what work-related stress is and what can cause it ■ Responding to a pattern of increased absence due to work-related stress ■ Checking fit notes, and talking to employees ■ Looking for signs of stress in employees ■ Talking to employees	■ Meeting with staff and clients to agree timings etc. for projects ■ Monitoring workloads ■ Planning work to minimise excessive demands ■ Taking on extra resource to support end of year work ■ Talking to employees regularly to gather information, directly or via line managers ■ Employees being encouraged to talk to line managers about upcoming leave etc. and potential difficulties with workload ■ People may not identify time off sick as stress so thinking about whether: - there is an area/job that has high amounts of absence - employees complain about working in a particular area or doing a particular job			
Control	All staff, in economic downturns Junior grades, who have less control	■ Talking to staff about how they feel about their work ■ Giving staff own areas of responsibility	■ Staff survey ■ Anonymous 'vox box' for comments ■ Using the results of surveys and your risk assessment with employees – asking what they think can be done and feeding back on these issues and ideas			
Support	All staff	■ Training managers in spotting early signs of stress ■ Providing details of counselling services for staff ■ Staff can talk to supervisors or managers if they are feeling stressed at work ■ Staff are supported on return to work after a period off with work-related stress	■ Training managers in how to support staff suffering from work-related stress ■ Having a clear commitment to employee wellbeing and a culture of openness ■ Reminding staff they can speak confidentially to managers or supervisors if they are feeling stressed at work			

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Relationships	All staff	■ Training managers in promoting a positive working culture	■ Introducing a zero tolerance approach to bullying ■ Sometimes line managers may be part of the problem so having a range of routes for feedback can be really helpful			
Role	All staff	■ Defining all team roles ■ Staff understanding what their duties and responsibilities are	■ Thinking about whether any staff are particularly vulnerable, e.g. those working alone, young workers ■ Investigating whether there are roles where it is difficult to recruit or retain staff			
Change	All staff, but junior grades are more likely to be affected by management decisions Additional pressures can arise through adapting to changes in staffing etc.	■ Making sure changes are communicated openly so everyone understands the effects they will have ■ Monitoring effects of changes on stress levels so staff have the chance to provide feedback	■ Meeting clients to explain changes and manage expectations ■ Acting on staff feedback so any new pressures linked to changes are discussed			

Assessment review date: 17/03/18

You should review your risk assessment if anything changes (e.g. following a case of stress-related ill health in the workplace or if there are any significant changes, such as new work activities).

For more information see www.hseni.gov.uk/stress