



Royal Mail Group

Safety, Health & Environment Guidance

Preventing and Managing Workplace Stress

Royal Mail Group Safety, Health & Environment Management System Preventing and Managing Workplace Stress Guidance

Introduction

Managing workplace stress is important in maintaining a positive and productive workplace and enhancing employee mental wellbeing. This guide aims to support the management of workplace stress.

Managers can obtain advice on managing workplace stress by:

- Calling the HR Services Advice Centre on 0345 604 3657
- Managers working for Parcelforce Worldwide should call 0345 604 2787
- For web access please go to: <https://www.psp.royalmailgroup.com/irj/portal#>
- Accessing support from the First Class Support service: call 0345 2665060, visit www.rmgfirstclasssupport.co.uk or download the 'Lifeworks' app. New users of the website/app can sign up with the invitation code 'RMG-' and your pay number, e.g. RMG-12345678.

Overview

Royal Mail Group is committed to creating a healthy and safe working environment for all employees and recognises that this includes the mental, as well as the physical, wellbeing of its employees. We acknowledge this responsibility through the application of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) management standards and guidance on stress at work.

We recognise work-related stressors as a potential hazard to health and are committed to managing work related stress in a proactive manner to reduce the personal impact on employees.

The purpose of this guide is to provide information for all employees to help identify, prevent and manage stress in themselves or others and to outline the roles and responsibilities of managing stress in the workplace. This guide does not form part of contracts of employment and we reserve the right to amend this guide from time to time.

Objectives

The objectives of this guide are to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that:

- Areas of work related stress are identified and assessed as appropriate and relevant measures are introduced to control the risk to health
- Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clearly defined and understood in order to achieve successful management of work related stress
- Employees are provided with appropriate information, guidance and training relevant to work related stress
- Employees are aware of their responsibilities in respect of the guidance
- Ways are identified to control and reduce the costs associated with work related stress, be they financial, organisational or personal

Responsibilities

Global Director Compliance & Sustainability:

- Monitor and report on the Royal Mail Group performance on dealing with work related stress
- Actively support and promote the guide

Human Resources (including Safety, Health and Environment):

- Give guidance and support to managers, especially to prevent and help manage workplace stress
- Support employees who report work related stress issues
- Signpost employees to appropriate support and guidance

Occupational Health:

- Support managers and Royal Mail Group business areas in implementing this guide
- Support employees who report stress issues
- Provide access to support: including counselling and the First Class Support service

Managers:

- Use the Guided Conversation for Stress to support an individual suffering from stress
- Use the Group Stress Risk Assessment Tool to support your team with any workplace stress
- Promote the First Class Support service for immediate access to independent support
- Encourage members of the team to sign up to First Class Support digital services
- Access Occupational Health Services where appropriate
- Ensure open, transparent, timely communication between you and your team

Employees:

- Recognise the legal duty to take reasonable care of their own health and safety; and of others who may be affected by their actions
- Raise areas of concern at the earliest opportunity with their manager or union representative
- Follow recommendations made by Occupational Health Services or contact First Class Support for advice on any physical or mental health related matter
- Work with their line manager, union representative, and other individuals as appropriate, to follow the agreed actions laid out in the Guided Conversation for Stress or Group Stress Risk Assessment Tool Action Plan
- Consider signing up to First Class Support digital services

What is Stress?

A wide range of factors can trigger or influence stress reactions. The Health and Safety Executive define stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demands placed on them”. This makes an important distinction between pressure, which can be a positive state if managed correctly, and stress which can be detrimental to health. It is reasonable to assume that:

- Employees are psychologically capable of withstanding reasonable pressures at work
- Employees are subjected to periods of pressure at work

- Short periods of pressure are not necessarily of concern. However sustained and/or excessive pressure over long periods of time can result in anxiety, depression and poor lifestyle patterns. Excessive pressure is commonly referred to as stress and can lead to serious illness

There are three stages to dealing with stress in the workplace: primary, secondary and tertiary:

- The **primary** approach is to identify and address the source of the pressure. This can be achieved through Stress Risk Assessment and remedies could include training, or access to equipment that allows the employee to do their job more effectively.
- The **secondary** approach focuses on ways of coping with pressures; we will all experience times of pressure in our lives and it is possible to build personal resilience to enable us to better cope. In Royal Mail Group there are a range of supportive wellbeing initiatives, these can be accessed through the Health and Wellbeing pages on the Safety, Health and Environment Management platform on the intranet, or through the First Class Support digital services (www.rmgfirstclasssupport.co.uk or download the 'Lifeworks' app – new users register using invitation code 'RMG-' and your pay number, e.g. RMG-12345678).
- The **tertiary** approach is supporting people who are suffering from stress with the use of support services; this may include internal services such as First Class Support (0345 266 5060 or 'live chat' via the website/app) or external support from charities such as Mind.

HSE and Management of Work Related Stress

A wide range of factors can trigger or influence stress reactions. This guide is primarily concerned with those identified as being relevant in the workplace. The table below lays out six factors recognised by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as being key areas of work that, if not properly managed, are associated with poor health and wellbeing, lower productivity and increased sickness absence.

It is important that these areas are considered, potential hazards identified and reasonable steps taken to eradicate them. By removing hazards that are likely to cause stress, it may be possible to prevent stress before it appears.

Areas identified by the HSE as relevant to workplace stress:

- Control - how much input an employee has in the way they do their work
- Demand - an employee's workload, work patterns and work environment
- Relationships - the behaviour of the team around the employee e.g. their manager and colleagues
- Change - organisational and other work related changes
- Role - an employee's understanding of their role, their responsibility and accountability
- Support - the level of encouragement an employee receives from their peers and managers and the availability of training.

Manager Guide

How to identify, monitor and prevent workplace stress in a team

Managers have responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of employees within their area. This extends to a duty to take steps to tackle the causes of stress at work.

Early signs of stress can be varied, but the important thing to look out for is any change in behaviour that is out of character. More information is given in the Occupational Health Guidance Notes, on the Health and

Wellbeing intranet pages and via our First Class Support service (helpline and/or digital services). A manager may need to address workplace stress when:

- An individual in their team shows signs of stress (use the Guided Conversation for Stress to structure a conversation)
- An employee returns to work following an illness – a Guided Conversation for Stress is a supportive tool that can be used in a Welcome Back Meeting
- Results from an employee survey suggest that there are issues which may generate workplace stress
- There are signs of stress throughout a group of individuals or the whole team

How to manage a concern about an individual employee, group of individuals, or whole team

It is important for managers to know their team, and working with them day to day will allow early identification of changes from their normal behaviour which suggests there may be a problem. Managers must respond actively:

- Talk to individuals confidentially and establish whether workplace factors are relevant
- Use the individual Guided Conversation for Stress to guide a conversation and generate an Action Plan to address any workplace factors or ways that work can support with non-workplace factors
- Use the Group Stress Risk Assessment Tool to identify workplace stressors which are impacting a group of individuals or whole team and agree actions which can help to improve workplace stress
- Advise on support services that are available, notably the First Class Support service

Employee Guide

Managing personal stress and stress within colleagues

All employees have a personal responsibility to highlight any concerns that they may have about stress to their manager. This applies whether they have personal concerns or where they may have noticed signs in a colleague which indicate they may have a problem.

If the nature of the concern makes talking to a manager difficult, advice and support is available from the First Class Support service. The employee's role is to:

- Seek advice or help where they believe they are suffering from pressure or stress
- Take positive steps to act on any advice received
- Support others who may be showing signs of stress

Risk Assessment Approach

Managers must monitor the workplace to ensure that safe conditions are maintained. Where hazards are identified, these must be risk assessed with the view to eliminate or reduce the level of risk.

Mental wellbeing should be considered in the same way as physical wellbeing in relation to workplace activities. Therefore routine risk assessments should include consideration of stress alongside physical factors, especially if changes are in prospect. An assessment of risk could be conducted through an individual stress risk assessment (Guided Conversation for Stress) or where appropriate a group risk assessment (Group Stress Risk Assessment Tool).

Specific areas in the workplace which may generate stress (tips on identifying issues and possible actions are shown in the tables below):

CONTROL	
Questions to ask to help identify risks	Suggested actions to take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are employees able to make decisions regarding their responsibilities? • Are employees encouraged to contribute in decision making? • Is the working time flexible – can/do employees take reasonable breaks? • Does the team meet regularly? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give control to individuals by encouraging their input into decision making and take an active role in their team. • Help employees understand how their tasks fit into the 'bigger picture'. • Encourage skills sharing between employees.

DEMAND	
Questions to ask to help identify risks	Suggested actions to take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are employees comfortable with their amount of work? • Do employees take regular breaks? • Are there high turnover and absenteeism rates? • Is the intensity of workload potentially too much or under-challenging for some individuals? • Is the working environment suitable? • Do employees regularly work overtime (paid or unpaid)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure a training plan is in place and accessible by all department members. • Encourage open communication channels for all employees, by ensuring regular contact in a one-to-one setting where possible. • Lead by example and be visible. • Support employees by helping them prioritise deadlines (in managerial roles).

RELATIONSHIPS	
Questions to ask to help identify risks	Suggested actions to take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there issues concerning workplace relationship conflicts within the team? • Are there problems with bullying /harassment? • Do employees feel the organisation has effective procedures to enable them to raise concerns? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the bullying and harassment policy is fully communicated to employees. • Encourage honest and open communication. • Ensure employees are aware of confidential systems for reporting unacceptable behaviour. • Identify ways to celebrate success.

CHANGE	
Questions to ask to help identify risks	Suggested actions to take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the department / unit seen a change in management / structure recently? • Are there arrangements to help employees deal with change? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make employees aware of changes as early as possible. • Establish a system to communicate changes quickly e.g. notice board, texts, email. • Allow employees to have a say in the change where appropriate. • Understand that changes can make people uneasy.

SUPPORT	
Questions to ask to help identify risks	Suggested actions to take
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have employees received all necessary information, instruction, training and supervision? • Can employees rely on managers and colleagues for support? • Are employees made aware of where they can go for support? • Have employees got adequate access to speak to their union representative? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold regular team meetings. • Encourage a healthy work / life balance. • Ensure employees take regular breaks. • Give individuals opportunities to raise concerns. • Make all employees feel part of the team, in particular if people have been off sick, or away on long term leave.

If an employee needs immediate support.

For urgent mental health support in a crisis call the Samaritans on **116 123** (open 24/7) or in the case of a suicide or other emergency situation, ring 999, or 9999 from a Royal Mail landline.

If you are worried that someone is at immediate risk of taking their own life you should stay with that person and take one of the following steps:

- Encourage them to call the First Class Support helpline (open 24/7) or the Samaritans on 116 123 (open 24/7)
- Contact their GP for an emergency appointment or the out of hours support service
- Call their Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) if they have one

Ring 999 (9999 from a Royal Mail landline), NHS direct (111) or go to the nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) department.

Version No.	Date of Change	Author	Description of change	Review Date
1	27/09/16	J. Grant	New guidance document and stress risk assessment process.	27/09/17
2	19/07/21	D Clarke	Updated to reflect changes in support available and introduction of Group Stress Risk Assessment Survey Tool.	01/04/2022