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If you're struggling with work-related stress and considering raising the issue with your employer via email, you might be wondering: *"Can I reference official HSE guidance to support my case?"* The short answer is yes. Stress at work is recognised as a health and safety hazard, and your employer has legal duties under health and safety law to assess and manage it properly.

This post will explain how stress is covered under health and safety law, what your employer's risk assessment duty means, why referencing the HSE stress page and *Management Standards* can be powerful tools in your communication, and how the Equality Act's disability definition might come into play. I'll also share practical advice for composing a clear, professional, and actionable email to your employer about stress.

## Why Stress Is a Health and Safety Hazard

Contrary to some outdated viewpoints, stress at work is not just about "personal resilience" or something you need to "cope better" with. It is recognised by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as a legitimate workplace hazard. This means it falls under **The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974**, which requires employers to safeguard their employees' health, safety, and welfare.

The HSE defines work-related stress as: *"the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work."* It acknowledges that unmanaged stress can lead to serious issues including anxiety, depression, and physical illness.



### Key takeaway:

- Stress isn't just "in your head"—it is a recognised health and safety hazard.
- Your employer has a legal duty to assess and manage stress risks.

## Employers' Duties: Risk Assessments on Stress

One of the crucial duties employers have under the **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999** is to carry [workplace bullying relationships standard](#) out **risk assessments**. This includes identifying and managing risks from work-related stress.

Employers must:

- Identify stress risks in the workplace
- Consult with employees or their representatives
- Implement control measures to reduce stressors
- Monitor the effectiveness of those measures over time

These duties are not just theoretical. If your employer fails to act and work stress contributes to health problems, they could be legally liable.

## Using the HSE Management Standards as a Benchmark

The HSE's **Management Standards** for work-related stress provide a practical, comprehensive benchmark for employers and employees to understand and tackle stress risks. They identify six key areas where pressure can build up:

1. Demands – workload, work patterns, and the work environment
2. Control – how much say the person has in the way they do their work
3. Support – encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues
4. Relationships – promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour
5. Role – whether people understand their role within the organisation and whether the organisation ensures that they do not have conflicting roles
6. Change – how organisational change (large or small) is managed and communicated in the organisation

Referencing the Management Standards in your email to your employer is a smart way of framing stress as an organisational risk, and pinpointing concrete areas for improvement.

## How to Reference HSE Guidance in Your Email

When writing to your manager or whoever is responsible for health and safety, your goal is to:

- Flag up the issue clearly and factually
- Demonstrate your understanding of employer duties
- Request practical action or a risk assessment
- Keep the tone professional and solution-focused

Here's a short checklist for **what to email your manager** with stress concerns, including how to reference HSE guidance:

1. Open by describing your experience of stress at work in clear, specific terms (e.g., workload, deadlines, support)
2. State that you understand stress is recognised as a health and safety hazard by the HSE and that employers have a legal duty to manage this risk
3. Include a link to the official HSE stress page for reference

4. Mention that the HSE's **Management Standards** provide a useful benchmark in identifying and managing stress risk factors
5. Explicitly request that a formal *stress risk assessment* is conducted or reviewed, consistent with legal duties
6. Offer to discuss specific issues or collaborate to find solutions
7. Close politely, noting that this is to ensure a healthy and safe work environment

Example sentence you might include:

"As the Health and Safety Executive makes clear, stress is recognised as a workplace hazard and employers have a duty under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to carry out risk assessments for work-related stress. I'd appreciate it if we could carry out or review a stress risk assessment in line with the HSE's Management Standards to ensure the necessary support and adjustments can be put in place."



## Equality Act: Stress as a Disability-Related Issue

Sometimes stress can be so severe or long-lasting that it meets the definition of a disability under the **Equality Act 2010**. This is important because employers then have an additional duty to make reasonable adjustments to support you at work.

A disability under the Equality Act is defined as "a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities." Chronic stress, anxiety disorders, or depression caused or exacerbated by work can fall under this.

Referencing this in your email could be relevant if you experience ongoing stress affecting your health and ability to work, but it's best to handle this sensitively and preferably after discussion with a healthcare professional or employment adviser.

## Summary checklist

Theme Key Points Useful References Workplace Stress as Hazard Stress is an HSE-recognised health and safety hazard, not a "personal issue" HSE Stress Page Risk Assessment Duty Employers must assess and manage stress risks under Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 HSE Guidance & the Management Standards Management Standards Six key stress risk areas to be managed: Demands, Control, Support,

Relationships, Role, Change HSE Management Standards Equality Act 2010 Severe stress can be a disability, requiring reasonable adjustments Equality Act Guidance

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## Final Thoughts

Using HSE guidance in an email about stress does more than just back up your concerns; it educates your employer about their legal duties and helps turn vague feelings of overwhelm into a concrete request for action. A well-constructed email referencing official resources like the HSE stress page and the *Management Standards* can catalyse improvements and safeguard your health at work.

If you don't have an HR department or don't feel comfortable raising this in person, an informed email is a robust first step. Just keep your language professional, factual, and solution-focused — and save a copy for your records.

Remember: stress is not a “resilience” problem; it's a workplace safety problem. And your employer has duties under UK health and safety law to take it seriously.

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