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WHAT TO DO WHEN THE HEAT IS ON

While the mercury may have dipped in recent days, workplace temperature is a perennial health and safety issue that will become increasingly significant as our weather gets more extreme.

But when addressing the effect that temperature has on our health and safety, there's more to consider than the reading on the thermometer. So whether you're struggling in the heat or cold, read Prospect's new guidance on how to maintain the right environment.

[Read the guidance](#)

REMINDER: PROSPECT ENERGY SECTOR HEALTH AND SAFETY SEMINAR, 30 OCTOBER

Prospect is holding a health and safety seminar on 30 October 2018 on the topic of human and organisational factors, which is the theme of Powering Improvement in 2018.

The seminar, which will be held at New Prospect House in London, aims to raise reps' awareness of the principles of human and organisational factors – that systems, procedures, culture and leadership influence people's behaviour – and how they can be applied in the workplace.

To find out more about the event, [download the calling notice](#). You will need to log into the website as a member

SICKNESS ABSENCE HITS ALL-TIME LOW

Sickness absence levels have fallen to their lowest on record – possibly because employees feel obliged to come into work when they're ill.

New data released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that workers took an average of 4.1 days of sick leave in 2017 – the lowest since records began in 1993. In that year, each worker took an average of 7.2 days off sick.

The total number of days lost due to sickness in 2017, at 131.2 million, has reduced by more than a quarter in the past 24 years, despite there being far more people in work last year than in the early 1990s.

The proportion of working hours lost to sickness absence – known as the sickness absence rate – was 1.9% in 2017, compared with 3.1% in 1993.

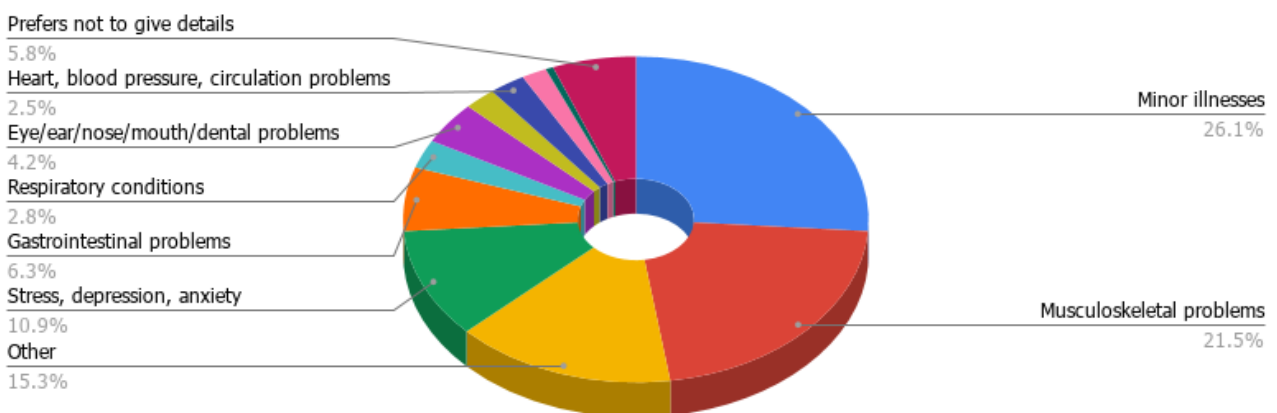
The main reason for sickness absence in 2017 was minor illnesses such as coughs and colds. This was closely followed by musculoskeletal disorders – conditions like bad backs, sore necks and painful joints. The total number of days lost to this group of conditions has broadly declined over the past eight years, and in 2017 was slightly lower than the year before.

The third most common cause of sickness absence, when the category “other” is removed, was stress, depression and anxiety. The total number of days taken as sick leave due to these conditions has fallen in the past three years to an average of around half a day per worker in 2017.

In its statistical release, the ONS speculated that the rate may have declined in recent years because healthy life expectancy has improved and that there may be an increase in “presenteeism”, where people go to work even though they are ill.

This theory is backed by a survey by HR professionals’ body the CIPD, released earlier in the year, which found that presenteeism was at a record high.

Reasons given for sickness absence in 2017



MILLIONS BEING DENIED ANNUAL LEAVE, SAYS TUC

Millions of employees are missing out on annual leave because employers are setting unrealistic workloads, according to a new analysis by the TUC.

Around 8% of workers across the UK – a total of 2.2 million people – take fewer holidays than they are legally entitled to, leaving them at risk of burnout.

Over half of these people – some 1.2 million workers – are not getting any paid breaks at all, the TUC said, after its analysis of the Labour Force Survey.

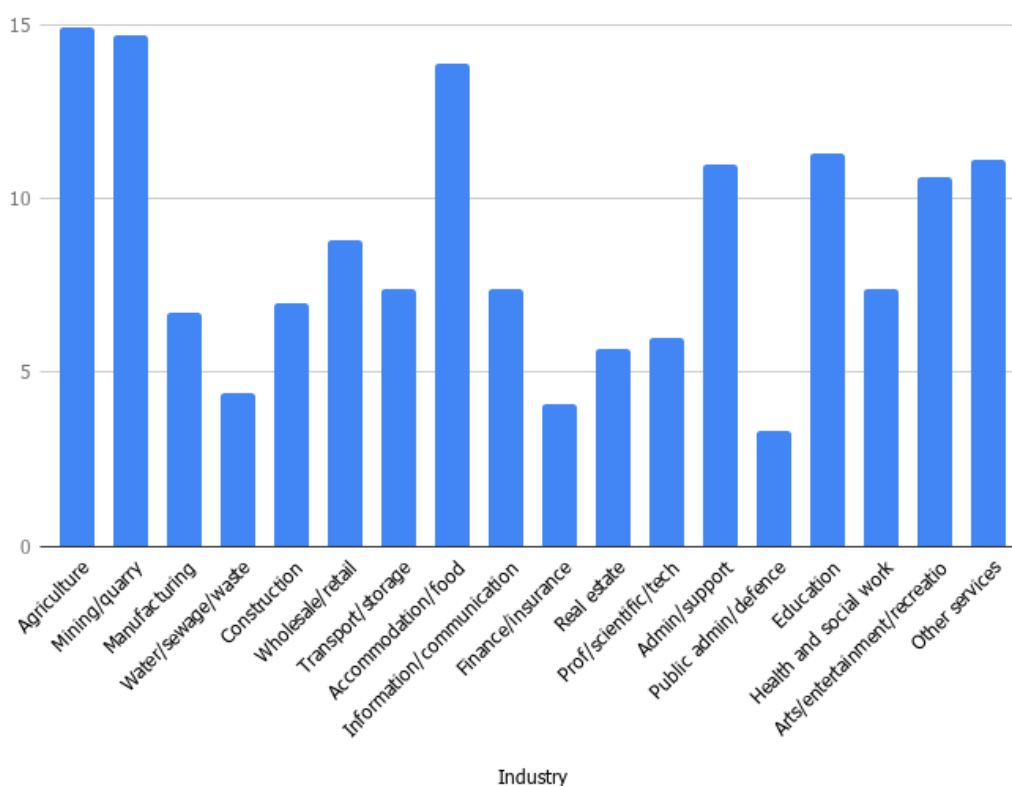
People who work excessive hours are at risk of developing heart disease, stress, mental ill health, strokes and diabetes, which has a knock-on effect on co-workers, friends and relatives.

The Working Time Regulations entitle workers to a minimum of 5.6 weeks of paid leave each year.

The TUC said that it had identified three main reasons why employees are not getting the leave they are entitled to:

- Workers are being set unrealistic workloads that do not allow time to take leave.
- Employers deliberately deny holiday requests and manage out people’s leave.
- Employers have not kept up to date with the law, which was changed nine years ago to increase employees’ leave entitlement.

Percentage of employees missing out on leave by sector



NEW MANSLAUGHTER SENTENCING GUIDE

Negligent bosses whose blatant disregard for safety leads to a death at work could now be sentenced to up to 18 years in prison following the publication of new court guidance.

The guideline will come into force on 1 November in England and Wales, covering all forms of manslaughter, including gross negligence manslaughter – an offence where someone has died following a serious breach of a duty of care.

The Sentencing Council produced the guideline to bring greater consistency to sentencing manslaughter offences, which are relatively rare and not currently covered by guidance.

It is expected that the guideline will increase sentences in serious workplace cases, for example where an employer has had a longstanding, utter disregard for the safety of employees and is motivated by cost cutting.

In 2014, 16 offenders were sentenced for gross negligence manslaughter, with the median sentence being four years. However, due to the variety of circumstances in which these offences can occur, ranging from workplaces to domestic settings, not all of these will have been employers.

With the new guideline, judges will undertake a nine-step process to arrive at the appropriate penalty, first assessing the defendant's culpability and placing it into one of four categories.

"Very high culpability" offences will attract a sentence of between 10 and 18 years in prison, while jail terms for "lower culpability" offences will be between one and four years.

Judges are then instructed to undertake a series of steps to refine the sentence, including considering whether the offender was subject to stress or pressure, or lacked the necessary expertise, equipment, support and training – factors relevant to deaths at work.

The new guideline does not change the circumstances in which the people can be prosecuted for manslaughter.