



# body and workplace mapping

members' factcard

union for professionals



## MAPPING TECHNIQUES

Immediate dangers are often easy to identify. People readily spot unguarded machines, missing edge protection or exposed electric cables. Less noticeable are risks to our health, because it can be a long time – often decades – before ill health or disease is recognised. Added to which, people may be reluctant to voice health concerns because of fears, vulnerability, embarrassment or concerns around confidentiality.

Certainly some employers use confidentiality as a false excuse to withhold data from union health and safety representatives. While it may be reasonable under data protection to refuse disclosure of personal information, there is no excuse for failing to share with H&S reps data on incidence and ill health prevalence among the workforce. Health and safety should be about cooperation and collaboration, and this includes sharing our observations and intelligence on accidents and ill health, so that together we can understand health and safety trends and promote joint problem-solving.

This factcard introduces mapping techniques: some simple steps you can take to unearth the health hazards in your workplace or business area. The technique is supported by the TUC and Health and Safety Executive and has been validated and published in peer-reviewed journals.

## WHY USE MAPPING?

- Mapping techniques enable reps to investigate risks to ill health at work.
  - Involving constituents ensures we develop a collective approach, protecting individuals who may
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fear being singled out by management. Mapping uses a fun approach to encourage discussion, analysis and strategy development.

- Reprs demonstrate there is something they can do. After all, once something's visible, it's hard to ignore!
- Remember that under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977, H&S reps can investigate potential hazards, complaints by employees and causes of accidents and ill health. Carrying out a body mapping session is a way of achieving this so H&S reps may legitimately negotiate time to meet with constituents in this way.

## WHAT ARE THE MAPPING TECHNIQUES?

- **Body mapping** helps gather health information such as: ailments, diseases, injuries, aches and pains, stress symptoms, reproductive problems and other common patterns of ill health. It can help reps prioritise further investigation and action.
- **Workplace mapping** helps gather hazard information such as: chemicals, work at height, lone working, bullying and harassment, long hours, failure to consult, etc. Again, this can help reps to prioritise their representations.

The following explains how to use these techniques in practice.

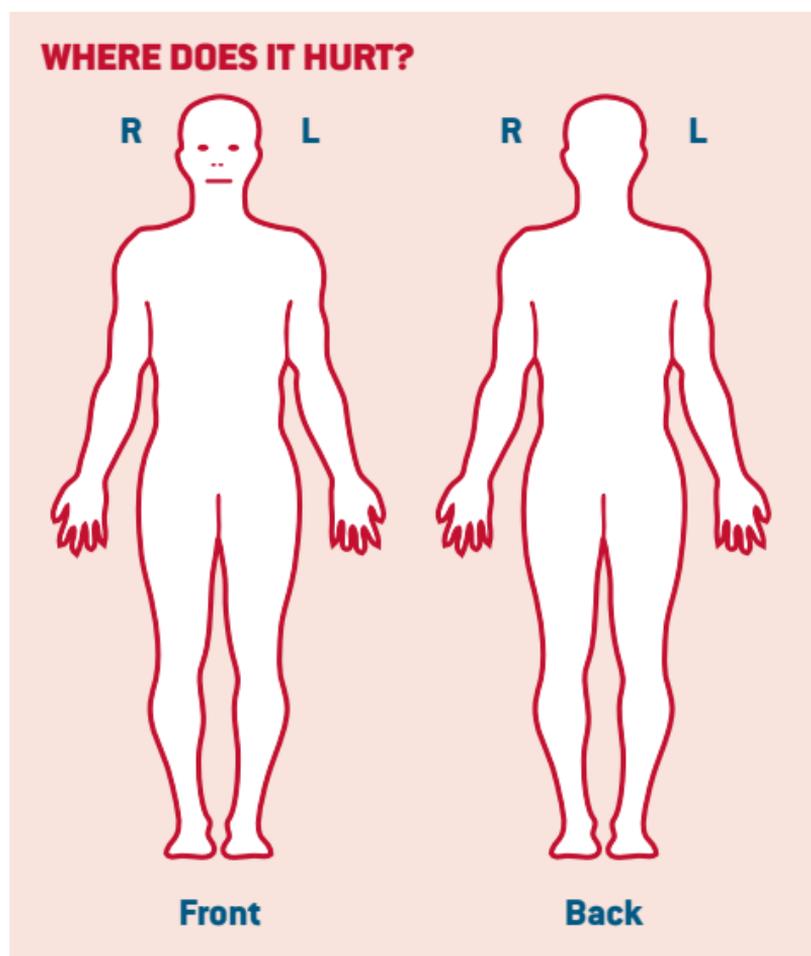
## HOW TO BODY MAP

### METHOD

There is nothing difficult about body mapping. It can be done in groups of about 6-10 people, preferably grouped by job or task. For each group, provide flipchart-sized outlines of the front and back of the human body.

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Ask group members to mark X on areas of the body they believe are affected by their work. You can use different coloured marker pens or post-it notes to distinguish different symptoms if you wish, eg aches and pains, allergies, stress symptoms.



Guaranteeing confidentiality is essential. If you suspect the group is uncomfortable about sharing their problems, go for the theoretical approach by proposing they indicate where they believe possible symptoms may show up.

Encourage the group to share their observations. For instance, when discussing stress you can develop the discussion from physical to psychological and behavioural symptoms, plus

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how the latter can impact on (a) an individual's work-life balance and (b) the health of the team, division or business.

## **ACTION**

Consider whether any new problems been identified or whether suspected problems are more extensive than previously thought. Agree collectively on initial findings and conclusions, using these to pursue an evidence-based approach with your management to inform risk assessments and associated joint action plans.

If improvements are made following discussions with management, make sure your constituents are informed about them and continue to monitor the situation to make sure they really do work. Please also let the Research & Specialist Services team know so Prospect evidence can be collated.

Body mapping could be re-visited after improvements are implemented to measure the impact.

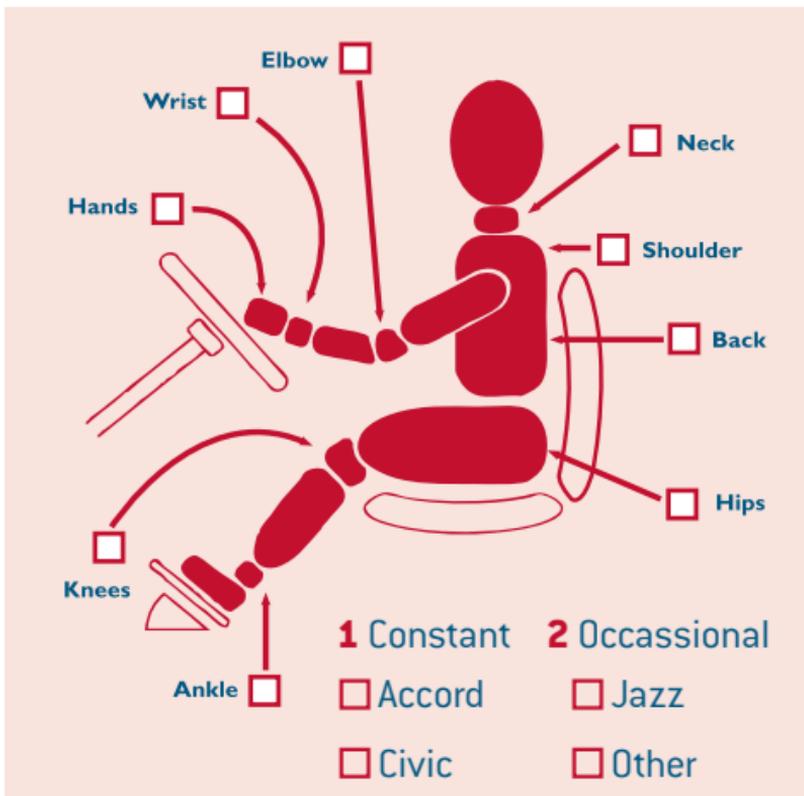
## **ALTERNATIVE METHOD**

If you have difficulties in getting a group of members together, you could use the technique by giving every member a chart to complete on their own with instructions for use. Your Prospect organiser could assist (see case study, where Prospect HQ designed the body map template). However this technique is less effective as the real benefit of body mapping is bringing a group of members together to get them talking about shared problems and to identify solutions.

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## CASE STUDY: NATIONAL TRUST BRANCH

In 2008, Prospect's NT Branch conducted a body-mapping exercise following suspicions that complaints of back and neck pain were linked to driving a type of pool car. The results pinpointed one model as the problem, so reps could make an evidence-based approach to management about vehicle purchase policy.

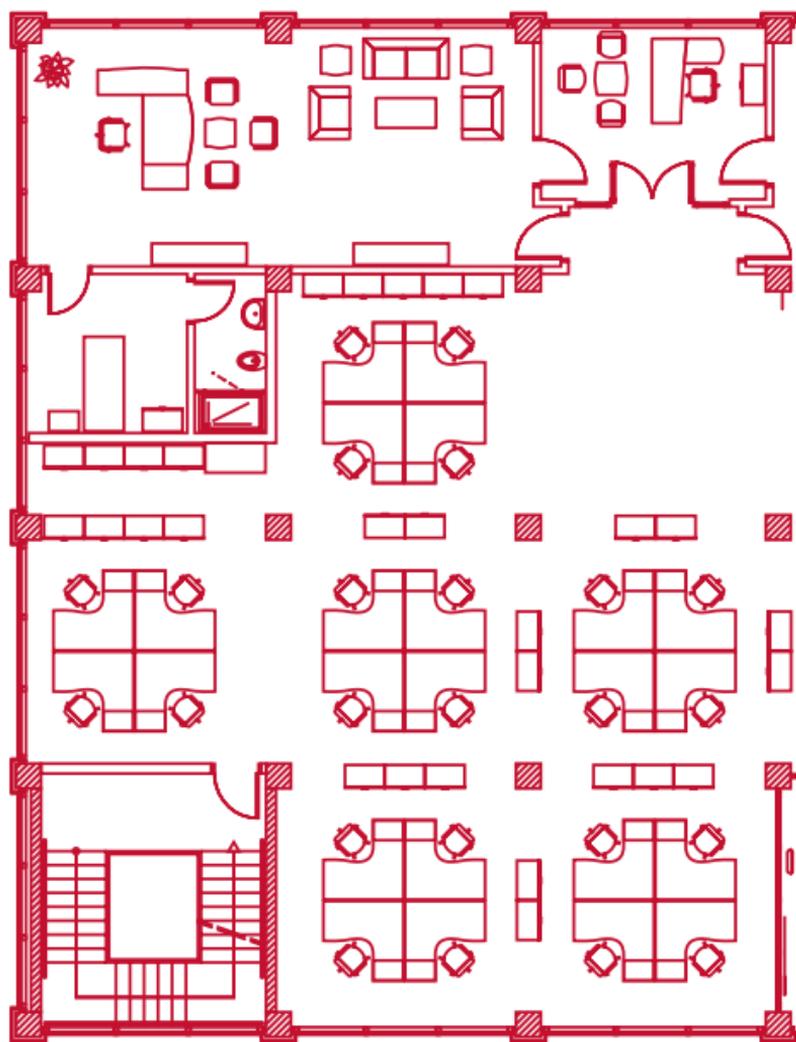


## HOW TO MAP YOUR WORKPLACE

This time you draw the physical layout of your workplace, such as your office. For those of you who are field workers, this could be your 'patch'. In either case, the process seeks to connect observations of patterns or trends.

For instance, workplace mapping may reveal that one part of the workplace is giving rise to higher

levels of headache or sickness absence. This may be attributable to a problem with the work environment, such as air flow or the presence of a bully. Alternatively, it may highlight a higher risk of a road traffic incident because a geographical area contains a particularly dangerous stretch of road or because its size creates greater driver fatigue.



Like body mapping, workplace mapping provides a picture. It can follow on from body mapping and build the evidence base. It can also be used retrospectively, where workers draw from memory a former workplace or environment. This can help establish the link between work and health problems that have developed over a period of time, such as occupational cancer.

## REFERENCES

- Keith M; Brophy J (2004) *Participatory mapping of occupational hazards and disease among asbestos-exposed workers from a foundry and insulation complex in Canada*. International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health 10 (2):144-153
- Keith M; Cann B; Brophy J (2001) *Identifying and prioritising gaming workers' health and safety concerns using mapping for data collection*. American Journal of Industrial Medicine, 39:45-21

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Hazards Detective  
[www.hazards.org/detective/index.htm](http://www.hazards.org/detective/index.htm)
- ILO Barefoot Guide  
[www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/ses/info/publ/barefoot.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/ses/info/publ/barefoot.htm)
- Seeing the Workplace with New Eyes  
[http://safemanitoba.com/new\\_eyes.aspx](http://safemanitoba.com/new_eyes.aspx)
- HSE interactive stress site  
[www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/signsandsymptoms.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/furtheradvice/signsandsymptoms.htm)

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Free to Prospect members.  
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