

# Managing workplace stress

We all use the term stress in our daily conversations and we all know what we mean by it since we recognise the signs and symptoms in ourselves and others. A common definition sees stress as a physiological response to undue pressure brought about when there appears to be a gap between how a person perceives the demands being made on them and how they view their ability to cope.

With the increased demands being made upon managers and their employees to achieve more with fewer resources at a time of unprecedented change, stress is on the increase and greenkeeping is not immune to these pressures.

The prospect of increased civil liability claims for stress has been raised following the much publicised case of John Walker verses Northumberland County Council in 1994. This test case set a new legal precedent under which employers may in future be liable under the Health and Safety at Work legislation if employees can prove that they suffered work related illness due to undue occupational stress.

Apart from the prospect of costly litigation, why do employers and management need to take stress management seriously?

The reasons are clear: If occupational stress builds up to unacceptable levels, then employee welfare and productivity will suffer. Surveys undertaken by the HSE and others suggest that the problem is now seen as a major contributor to work-related illness

by **BRIN BENDON**

**Brin will be conducting a free session on supervisory management during BTME 96, in the Royal Hall on Thursday January 25 from 1-1.40pm. There's no need to book - just turn up on the day**



and sickness absence. Up to 40% of sickness absences may be stress related.

Dr Vernon Coleman estimates that for every employee on the payroll, stress costs about £1,000 per year in lost time due to stress related illness. Stress costs British Industry something like £20 billion a year, making Britain a world leader in the damage that stress does.

How do we account for these trends? Professor Tom Cox suggests that workplace stress is an organisational issue and that employers and managers should consider whether work design and management which result in excessive and unreasonable pressures are posing a risk to health.

The signs of workplace stress can be observed in reduction in output, higher wastage and error rates, weaher planning and control of work, poor motivation and commitment, erratic or poor time-keeping, poor customer service and conflict and tension between colleagues.

Effective stress management can't just cure the symptoms, it has to look at the cause. Change

and uncertainty, lack of clear objectives and inflexible and over-demanding schedules all contribute to occupational stress.

What should our response be? The first step must be to raise awareness of stress as a serious health and safety issue and ensure that practical steps are taken in relation to the day to day planning and organisation of work. We need to raise awareness first because it is something that people are reluctant to discuss. We need to get across the message that it is not wimpish to admit to experiencing stress. Stress is not down to individual susceptibility or weakness.

Finally, we need to invest in management training to prepare Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers for this additional responsibility.

● *Brin Bendon is a Management Training Consultant who has a background in behavioural sciences. He is the director of Vector Training, a training consultant specialising in Human Resource Management and is an approved provider of BIGGA's Supervisory and Management Courses.*

## QUIZ



Janet



Sami



Carol



Louise



Bill



Scott



Vickie



John



Ken



Neil



Pauline

Match up the sporting pursuit to the BIGGA member of staff. There are a couple of bogus pursuits thrown in just to confuse you.

■ Janet Adamson, Sami Collins, Carol Dutton, Louise Lunn, Bill Lynch, Scott MacCallum, Vickie Peckham, John Pemberton, Ken Richardson, Neil Thomas and Pauline Thompson.

Now choose from:

■ Basketball, Football, Swimming, Bungee Jumping, Rowing, Trampolineing, Cricket, Middle Distance Running, Marbles, Shinty, High Jumping, Netball, Cross Country.

Answers on Page 32.