



**Stress is the biggest health and safety problem at work and statistics show that the problem is generally getting worse.**

**ACCORD members tell us it's getting worse in HBOS too.**

**Join us in our campaign to return dignity to all HBOS workplaces and tackle the causes of stress once and for all.**

**The theme of the Union's 2004 Conference was, 'Tackling Stress', and our campaign to return dignity to all HBOS workplaces starts now. Did you know that 63% of our sample survey of HBOS staff fell into "high risk" category for health and wellbeing? That's a real concern for us all and simply can't be ignored. Help us to help you – support our campaign and encourage all of your colleagues to do the same. Working together we really can make a difference!**

## The causes of work-related stress

Defining the causes of work-related stress is complicated. Some major surveys have identified the main contributors to stress as:

- | Long working hours
- | Excessive workload
- | Job insecurity
- | Lack of control
- | Job cuts
- | Bullying
- | Poor management
- | Threats of violence

All of these "contributors" feature in the calls ACCORD members make to the Union's helpline. It seems that, despite the framework agreements that we've negotiated with HBOS, when it comes down to what goes on in the workplace, there's far too much misinterpretation, misapplication and misunderstanding of the rights that we've fought hard to secure. We're determined to change this unhealthy trend.

## Pressure -v- Stress

Cary Cooper, Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at the Management School, Lancaster University and an expert on the subject of stress, addressed ACCORD's Conference in May. He told us that we need to distinguish between pressure and stress, ... *"there's always going to be pressure, it's when pressure exceeds your ability to cope with it that it becomes stress."*

All ACCORD members work in a pressurised environment and, according to our survey, a worryingly high percentage of them are unable to cope with the amount of pressure that's placed upon them. They are not just under pressure – they are stressed!

## Tackling Stress

So what are we going to do about it? There's so much that's been written on how to tackle stress (see "Further Information & Help") all of which makes it clear that employers have a responsibility – both legal and moral – to tackle the issue.



It is also clear that there is little evidence that employers are looking deeply into the organisational causes of stress.

ACCORD is determined to work with HBOS to change this.

Our campaign will call for a Group-wide risk assessment to be carried out which will:

- | Identify the hazard
- | Decide who might be harmed and how
- | Evaluate the risk
- | Record the significant findings, and
- | Review the assessment at regular intervals

Part of our approach will be to negotiate an effective stress policy that will:

- | Recognise that stress is a health and safety issue
- | Recognise that stress is about the organisation of work
- | Be jointly developed and agreed
- | Indicate commitment from top management
- | Guarantee a “blame free” approach, and,
- | Apply to everyone!

We'll also be campaigning for the appointment of a Group Organisational Health specialist whose sole responsibility will be to ensure the health and safety of all HBOS colleagues. Unless and until organisational health is someone's job, it's difficult to see how the necessary cultural changes will occur.

## Stress & The Law

It's sad but true that the threat of compensation claims affects the level of commitment employers seem to give to tackling work related health issues. An important Court of Appeal judgment on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004 (Barber -v- Somerset County Council) on occupational stress has made it clear that:

- | The employer needs to be more proactive in looking after the health and welfare of its employees in respect of mental injury, and,
- | Employees, whilst not having to resort to screaming, shouting, tears or tantrums, still have an obligation to bring their mental health problems to the attention of the employer.

So, we'll be bringing HBOS's responsibilities well and truly to its attention, but Members have a responsibility too. If you're suffering from work related stress symptoms you must tell your employer. Your manager has a duty to investigate and act in an attempt to arrest the condition.

If they fail to do so, they have failed in their common law duty of care to you.

We will support every member who considers themselves the victim of such negligence – up to and including Court action where legal advice so recommends.

But we don't want to get to that point – prevention is always better than cure. Here's how you can help us to help you.

## How Is It For You ?

To strengthen our approaches to HBOS, we want you to give your workplace a stress MoT. The TUC developed this tool back in 2002 with the aim of giving Union Reps a device to help identify the main issues that need to be addressed by producing a “stress map” of the workplace. The MoT and advice on how to use it is available by emailing [info@AccordHQ.org](mailto:info@AccordHQ.org). If your workplace “fails” the MOT, we want to know about it!

In the meantime, there's plenty of support you can tap into as a benefit of your ACCORD union membership.

## Further Help & Advice

The Union campaigned tirelessly for the launch of an employer funded Employee Assistance Programme. This is available to all HBOS employees and includes access to face to face counselling. You can call the helpline on a completely confidential basis, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

**Call 0800 072 1629**

If you want to speak to a solicitor about your situation, use the Union's Legal Advice line. This is free to all members and their immediate family, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

**Call 01455 255114**

Don't suffer in silence – we've got a team of paid officials who can help and support you if you think you're being placed under unreasonable pressure at work.

**Call 01189 341808**

If you want a copy of the booklet produced by Labour Research Department, “Tackling Stress At Work” email [info@AccordHQ.org](mailto:info@AccordHQ.org). We'll send you a free copy of this useful publication that includes information and advice and lists further resources that you can access.