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Stress at Work

Stress now accounts for 6.5 million days of absenteeism every year according to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Stress is a common illness amongst workers. It can be physical or psychological. Physical stress is a general conditional brought about by the body working in the wrong environment. Physical stress causes direct damage to the body e.g. eye strain, backache, repetitive strain injury (RSI) etc. Many employers are aware of these stresses and have tried to improve conditions in the workplace by using ergonomic designs. On the other hand, psychological stress can be caused by a number of situations such as:

- Unrealistic deadlines for projects
- Being asked to do a task which has not been clearly explained
- Introduction of a new software application
- Losing information due to a computer breakdown or a virus
- Bad equipment that slows work down and frequently breaks
- Bullying at work

Some people cannot get away from their work. With the use of pagers, mobile phones, laptop computers and modems, it means that even when the individual has left the office they can still carry on with work, causing even more stress. The HSE has developed guidelines to help businesses manage this stress effectively. The new guidelines focus on six key areas

- *demands* - the standard is that employees indicate that they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs

- *control* - the standard is that employees indicate that they are able to have a say about the way they do their work
- *support* - the standard is that employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors
- *relationships* - the standard says that employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours e.g. bullying at work
- *roles* - the standard is that employees indicate that they understand their role and responsibilities
- *changes* - the standard is that employees indicate that the organisation engages them frequently when undergoing an organisational change

In addition there must be systems in place locally to respond to any individual concerns in any of the six areas. Initially launched by HSE Scotland, where at the last count nearly 40,000 Scots said they were affected by stress in the workplace, it has relevance across the country. HSE Scotland said that the new approach aims to provide practical support to ensure healthy working lives for employers and employees. For more information please contact the Health and Safety Executive.

Website Certification

W-Mark is the first global website quality certification process. Websites applying for certification will be audited against six criteria, including appearance, accessibility and

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consistency. Obtaining W-Mark certification shows that an organisation has an approved website, that it is committed to excellence and is standards compliant. This certification is available via the IQA in the UK and for further information please visit www.iqa.org

Standard on Social Responsibility

ISO have begun the process of developing an international standard on social responsibility. The process is expected to take three years with publication in 2008. The standard will not be a management system standard or for certification purposes, but will provide guiding principles on social responsibility. Chair of the Working Group on Social Responsibility is Mr Cajazeira of Brazil. He has said "ISO's future Social Responsibility guideline standard is of great interest to stakeholder groups just as regulators, labour and non-governmental organisations that have previously had limited contact with ISO. We shall no doubt need to be innovative in order to engage with them fruitfully, while implementing ISO's fundamental principles, including openness and transparency in the work." The Vice Chair is Ms Catarina Munck af Rosenschold of Sweden. She has said "Our ambition is to develop guiding principles with global relevance that will be useful to organisations worldwide in establishing, implementing, maintaining and improving the way they address social responsibility". For further information on the ISO developments please visit www.iso.ch. If you cannot wait three years to read the ISO Guidelines, then the BSI also have some guidelines on social responsibility available from www.bsi-global.com.

World Economic Forum

At the recent World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland, ISO had the opportunity to demonstrate the usefulness of their standards as tools for tackling many of the world's challenges. The ISO Secretary General Alan

Bryden pointed out that ISO Standards are an essential tool for facilitating trade, spreading knowledge, and sharing technical advances and good management practice. Many of the current ISO initiatives support the topics on the global agenda e.g. climate change is supported by the ISO 14000 family of environmental standards and corporate governance and social responsibility is also an ISO initiative. The ISO was taking part in the WEF for the first time this year, having become a member in 2004. For further information please visit www.iso.ch.

Greenhouse Gas Emission Targets

The Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and on mechanisms aimed at cutting the costs of reducing emissions, in order to address possible changes in the climate. In effect, the Kyoto Protocol requires the world's developed countries to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 5% from 1990 levels by 2008-2010. Under the Kyoto Protocol companies in certain industry sectors are required to reduce their emission levels. If they more than meet their targets then they can receive emission credits that can be traded with companies who have failed to meet their targets. The two mechanisms that allow emission credits to be traded are the Greenhouse Gas Verification scheme (GHGEV) and the United Nations' Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). BSI are in the process of applying for CDM accreditation to provide internationally recognised validation and verification services. This will complement their GHGEV activities. For further details please visit www.bsi-global.com.

Symbols across the World

A new guide has been released by ISO to ensure that symbols are understood by consumers worldwide. ISO/IEC Guide 74, Graphical symbols - Technical guidelines for the consideration of consumers' needs, aims to

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reduce the levels of misunderstanding of symbols. The project team that developed the guide say in their introduction “Poorly designed and researched graphical symbols, and also the proliferation of graphical symbols with the same intended meaning, can cause confusion for consumers. Such problems will become ever more common in an age of mass travel, mobility of labour and global reading unless graphical symbols are designed, evaluated and standardized in accordance with procedures set out in the relevant International Standards”. Although intended for standards writers, it will also be helpful to public authorities, manufacturers and service providers, consumer associations and graphic designers. The project leader, John Perry, said “The use of graphical symbols in signs, on labels and in product instructions and other product documentation has a number of advantages. Well designed symbols stand out visually, save wordy explanations and convey the intended message across language barriers”. For more information on the guide, please visit www.iso.ch.

Scam Awareness

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has recently launched a “Scam Awareness” campaign. The aim of this campaign is to warn the public about fraudulent and deceptive scams. The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) believes that small businesses are more at risk to being taken in by such scams because they do not have the resources to carry out thorough background checks. There have been a range of scams aimed at Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), for example, official looking documents are sent to SMEs claiming that they were in breach of Health and Safety rules and need to pay to set things right. The OFT have published a list of 10 scams to be on the look out for and for further information visit their website or www.theregister.co.uk

European Directive on Vitamins and Minerals

A new European Directive that is to come into force in August will ban the sale of more than 300 vitamins and minerals. The directive contains a list of vitamins and minerals that are approved for sale in the EU and excludes many that are currently on sale in the UK. A major chemist chain in the UK has already lowered the dose of some of its more popular brands and removed or substituted some nutrients to ensure that its products comply with the directive. However, despite trying to obey the new directive they have upset some health campaigners. The issue is that they did not clearly inform the public that they have reformulated their products, in some cases the doses had been halved. Other lobby groups are concerned about these new directives as they feel this may drive people into buying unregulated products from the Internet and are campaigning for the ban to be overturned. (Daily Telegraph, February 2005)