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Stress at work

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1. Introduction and purpose

This document forms part of the European Medicines Agency's (EMA) Health and Safety policy. It details the arrangements at the Agency to help prevent work-related stress.

The relevant Dutch legislation Working Conditions Act (in Dutch: '*Arbeidsomstandighedenwet*') and the Working Conditions Decree (in Dutch: '*Arbeidsomstandighedenbesluit*'), collectively referred hereinafter as "the relevant legislation", set out specific requirements about psychosocial burden. EMA finds it appropriate to follow these requirements.

Under the relevant legislation, the employer is obliged to pursue a policy aimed at preventing or limiting psychosocial burden if this poses a risk within the organisation. The relevant legislation clarifies that employees bear joint responsibility for health and safety with their employer. Each employee is obliged to take care of their own health and safety when at work, as well as that of the other persons.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the staff at the Agency, hereinafter referred to as "EMA" or "the Agency", as defined in the ensuing Section 3.

3. Definitions

Stress: is the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them. Pressure is an integral part of all work and can help motivate people, however, excessive pressure can lead to stress. People can be subjected to pressures both inside and outside the workplace. Either or both of these combined can result in harmful levels of stress and cause a wide range of physical and psychological effects.

Psychosocial burden: this can be direct or indirect and can manifest itself in various ways, including the following: psychological or physical aggression, work pressure, sexual harassment in the workplace that causes stress and can result in physical, psychological and social effects.



Managers are, for the purposes of this policy, defined as anyone who supervises staff.

Staff: for the purpose of this policy are defined as Temporary Agents, Contract Agents, National Experts on Secondment, trainees, interims, visiting experts and ad hoc experts.

Other persons: Delegates, contractors, liaison officials.

Workplace stressors: causes of stress originating in the workplace.

4. Policy statement

The Agency is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment for staff and recognises the importance of psychological as well as physical wellbeing.

This policy describes what arrangements are in place to identify and reduce workplace stressors for staff and the responsibilities of relevant staff members. It should be read in conjunction with the supporting document: Stress – Information for Staff ([link here](#)) which is available on the microsite [the Fire, Health & Safety](#) web page. All staff are required to familiarise themselves with and follow the advice in the Stress – Information for Staff document.

5. Arrangements

The Agency aims to minimise the risk of work-related stress through a risk management process through the following arrangements:

- Identify workplace stressors in order to eliminate stress or control the risks from stress and consult with staff on all proposed action relating to the prevention of workplace stress.
- Provide training for managers and staff in stress management and increase general awareness of stress and methods to prevent and combat workplace stressors.
- Identify staff who are suffering from stress based on their symptoms and behaviour and address the causes.
- Provide access to support systems and occupational health support for staff affected by stress caused by either work or external factors as appropriate.

5.1. Identifying and addressing stress

The Agency conducts a periodic general risk inventory and evaluation which includes an assessment of physical and psychological burden. At least every three years the Agency will ask questions (e.g. in a staff survey or by other means) regarding potential causes of work-related stress. Results of stress-related surveys are forwarded to the Agency's Fire, Health and Safety Officer so that they can be assessed in relation to Health & Safety standards.

Subject to prioritisation by senior management, an action plan is drawn up to address any significant issues identified, including potential workplace stressors. The techniques used to address any such issues will depend on the stressors identified, and may include focus groups, individual/sector-specific risk assessments and staff questionnaires.

The Agency is responsible for initiating any corrective action. The Agency can only take action to mitigate issues (e.g. psychosocial burden) that have been identified or brought to its attention.

5.2. Consulting with and supporting staff

The Agency considers that the involvement of staff is a vital part of managing stress.

Staff are consulted about stress through the Health and Safety Group and [the Stress Steering Group](#). Management is responsible for consulting with the Health and Safety Group and the Stress Steering Group about any issues that may have psychosocial or stress implications for staff.

Staff Committee and Health & Safety Group Representatives are responsible for representing staff and communicating with them about work-related stress matters.

Staff may report any workplace stressors, issues or concerns to their line manager (who might escalate, as appropriate) or to the Staff Relations and Support Department, or to the Staff Committee.

The Staff Committee is responsible for making Staff Relations and Support Department aware of any workplace issues or stressors that cannot be dealt with at a local level.

The Staff Committee assists Staff Relations and Support Department in addressing any workplace stressors and provides support with implementation of any necessary actions, including developing and arranging awareness campaigns.

The Agency has "Confidential Counsellors", who are appointed by the Executive Director. A staff member who feels that he or she is experiencing stress resulting from psychological or sexual harassment can approach a Confidential Counsellor. This support is an alternative to contacting a manager or a member of the Staff Committee or the Occupational Health Physician. The aim is to provide the staff member with a choice, so that they can speak to someone they feel comfortable with.

5.3. Providing information and training

The Agency provides information and training on the risks of work-related stress as well as on the measures aimed at preventing or limiting it, including learning and development opportunities designed to assist managers and staff to recognise and to manage stress. Information on available courses can be found on the EMA Talent Hub.

All staff and managers are provided with information on stress ([see link](#)) and in the 'Stress – Information for Staff' , including:

- The nature of stress and the distinction between stress and pressure
- The signs and symptoms of stress
- The possible causes of stress at work
- Practical measures to be taken to avoid problems
- Steps to take in the event of a problem.

6. Responsibilities

1. Staff Members are responsible for:

1.1. Reporting any stress-related issues or concerns to any of the following channels: their line manager (who might escalate, as appropriate) or to the Staff Relations and Support Department, or to the Staff Committee.

1.2. Discussing the requirement to attend stress management training with their line manager.

- 1.3. Ensuring that managers are aware of any significant difficulties that may be encountered in their personal life that may affect their ability to cope with their job.
- 1.4. Being aware of the support mechanisms in place to assist with life in the Netherlands.
- 1.5. Being watchful for other employees and colleagues who may suffer from difficulties such as bereavement or separation which may reduce their ability to cope with workplace stressors. Assisting managers and supervisors in providing practical support.
- 1.6. Working with colleagues in a positive manner to ensure that no actions resulting from their behaviour cause offence or harm through physical, verbal, non-verbal conduct, harassment, humiliation or isolation.
- 1.7. Being aware that bullying and harassment is not tolerated whatsoever and reporting all incidences internally through line management, Staff Relations and Support Department, the Staff Committee or the Confidential Counsellors.

2. Heads of Division/ Task Forces are responsible for:

- 2.1. Ensuring that stress-related risks to their staff have been assessed and are adequately controlled.
- 2.2. Working with Staff Relations and Support Department, the Staff Committee and other relevant staff to implement any necessary actions to control workplace stressors in their Division.

3. Managers are responsible for:

- 3.1. Ensuring good communication between management and staff, particularly where there are organisational and procedural changes.
- 3.2. Ensuring staff are fully trained to discharge their duties.
- 3.3. Ensuring staff are provided with meaningful developmental opportunities.
- 3.4. Assisting Staff Relations and Support Department, the Staff Committee and other relevant staff with implementing any necessary actions to control workplace stressors in their team.
- 3.5. Monitoring workloads to ensure that people are not overloaded.
- 3.6. Monitoring working hours and overtime to ensure that staff are not working excessive hours.
- 3.7. Monitoring annual leave consumption to ensure that staff are taking their full entitlement.
- 3.8. Attending training in stress management as required.
- 3.9. Ensuring that staff are not subject to bullying and harassment and that high standards of professional behaviour are maintained.
- 3.10. Acting to resolve work-related stress issues where possible within the team.
- 3.11. Escalating to the Head of Division or Staff Relations and Support Department any workplace issues or stressors that cannot be dealt with at a local level.
- 3.12. Being vigilant and offering additional support to members of staff experiencing stress outside work, for example bereavement or separation.

4. Administration and Corporate Management Division (A Division) is responsible for

- 4.1. Initiating any corrective action required as a result of the survey, monitoring progress and ensuring that it is completed appropriate to the case.

- 4.2. Consulting with the Stress Steering Group, Health and Safety Group, the Staff Committee and other managers regarding any proposed actions to address workplace stressors and issues.
- 4.3. Providing assistance in managing individual cases of stress, recommending learning opportunities or the relevant external services, or referring the individual for occupational health support where appropriate.
- 4.4. Organising learning opportunities in the area of wellbeing and stress management which is accessible to all staff and managers.
- 4.5. To maintain dialogue with the Occupational Health Physician to identify work related stress factors.
- 4.6. Informing the Fire, Health & Safety Officer and Stress Steering Group about work-related stressors.

5. The Staff Committee is responsible for:

- 5.1. Raising any workplace issues and stressors with Staff Relations and Support Department, management, the Fire, Health & Safety Officer or the Stress Steering Group.
- 5.2. Reporting work-related stressors for discussion at the Stress Steering Group and working with the Group to suggest controls for them.
- 5.3. Working with Staff Relations and Support Department to address any workplace stressors or issues that are identified as part of the relevant staff surveys.
- 5.4. Assisting staff members with any stress-related issues or concerns.
- 5.5. Implementing any necessary actions and assisting with stress awareness campaigns.

6. The Fire, Health and Safety Officer is responsible for:

- 6.1. Providing staff with this policy and the "Stress – Information for Staff" document as part of the briefing procedure.
- 6.2. Arranging for the "Stress – Information for Staff" document to be regularly reviewed, updated at minimum in line with the review of this policy, and making it available to all staff on the intranet.
- 6.3. Assisting Staff Relations and Support Department and other relevant staff by providing advice on the implementation of any necessary actions to control workplace stressors.
- 6.4. Informing the Stress Steering Group about work-related stressors.

7. Stress Steering Group Representatives are responsible for:

- 7.1. Carrying out the objectives of the Stress Steering Group, as described in the mandate of the Group.
- 7.2. Reporting work-related stressors for discussion by the Stress Steering Group and suggesting controls for them.
- 7.3. Raising any workplace issues or stressors that cannot be dealt with at a local level.
- 7.4. Assisting Staff Relations and Support Department and other relevant staff/entities to implement any necessary actions to control workplace stressors.

8. Health & Safety Group Representatives

8.1. Reporting work-related stressors for discussion by the Health & Safety Group and suggesting controls for them.

8.2. Raising any workplace issues or stressors that cannot be dealt with at a local level.

7. Related documents

1. Stress – Information for staff: available on the Fire, Health and Safety microsite:

http://emeaplus/EMEAPlus_WebsiteNew/WS/html/fhs.html

2. Dutch government website on stress:

<https://www.arboportaal.nl/onderwerpen/themas/psychosociale-arbeidsbelasting>

8. Changes since last revision

Amended policy.

Amsterdam,

[Signature on file]

Emer Cooke

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