Employers must ensure that staffing levels and the workforce skills profile align with expected organisational outputs to prevent harmful work-related stress being generated.

Work demands must be managed at safe levels

Work demands are one of the most common sources of work-related stress and a serious work-related health hazard causing illness and injury to workers.

When work demands are unrealistic - unachievable or unreasonable, workers are far more likely to experience work related stress. Extreme or longlasting stress is harmful and can lead to serious illness or injury to workers.

Your employer must implement safe work systems and procedures that minimise the risk work demands pose to workers' psychological and physical health This safety system must include processes and procedures that ensure a safe staffing level is maintained.

A safe staffing level is a risk control measure that results in the number of workers (capacity) and the workforce skills profile (capabilities) aligning to the organisational work output

Safe staffing levels checklist

These are five key things your employer should, at a minimum, be doing and have in place to ensure safe staffing levels:

- **Organisational workload and job demand assessment** with their workers to quantify and qualify what a safe workload is for each specific job role, map the work tasks involved and identify the time needed to complete work tasks.

- **Workload and task assessment**: Quantify and qualify the organisational workload, understand the work tasks involved (e.g time to complete and complexity of tasks), then ensure staffing levels and resources align to meet expected organisational outputs.

- **Workforce skills assessment:** Identify the skills workers' need to do work tasks; have a process to identify and support workers' training and development to match skills needed – don't ask staff to do work they are not yet competently skilled to do!

- **Workload management system**: monitor workload peaks and troughs, recruit new staff to maintain staffing levels that align to organisational output, ensure processes to reallocate and redistribute work tasks as necessary.

- **Monitor and review staffing levels regularly**: Consult with workers, HSRs and union reps to identify risks relating to work demands, including work demands that are too high (e.g. unrealistic timeframes or resource constraints) or too low (e.g. highly repetitive or monotonous work), then make systematic adjustments to staffing levels and task allocations to address work related stressors. Agreement.

Work demands - a big problem and serious health hazard

Work demands or pressures are the second highest driver of mental stress, injury and illness, claims in the Comcare (Commonwealth) jurisdiction for the last ten years and are trending upwards.

Workers experiencing high work demands, such as unrealistic KPIs, workloads, time pressures, and resource constraints, often report feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope. While those workers experiencing low work demands, such as repetitive or monotonous tasks, often feel disengaged or underutilised and undervalued.

In either case, when work demand issues are not effectively managed workers are far more likely to experience work-related stress. Extreme or long-lasting stress is harmful and can lead to serious illness or injury to workers.

Work demands - the impacts

Worker impacts

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Burnout
- Anger and/or mood swings
- Problems sleeping
- Diminished performance
- Disengaged or withdrawn from work.

Organisational impacts

- Poor workplace culture
- Negative or strained work-team relations
- Increased worker injury and illness
- Reduced productivity
- Higher employee turnover
- Increased absenteeism
- Affiliate or client complaints.

Look out - knowing the risk factors

Context (how work is managed and organised)

- Organisational management and systems functions
- Organisational change
- Inadequate staffing and or poor resourcing
- Interpersonal relationships at work
- Lack of career development and or training
- Incoherent decision making and control from work.

Content (what the job involves)

- Work environment and equipment
- Task and job design
- Workloads and performance expectations
- Work schedules and organisational outputs
- Worker skills, capabilities and training affiliate or client complaints.

LOOKING FOR ADVICE?

This information was produced by the Staff Association and paid for by union members. Every member contributes to the resources, strength, and capacity of our union.

Members are encouraged to email or call our team at csstaff@cpsu.org.au or speak directly with your Delegate or Staff Association Organiser.

NOT YET A MEMBER?

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