

## Stress up one-third in AXA

The impact of work-related stress on individuals can be incredibly debilitating but its impact on business cannot be understated. According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) industry in Britain loses 12.8 million working days to stress, anxiety and depression, which the CBI states costs UK industry some £12.25 billion. Whilst it isn't possible to calculate exactly how much work-related stress costs AXA, information supplied by the company shows that average number of days absent per employee due to stress has increased alarmingly by over 30% in both AXA Life and AXA Insurance since 2003.

In a time of cost challenges across the UK AXA Group, addressing work-related stress needs to be high up the management agenda, not only to ensure the impact on individuals is reduced, but also for pure financial reasons.

Amicus are pushing the company to work with the union and undertake the HSE stress audit across the whole organisation in an effort to reduce both the impact of work related stress on individual employees and the cost to the company in loss of workdays through sickness and reduced business efficiency. Hopefully we will be able to announce some good news on this in the next few weeks.

The stress audit pilot jointly undertaken by Amicus and AXA, in the Birmingham and Bolton offices in 2004/5 demonstrated that if the causes of stress were correctly identified, then a positive impact could be made in reducing sick and improving the workplace environment. This process now needs undertaking across all the operating companies of the UK organisation with hopefully the same results.



Pic: Amicus Union Reps 'give stress the squeeze' at the AXA Centre in Bristol on Valentines Day.

### What causes work-related stress?

There are many causes of work-related stress (or stressors as they are known). According to the NHS they can include:

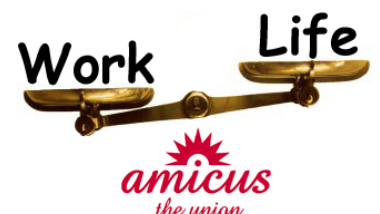
- boring and repetitive work
- having too much to do in too little time
- too little (or even too much) training for the job
- feeling confused about how you fit in within a team or department
- having responsibility for others
- having poor relationships with others
- being subjected to bullying, racial or sexual harassment
- inflexible work schedules
- poor physical working conditions
- lack of personal control over work activities
- lack of communication and consultation from management
- a negative blame culture operating in the office
- lack of support to develop skills

### Individual symptoms

- struggling to concentrate
- unable to make decisions
- being short tempered
- feeling tired most of the time
- sleeping badly
- feeling stretched and unable to cope
- increased drinking and smoking
- feeling though you've achieved nothing

### Effects on individuals

- anxiety or depression
- heart disease or high blood pressure
- menstrual problems
- sexual impotence
- increased asthma attacks
- back pain
- gastrointestinal problems
- increased drinking and/or smoking



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