

Contents

- 1. Stress at work unlikely to trigger common cancers**
- 2. But stress can affect your ability to cope with cancer**
- 3. Draft Workplace Inspection notice**
- 4. Volkswagen gives its employees a break from out-of-hours emails**
- 5. More questions about fire risk assessments**
- 6. Now coalition moves towards privatising fire services**
- 7. National No-smoking Day 2013**
- 8. Three new TUC publications this month**
- 9. More open-plan office information from the BBC**

1. Stress at work unlikely to trigger common cancers

A study reported here <http://www.bmj.com/content/346/bmj.f165> finds no evidence of a link between job strain and risk of colorectal, lung, breast or prostate cancers. Data from studies in six countries between 1985 and 2008 was pooled in a meta-analysis which showed no increase in cancer among people who are highly stressed by their work, leading researchers to conclude that breast, prostate, colorectal and lung cancers are probably not triggered by job-related stress. The authors say some previous studies have appeared to show a link between job stress and cancer but, they say, this is probably because of chance, the small size of the studies which makes their conclusions less definite, or factors that have not been allowed for such as shift work, which has recently been associated with breast cancer.

However, the research does not rule out a link between stress caused by a traumatic life event, such as the unexpected death of a loved one, and cancer. The authors note that in a French study, people with brain cancer were much more likely to report that something disastrous had happened to them than people without the cancer – although there was no clear evidence of a difference in work-related stress levels between the two groups.

The study examined data from 12 previous studies in Finland, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and the United Kingdom, involving a total of 116,056 men and women aged 17 to 70. The analysis was carried out by a consortium led by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and University College, London.

The research looked at the degree of control workers have over their job and the pressure to deliver. The job strain the participants were experiencing was categorised as: high stress job (high demands and low control), active job (high demands and high control), passive job (low demands and low control) and low stress job (low demands and high control).

Data on cancer was obtained from national cancer or death registries and hospitalisation, and findings adjusted to take account of differences in age, sex, socioeconomic factors, BMI, smoking and alcohol use. Those who were considered underweight or morbidly obese were excluded from the study.

5% of the study population developed some form of cancer in the average 12-year follow-up, but the researchers found no evidence that those who were more highly stressed were more likely to get cancer than others. The findings suggest that work-related stress is unlikely to be an important risk factor for the four cancers reviewed. And while reducing work stress would undoubtedly improve the psychological and physical wellbeing of individuals and the working population, it is unlikely to have an important impact on the cancer burden at a population level.

The research did confirm other research that work-related stress can affect the heart. They found an association between job strain and an increased risk of coronary heart disease, which suggests that a single validated measure of job strain exposure is capable of showing an association with chronic disease. It is useful to remind ourselves that stress not only causes mental health problems, but physical ones too.

2. But stress can affect your ability to cope with cancer

While psychological stress alone has not been found to cause cancer, stress that lasts a long time may affect a person's overall health and ability to cope with cancer. The US National Cancer Institute says that where people are under stress, they may be less able to cope with the implications of a cancer diagnosis and treatment. People who are better able to cope with stress have a better quality of life while they are being treated for cancer, but they do not necessarily live longer

This factsheet <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/stress> is useful.

3. Draft Workplace Inspection notice

I was asked recently if it would be possible to have a model inspection notice to send to employers. I've also included a notice for sending-out to employees prior to the inspection as well. I'll get this posted on the website as soon as I can. If members need more information about your role as a safety rep, see the factsheet attached to this document

http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/docs/6/n/Doing_your_first_inspection.doc



Notification of a workplace Health & Safety Inspection

Date:

To.....
(Appropriate Manager or Health and Safety Officer)

Location

From:.....
UCU Health and Safety Representative

Location:

Dear

RE: NOTIFICATION OF HEALTH & SAFETY INSPECTION

This is to let you know that I will be conducting a workplace health & safety inspection under Regulation 5 of the Safety Representatives & Safety Committees Regulations 1977.

The inspection will take place on (date)

The inspection will begin at (time)

The inspection will cover the following location(s) and staff who work there:

.....

I request that you also attend. (*This is your choice - delete if appropriate*)

I intend circulating a notice to all staff informing them of the inspection and asking if they have any health, safety or welfare concerns they wish to bring to my attention before or during the inspection.

Yours sincerely

Name.....
UCU Health and Safety Representative



Notice of forthcoming health, safety & welfare inspection

UCU Branch or LA:

Date:

This is to let you know that I will be conducting a formal health and safety inspection of your part of the workplace on behalf of UCU on:

Insert date and time here

If you have any health and safety concerns, or anything you would like me to look at during the inspection, please let me know by (date).....

You may also raise any matters with me that you are concerned about during my inspection tour.

Your name and contact details here

UCU is the representative organisation for all health, safety and welfare consultation with the employer. If you are not already a member and would like more information about joining, please ask me when I am doing the inspection.

Name
UCU health & safety representative.

4. Volkswagen gives its employees a break from out-of-hours emails

According to Reuters, Volkswagen has agreed to give workers in Germany a rest from emails relentlessly filling the inboxes of their Blackberry devices out of hours.

Europe's biggest car-maker and the body that represents its workers have agreed to have the email function deactivated at night, a spokesman for the company said.

Workers will only receive emails from half an hour before the start of flex-time working hours until half an hour after they end, but will still be able to receive and make phone calls.

Daily *Wolfsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* reported works council member Heinz-Joachim Thust as saying that 1,154 employees at Volkswagen's six plants in Germany have a smart-phone device provided by the company.

The works council sought to counter any expectation that employees should be contactable at all the times, thanks to their indispensable "CrackBerry" gadgets, which could heighten the risk of burnout, a psychological syndrome that some studies have said causes almost 10 million sick days a year in Germany.

We say that, regardless of what employers do, there is no substitute for the off switch.

5. More questions about fire risk assessments

Having responded to a couple of enquiries regarding fire precautions recently, I was drawn towards an article by solicitor Warren Spencer that offers a critical view of the fire risk assessment (FRA) requirement under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) (http://www.ifsecglobal.com/author.asp?section_id=445&doc_id=558766&) The article says that while many employers will have found the cost of an FRA prohibitive they have chosen either to tackle the task themselves or to carry on without one. That's dangerous ground for both employers and staff.

The person responsible for the workplace (usually the employer) is required to appoint competent persons to carry out such risk assessments, a duty first carried forward into the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 amendment, from the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulation 1997. The problem is that there is no adequate definition of "competence" in either the Management Regulations or the RRO. Under the RRO, a competent person is defined as in Regulation 7(5) of the Management Regulations, and Guidance Paragraphs 51 and 52. That definition is pretty basic, and says that a competent person is someone who has "sufficient training and experience or knowledge and other qualities" to undertake the measures required. The guidance also suggests they need an understanding of current best practice, awareness of their own limitations and the willingness to seek advice, and may need specialist knowledge and formal qualifications in more complex or technical situations. But how much training, experience, and knowledge is sufficient?

On this measure competence could be interpreted as being related to risk, in that different levels of competence may be necessary where varying degrees of risk can be present. The real question of competence has never been properly addressed, and the guidance to the Management Regulations is so general as to be near enough useless. There are still no recognized criteria or accreditation processes that give any indication of the competence of fire risk assessors. And that's not the only weakness.

Determining what is suitable and sufficient can be a problem. For example, what if a fire officer decides that a FRA compiled by an assessor who the employer considers competent, is not suitable and sufficient? The article points to one case where an assessor has been held liable, charged and convicted. And if assessors are at such risk from enforcers, who would want to do the job? Hence my view that risk assessors should not be unilaterally appointed by employers, but such appointments should be by mutual consent. There is a role for UCU safety reps here – under Regulation 4A of the SRSC Regulations, employers

have a duty to consult with us on how they make such appointments. UCU should negotiate to extend that consultation to include more participation in appointments, such as determining appropriate experience and qualifications, recruitment processes, short-listing, interviews and final decision-making on appointments.

The article points out that the Chief Fire Officers Association is about to clarify its position on the competence of fire risk assessors. But will this guidance provides an adequate defence for a risk assessor whose assessment has been deemed not suitable and sufficient? I am not sure that it will, so I'll keep a watch on how this develops.

If I've already circulated this, it's worth repeating anyway. The Department for Communities & Local Government website has gone, absorbed into the dreaded "dot gov" site. The fire risk assessment guidance for educational premises can now be downloaded from

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/14887/fsra-educational-premises.pdf

6. Now coalition moves towards privatising fire services

Following on from our report in Issue 65 on the sale of the national Fire College, it seems that governmental enthusiasm for privatisation continues unabated. In a letter to the Regulatory Reform committee delivered in January, junior minister for local government Brandon Lewis has called for regulatory changes to enable fire and rescue authorities to contract out their services to the private sector. Reported in the Daily Mirror on February 8th, the government is already considering handing-over the Cleveland Fire & Rescue authority to a mutual organisation.

Mirror report at <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/privatised-fire-and-rescue-services-secret-1593277> and <http://dnwssx4l7gl7s.cloudfront.net/38degrees/default/page/-/documents/Letter%20from%20Brandon%20Lewis%2023%20Jan%202013.pdf> for Lewis's letter and policy justification

7. National No-smoking Day 2013

The British Heart Foundation is promoting national No-smoking Day again – this year it is Wednesday 13th March. The website <http://www.nosmokingday.org.uk/> gives download posters and access to other resources to support the day. Check what your employer does to help those members of staff who still smoke to stop; it might be an opportunity for a useful joint campaign if your employer is up for it. As reformed smokers, (I believe I will be a smoker all my life; it's just that I stopped practicing 9 years ago) all of us here at UCU health & safety advice are virulently anti-smoking as you might expect, and are more than happy to promote activities and support those of our members who, as we did, want to kick the habit.

8. Three new TUC publications this month

a) TUC manifesto - Health & Safety: Time to Change

The TUC have published their manifesto to reclaim health and safety. Download a copy from [https://www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/531/TUC Health and Safety Manifesto Time for Change.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/531/TUC%20Health%20and%20Safety%20Manifesto%20Time%20for%20Change.pdf) There will be a series of factsheets to support the manifesto; the first, on the value of inspections by the regulator, is here <http://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace/tuc-21954-f0.pdf>

Hugh Robertson, TUC senior policy officer for health, safety and rehabilitation and, having served 3 terms, retiring employee representative on the HSE Board, has agreed to be the main speaker at the Health & Safety Fringe meeting at 2013 Congress, and will address the issues in the Manifesto. Good opportunity for those of you attending Congress to come

along, meet Hugh and contribute to the debate about how we can campaign around some of these important issues within UCU Branches and LA's.

b) Work and well-being: A trade union resource

As I said in my e-mail of 13th February, "Well-being has become one of the most over-used phrases in the English language. It helps to sell anything from yoghurt to holidays, pillows to pills". So begins the text of this new TUC publication. It examines the relationship between work and health; gives some clarity on how to promote general health in the workplace; reminds us of the need for proper evaluation of any measures introduced; and the importance of trade unions being involved in those initiatives where employers have sought to make deliberate distinction between work-related health and safety issues and "well-being", and thus exclude trade unions from the process. Download a copy from

https://www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/532/TUC_WORK_AND_WELL-BEING.pdf

c) Time-off for safety rep training

The leaflet emphasises that time-off for trade union safety representatives training is not qualified by 'reasonable' as the provision for other local trade union officers is. Useful addition to safety reps resources. Download from

http://www.tuc.org.uk/tucfiles/536/TUC_guide_Time_off_for_training.pdf

9. More open-plan office information from the BBC

Thanks to Tony Brown, UCU H&S Rep at UCL for this – I missed the actual broadcast as we were away. I've circulated it to the list, and put it in here for the record.

It is a BBC World Service Program in 'The Why Factor' series. The embedded programme is here with website information, and there is the usual BBC pod-cast available:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01483mq?dm_t=0,0,0,0,0

Here's the accompanying text:

Millions of us work in open plan offices, whether in modern, efficient buildings with the latest technology and design, or in more traditional set-ups with rows and rows of desks. Mike Williams asks why the open plan office has become the norm in many places, and whether they are as good for the workers, as for the bosses' bottom lines.

Open plan offices have many advantages: a higher density of people means big savings in real estate costs. They also make it easier to communicate, help or seek help from co-workers. They even make your boss seem more accessible. But the downsides are considerable. People find they get distracted by co-workers' phone calls and conversations and scientists report that this impacts on your concentration and productivity.

The links on the main web page are useful for identifying supporting research.

The downloadable pod-cast link is:

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/worldservice/whyfactor/whyfactor_20130215-1950a.mp3

This, and the associated comments is also useful for making arguments:

<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/the-secret-life-of-buildings/articles/work-the-balance-of-power>

Contact UCU Health & Safety Advice
UCU Health & Safety Advice is provided by the Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, and is available for 3 days each week during extended term times. The contact person is John Bamford: (e) jbamford@ucu.org.uk (t) 0161 636 7558