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HSE Safety Cornerstones Newsletter

A newsletter of practical compliance and safety tips provided by

Crendon Insurance Brokers Ltd

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The Economic Consequences of Inadequate Mental Health Support at Work

The world's biggest professional health and safety membership organisation, the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), reiterated the need for increased support of mental health at work, after the release of England's Chief Medical Officer's annual report on 9 September.

In the report, compiled at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience at King's College London, Chief Medical Officer Dame Sally Davies highlights the economic costs of failing to adequately provide for employees suffering from mental illness. According to the report, a total of 70 million working days were lost because of mental illness in the United Kingdom in 2013. And since 2009, the number of sick days lost because of stress, depression and anxiety has jumped by 24 per cent.

Estimates suggest that mental illness costs the UK economy between £70 billion and £100 billion in lost productivity, benefits payments and work absences every year, which equals 4.5 per cent of the UK's GDP.

In addition to chastising the NHS for a woeful lack of funding—mental health support spending makes up only 13 per cent of the entire NHS budget, despite causing 28 per cent of illnesses—Dame Sally Davies' report calls for more employer support. The report encourages implementing workplace mental health wellness programmes or offering some of the following general support:

- Give people with mental health problems the option of flexible working hours to keep them working and maintaining regular contact during sick leave.
- Require managers to initiate early and regular contact with employees during sick leave. By sensitively talking with employees on sick leave who are suffering from mental health issues, you can help them return to work earlier.
- Reduce the stigma of suffering from mental illness in the workplace by talking about it openly and periodically assessing employees' mental wellness. By treating mental health with the same seriousness as physical health, employees will be more likely to disclose their condition.
- Offer temporary adjustments such as part-time work or altered work hours upon return from sick leave in order to ease the transition.

The sheer number of people suffering from mental health problems is astounding—according to Dame Sally Davies, one-quarter of all adults suffer some form of mental illness, and 60 to 70 per cent of people with common mental problems such as depression and anxiety are workers.

In the past, the public considered mental health problems a type of anomaly. Clearly mental health problems are much more widespread, and a proactive approach to supporting employees who may be shouldering this burden can improve the mental well-being of your employees and the financial well-being of your business.



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Fee for Intervention is 'Effective and Should Stay'

An independent report has concluded that the Fee for Intervention (FFI) scheme implemented by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in October 2012 has proven effective and should stay. FFI is a cost-recovery scheme which requires those who break health and safety laws to recover the HSE's related costs of inspection, investigation and enforcement action.

The report, compiled by a professor of public policy at Liverpool University, representatives of the GMB trade union, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Department for Work and Pensions, found that the HSE has consistently and fairly implemented the scheme, and found no evidence to suggest that enforcement policy decisions had been influenced in any way.

Detractors of the FFI scheme had claimed that requiring rule-breakers to recover HSE expenses would motivate investigators to fabricate bogus health and safety violations, but no such evidence has been found.

According to the report's authors, the professional approach adopted by HSE inspectors has been essential to minimising any challenges raised by the scheme during its first 18 months. The report claims that any concerns voiced about FFI have not materialised to a significant extent, and that inspectors and duty holders continue working together to improve health and safety management.

Due to FFI's effectiveness, the report suggests that business leaders are increasingly more accepting of the idea that those who fail to meet their legal health and safety obligations should pay the HSE's costs, a view held by both the HSE and the government. The report reasons that FFI shifts the costs of health and safety regulation from the public purse to those businesses that break health and safety laws, thus easing the financial burden of the public. The report states that:

- Fears that FFI would be used to generate revenue have been proven unfounded.
- While not popular with some inspectors and duty holders, FFI has been embedded effectively and applied consistently.
- There is no viable alternative that can achieve the same aims.



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Recent HSE News, Myths & Prosecutions

Northern Ireland work-related deaths drop by almost 50 per cent

The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) published its annual report in September, which confirmed a dramatic reduction in work-related deaths. The number of all work-related fatalities between 2013 and 2014 shrunk to 10, compared to 19 in the previous year. However, farm deaths continue to be the biggest challenge facing workplace health and safety in Northern Ireland. The report found that while the number of work-related agriculture deaths fell to four, compared to 11 last year—a 67 per cent reduction—it still accounted for 40 per cent of the overall deaths. The report also summarised the HSENI's recent work done from 2013 to 2014, which included carrying out 6,350 workplace inspections and delivering 325 one-to-one mentoring visits to small businesses. Although the HSENI is satisfied with the results, it is determined not to rest on its laurels.

Chips cannot be served in a paper cone

A Glasgow woman who ordered chips from a chip shop to take away asked for her chips to be put in paper and wrapped in a cone, rather than in the normal plastic tray. She thought they would be easier to eat and carry in a cone as she walked around the shops with her husband. The shop's proprietor responded by saying she was unable to accommodate the request because it was against health and safety. The customer was advised to remove the tray and wrap them up herself. The HSE Myth Busters Panel concluded this was yet another egregious instance of poor customer service disguised as a health and safety concern.

Parents banned from saying goodbye at school playground

A newspaper reported that during ongoing construction work at a south London primary school, parents were banned from saying goodbye to their children in the playground due to the school's health and safety fears. The school maintain that the extensive construction work has limited access to the school, and that an influx of parents and children every day in the playground could cause a dangerous situation. The school faced an immediate backlash, and plans are now in place to revise the arrangements and make the situation more comfortable for both students and parents.

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