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Health & Safety News Bulletin



Contents

How 'headline anxiety' impacts workers mental health 3

Company fined after worker suffered fall from height 5

Spring manufacturer sentenced after worker severs fingers 6

£2 million fine for corporate manslaughter at a recycling facility 7

DSEAR fine for chemical company after employee suffers burns 8

Skip company fined after employee's arm crushed 9

How 'headline anxiety' impacts workers mental health

Since news broke of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, images of bombings, wrecked buildings, wounded citizens and families fleeing for safety are still being spread across social media, news programmes, papers and websites.

With events like this, and the pandemic, having a detrimental impact on our mental health, employers need to know how they can help their employees.



Headline anxiety

Naturally news like this causes depression, anxiety, stress and low mood, which Rupert Saunders, Senior Clinical Advisor at Headspace, says is completely normal.

For those not in Ukraine, it is brought into our lives by access to constant news updates, with this sense of fear being continuous since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and even before that due to stresses over Brexit.

"We have been living in a state of sustained trauma the last couple of years ... and I think people are tired and fatigued".

As sensational headlines get more attention, media outlets often end up focusing on disaster reporting. Consuming too much of this type of news can be toxic and have a serious impact on your mood.

In today's media it can be difficult to differentiate between news and comment, especially dependent on the political and social stances of those news outlets, which if not obvious, can also have a negative impact on their audience.

Impact of the pandemic

Clinical psychologist Tamara Cavenett, President of the Australian Psychological Society, added that we may be impacted by the news of Ukraine in a way that we might not have been three years ago.

"It's not surprising if you're overwhelmed by the possibility of another global disaster and lost sense of predictability around what's happening in the world".

She added that vicarious trauma is possible from what you see on social media, or what you see in the news.

The workplace and headline anxiety

As people begin to return to work in some way, whether that be hybrid, working in the office, or still working from home, employees feel less resilient and stressed.

Despite feeling less able to cope than they did before the pandemic, workers still feel under pressure to disguise their mental health struggles from colleagues.

As well as this, colleague discussion on world events and sharing news articles, can feel like a constant reminder of the 'headline anxiety' which employees may be trying to escape whilst at work.

More than 800,000 people experienced work-related stress, anxiety or depression in 2020-2021 according to the [Health and Safety Executive](#) (HSE). This alongside the stress of the pandemic, news and personal circumstances can have serious negative impacts on employees mental health.

How to manage your headline anxiety

Ways to deal with how you are feeling include:

- manage your exposure by taking regular breaks from the news and social media;
- watch reliable news outlets;
- seek good news;
- stick to a routine to help life feel a bit more predictable;
- try to allocate certain times to worry and talk through it, whilst keeping the rest of the day to focus on daily life;
- try to take care of your body through physical activity, eating well, drinking water and prioritising sleep;
- avoid the temptation to self-medicate with alcohol and other drugs;
- allow yourself to cry when you need to;
- share what's on your mind with friends and family, or a counsellor or mental health service; and
- if you are mentally able, look to see how you can help those impacted.

As well as this, employees can be strict about a work-life balance and creating a calm workspace when either personal circumstances, world events, or work is causing poor mental health.

How employers can help their employees

Employers can help employees with their stress or poor mental health by:

- encouraging communication between both employees and management on mental health;
- allowing flexible working;
- creating a supportive environment;
- checking-in with employees;
- asking employees to be mindful when sending or discussing topics that could be a trigger to others.

Company fined after worker suffered fall from height

Infiniti Roofing and Construction Ltd has been sentenced for breaches of safety regulations after an employee fell through a gap in scaffolding, sustaining multiple injuries, whilst working on a building in Scarborough.

In November 2017 a 20-year-old labourer who was working on the roof fell three metres through a gap in the scaffolding, onto an office roof below, causing injuries to his left wrist and hand.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that when the labourer was moving insulation panels on the roof, he stumbled and fell through the gap. Although the company had taken measures to reduce the risk of a fall, the scaffolding did not fully extend along the roof in the area where the insulation panels were stacked and stored.

The fall resulted in the labourer sustaining a dislocation to his left wrist and a broken bone in his hand which required him to undergo several operations.

Infiniti Roofing and Construction Ltd pleaded guilty to breaching the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, was fined **£22,667** and ordered to pay **£7,228** in costs.

HSE inspector Jayne Towey commented: "The accident could have been prevented if edge protection, constructed and installed to industry standards, was in place where there was a risk of a fall from height".



Spring manufacturer sentenced after worker severs fingers

A spring manufacturing company has been fined after an employee had two fingers of his right hand severed whilst attempting to lubricate a bandsaw.

In October 2019 a labourer employed by Hanson Springs Ltd in Rochdale, was assisting in the cutting back department to cut sections of steel spring using a vertical bandsaw when the blade began to smoke and squeal.

The worker decided to replace the blade, as on inspection it appeared heavily worn. He attempted to lubricate the new blade by pressing a cardboard tube of wax onto the exposed section of it whilst it ran. The tube was drawn in, drawing in the worker's hand too, severing the middle two fingers at the first and second knuckle.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that although the worker had received training from the supervisor in using the machine, it was of poor quality with no formal competency assessment, nor was he certain that he could use the machine unsupervised.

Also, despite lubrication of the blades in this manner being standard practice within the company, it was unnecessary as the machine was self-lubricating. The worker had been shown how to do this during training in order to minimise the time needed for the blade to become greased using the inbuilt lubrication system and therefore operational.

Operational management was not aware of this dangerous practice and therefore no safe method of lubricating the blades had been provided.

Hanson Springs Ltd pleaded guilty to breaching the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 was fined **£200,000** and ordered to pay costs of **£5,394**.

HSE inspector Peter Lennon commented on how this incident could have easily been avoided, and that employers should "ensure they carry out an assessment of the risks and put in safe system of works for the operation of all machinery".

"Employers should also ensure that adequate supervision, instruction and training is provided to workers".



£2 million fine for corporate manslaughter at a recycling facility

A metal recycling firm was fined £2 million following a guilty plea to corporate manslaughter after an employee was killed by a machine in 2017.

As part of a three-year joint investigation carried out by the West Midlands Police and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) where hours of CCTV footage were examined as evidence, three directors of Alutrade were sentenced and fined following a number of severe safety breaches that led to the fatal accident.

On 24 June 2017, 34-year-old Stuart Towns was accessing an area beneath a hopper that fed scrap metal onto a conveyor belt, known as the "Biffa Line", through a broken gate. A few minutes later colleagues discovered a Towns's body who had suffered fatal head injuries and was pronounced dead at the scene.

Alutrade was previously warned about poor machine access controls, including lockable gates, to prevent people from entering the vicinity of the machine while it is operating. The firm had installed gates but at the time of Mr Towns's death, the gate was broken. During the investigation, the HSE discovered that the company had bad safety culture where the managing directors would turn a blind eye to unsafe working practices among their employees.

Analysis of the CCTV footage presented shockingly poor practices at the recycling plant, which included workers jumping on top of the scrap metal in hoppers to help clear the blockages or lifting people 18 feet above the ground to clear blockages using a forklift truck.

The Crown Prosecution Service originally brought charges of gross negligence manslaughter against director Malcolm George, director Kevin Pugh and the company's health and safety manager Mark Redfern who pleaded guilty, but ultimately, they were also fined on the basis of breaching the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 for failing to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of their employees. George was fined **£15,000** with costs of **£7,109**; Pugh was fined **£5,318** with **£3,854** costs; and Redfern was fined **£2,635**, with the company paying his costs.

Alutrade was fined **£2 million** and ordered to pay **£105,514** in costs.



DSEAR fine for chemical company after employee suffers burns

A Hull-based manufacturer was sentenced and fined after a 31-year-old employee suffered 13% superficial burns to his arm and hand following the ignition of flammable vapours.

On 21 August 2017, a batch of hairspray was being mixed in a 10,000-litre stainless steel mixing vessel. As ethanol was pumped directly into the vessel through pipework, other ingredients of the hairspray mix (liquid and powder) were added to the vessel through a manway lid on the top of the vessel. The mixing process then required the addition of heat through the integral steam coil within the vessel.

As the employee was adding powders into the vessel through the lid using a metal scoop, the flammable vapours around the lid ignited, briefly engulfing his upper torso.

An investigation carried out by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the extraction system installed to remove flammable vapours from the area was not adequate to prevent the creation of a flammable atmosphere. The ignition source was likely the metal scoop or build-up of static electricity on the worker's clothing.

Robert McBride Ltd pleaded guilty to breaching the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres (DSEAR) Regulations SI 2002/2776. The company was fined **£480,000** and ordered to pay costs of **£13,441.80**.

After the hearing, HSE inspector David Stewart said: "Duty holders should carry out a DSEAR risk assessment in areas where there is a potential for the creation of explosive or flammable atmospheres in order to identify adequate control measures."



Skip company fined after employee's arm crushed

Bateman Skips Ltd of Keynsham, Bristol has been prosecuted and fined following an incident where an employee sustained crush injuries to their arm.

On 30 May 2018, an employee was asked to repair a conveyor belt that fed the picking station. Whilst realigning the belt, his arm was drawn into the mechanism and injured. The Fire and Rescue service had to free the employee's arm.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigated the incident and found that the company had failed to ensure there was adequate training and suitable safeguards for dealing with blockages and adjusting the equipment.

Bateman Skips Ltd pleaded guilty to breaching the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, at Bristol Magistrates' Court. They were fined **£50,000** and ordered to pay costs of **£10,205.80**.

HSE inspector Berenice Ray, commented on the incident: "Those in control of work have a duty to assess the risks and devise safe methods of working to provide the necessary information, instruction and training to their workforce. Employers must ensure that the power source of machinery such as this is isolated and physically locked off whenever the guards are removed."



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