



## **Home Retail Group Stress Policy (UK & ROI)**

### **Introduction**

This policy is part of the Home Retail Group Business Principles and supports the Company's commitment to maintaining a working environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle.

The Company recognises that it has a duty to take reasonable care to ensure that employees' health is not placed at risk through excessive and/or sustained levels of stress at work. Furthermore, it has a responsibility to assess the nature and extent of risks which may contribute to unacceptable levels of stress within the workplace and to implement and maintain suitable measures to control these.

The aim of this policy is to raise awareness of the conditions under which individuals or teams can become subject to unacceptable levels of stress at work and to explain how such conditions will be assessed, monitored and managed.

### **Definition and causes of stress**

The Health and Safety Executive defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them". It is important to be aware that stress is a state and not an illness.

There is a distinction between well managed/controlled pressure and stress. If managed correctly, pressure can be a healthy state which can provide positive challenges and experiences and help to improve performance. Excessive pressure, leading to stress, can become harmful and destructive to an individual's health and well-being.

It is generally recognised that stress is often generated by a variety of causes, including pressures in the workplace as well as pressures in an individual's life outside work.

Workplace demands that lead to stress can include: excessive targets and workloads; insufficient resources; long working hours; rapid change; conflicting priorities; uncertainty or insecurity; poor communication; lack of involvement; inappropriate management style; or lack of control. An employee's inability to effectively monitor and manage their workload may also contribute to workplace stress.

## Symptoms of stress

Individuals can be affected differently by stress in similar situations, however, common symptoms of stress can be identified. Individuals may display poor or erratic time keeping; persistent short term absenteeism; loss of motivation and commitment; increased irritability, anxiety or depression; lack of concentration; and a reduction in output or productivity.

The impact of workplace stress can often be wider than the individual concerned. Similarly, the same source of stress may affect more than one individual at a time. Teams that are impacted by workplace stress may display a high level of labour turnover or persistent absenteeism within the group or they may consistently fail to achieve set objectives. Other issues may be, a general increase in disciplinary or employee relations issues; increasing staff turnover; increased error rates; or an overall reduction in the team's output or productivity. As well as impacting on individuals and teams, these outcomes may also have an adverse effect on the Company's efficiency and performance.

## Assessment and management of stress

### 1 Stress Risk Assessment

The Company has a stress risk assessment in place as part of its wider health and safety risk assessment process. This document is available on the Intranet or from HR or your manager.

The risk assessment is based on the Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards. The standards cover six broad areas of potential causes of workplace stress: demands; control; support; relationships; role; and change. The risk assessment outlines the measures used by the Company to assess potential stresses in these six areas.

Workplace studies, staff surveys and consultation processes will also be used to identify areas of the business where workplace stress is an issue requiring attention.

### 2 Organisational Framework

In order to maintain a healthy and effective working environment, the Company is responsible for providing a clear management framework which includes:

- a clearly defined business strategy and Company objectives;
- an organisational structure which supports the needs of the business plan;
- an appropriate framework for internal and external communications;
- the encouragement of employee involvement;

- clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- clear contractual terms and conditions of employment;
- regular appraisal and feedback on employee performance;
- provision of relevant training and development opportunities;
- effective management of change.

### **3 Management Responsibilities**

All levels of management have a responsibility to ensure that they deal with staff in a fair and consistent manner. In particular, they are responsible for:

- organising work tasks and jobs to ensure that potential stress is minimised;
- ensuring that employees have the skills, resources and training to do their jobs properly;
- setting realistic and achievable performance targets for both individuals and teams;
- encouraging ideas and two-way communication, especially on issues which directly impact upon employees at work;
- ensuring that employee performance is regularly appraised and that appropriate and constructive feedback is given;
- maintaining an open management style that encourages employees to discuss issues affecting their work.

Where ongoing problems are identified which cannot be resolved locally such as excessive hours being worked, persistent tension and conflict, or consistently reduced productivity, then appropriate advice and guidance should be sought from HR or, where appropriate, Occupational Health.

### **4 Departmental Responsibilities and Support**

HR, Health and Safety, Occupational Health and Management Development all have a role to play in providing and implementing effective procedures for the Company and providing advice and guidance to managers and employees. These include:

- effective health and safety policy and risk assessment programme;
- fair discipline and grievance procedures;
- effective absence management procedures;
- appropriate job and organisational design;
- support on reviewing working practices;
- effective recruitment and selection procedures;
- effective appraisal, training and development opportunities;
- effective policy on equal opportunities and bullying/harassment;
- the provision of an effective communications framework; and
- the monitoring of the working environment and physical working conditions.

The HR function has responsibility for monitoring specific organisational data and taking action as necessary in conjunction with appropriate line management. Depending on the business area, such data may include:

- labour turnover and stability data;
- sickness and absence data;
- feedback from exit interviews;
- feedback of relevant data from disciplinary or grievance interviews;
- employee survey data; and
- corporate social responsibility data.

As far as is reasonably practical, support will be given to individuals who are suffering from stress related ill-health or absence in order to maintain necessary standards of performance at work or to facilitate an individual's return to work following absence. This may include referral to specialist counselling where necessary.

## **5 Employees**

In addition to the above, employees have a responsibility at work to manage their time effectively and to raise any issues in the workplace that may lead to stress at the earliest opportunity.

In achieving this, employees are encouraged to discuss issues of stress with their line manager before they get out of control. Where the issue is related to bullying, harassment or victimisation and it involves the individual's line manager, the individual may feel more comfortable discussing the issue with HR. Further information is contained in the Company's Equal Opportunities and Bullying and Harassment Policies, available on the Intranet or from HR.

The Company will also ensure that non-work related matters affecting performance at work are treated confidentially, sympathetically and constructively by management in as far as is reasonably practicable.