

Letter to Branches

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To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues

Depression & Stress Awareness - Depression Awareness Week 20 - 24 April 2009

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) has urged managers in the workplace to be informed about signs of depression, as Depression Awareness Week approaches.

The Depression Awareness Week runs from 20 - 24 April 2009. The Health, Safety & Environment department suggests Safety Representatives concentrate on the issue during the week with meetings, Inspections and local awareness campaigns.

Depression Awareness Week 2008 focused on the theme of employment and this is to remind Safety Representatives and other Branch Officials of what is expected of employers and managers. Our advice is to raise this on Safety Inspections and at Health and Safety Committee meetings with Senior Managers so it's on the record. Raise the matter with visiting HSE and LA Inspectors also. In the current climate the problems will certainly increase and it's important to proactively raise members concerns around work related stress and depression. Share copies of this LTB and attachments with Managers and Managers Union Safety Reps. Organise local joint events.

ACAS says research shows that bosses underestimate how much their colleagues and employees are suffering from stress, anxiety and depression.

It also reveals that almost 3 in every 10 employees will have a mental health problem in any given year. People suffering from depression take an average of 30 days off for each sickness absence spell.

In dealing with the sensitive issue of depression in the workplace, ACAS say Managers should:

- be aware of changes in day-to-day behaviour, such as not coping at work, under pressure, seeming distracted, loss in motivation or absenteeism
- do not make assumptions, since inconsistent behaviour may well be a "blip", rather than the signs of a more serious problem
- get to the root of the problem by approaching the individual privately, and informally asking if they are feeling alright
- take responsibility if the cause of the problem is work related,
- consult the Safety Representative
- talk to the employee about changes which may be possible if the issue is a domestic one, such as work overload, poor working practices and methods
- if the employee has not already found support, point them in the right direction of help from their GP or a counsellor

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- create a culture which eradicates the stigma mental health can carry by introducing key policies and making support options available, like employment assistance programmes or access to occupational health
- ensure stress and ohs policies are implemented in practice by means of the training of management and staff
- ask the company to provide advice regarding exercise, a balanced diet and a healthy work pattern, since evidence suggests these can be useful in treating mild depression.

The above 10 point ACAS plan is a good concise plan of action which Managers should be adopting and for Health and Safety Reps to pursue implementation of.

Yours Sincerely

Dave Joyce

National Health, Safety & Environment Officer

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