

Scottish Hazards

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Suicide; a workplace issue

Scottish Hazards Briefing

International Suicide Prevention Day

September 10th 2017

Suicide; a workplace issue

Every year the HSE publishes statistics on work related deaths that most of us, as health and safety activists, recognise as being only the tip of the iceberg.

Little effort is made to include the amount of deaths caused by occupational disease in the annual announcement even although the figures are readily available.

Perhaps harder to measure is the extent of work related suicide in the United Kingdom, a serious concern for trade unions and the Hazards movement and one which deserves more attention from Government, regulators and employers alike.

The drift away from secure employment to highly precarious work is, sadly, an ideal breeding ground for the personal insecurity that can often lead to poor mental ill health.

Add to this ever increasing workloads encountered by many workers following the economic melt down of 2008, oppressive management, harrowing workplace experiences such as witnessing workplace accidents, the continuing demand to meet unrealistic targets, draconian employer policies such as sickness absence management and we have a lethal cocktail of ingredients that can lead to this serious mental ill health.

In [Make or Break](#) (Hazards Magazine N0 138), Rory O'Neil warns that bad jobs are driving us over the edge, adding it is time to fight back for basic decency including job security and improved rights in the workplace.

This is not a big ask but one which, in the absence of a fight, the ideological Tories and their corporate paymasters will be only too happy to continually ignore.

Employers cannot ignore clear signs of mental ill health in the workplace particularly when the indications are that the condition may be related to workplace events. In [Corr v IBC Vehicles](#) the employer was found liable for Thomas Corr's 2002 suicide, an act that followed a depressive illness caused by a serious work related head injury six years earlier.

In that case the judge ruled that it was entirely foreseeable that such an illness could result from a serious head trauma and, as such, IBC Vehicles were liable not only for the original injury but also for Thomas Corr's suicide.

With such a compelling legal opinion it is clear that survivors of workers who take their own lives can, in certain circumstances, sue for compensation.

However, we are constantly told by families who lose loved ones through workplace fatal injuries that compensation is way down their list of priorities, behind securing justice for their loss and ensuring lessons are learned to prevent others suffering needlessly, as they have done.

It would appear that the HSE is blissfully unaware of the Thomas Corr case as they updated their incident investigation criteria very recently, in May 2017 to be exact and the wording is quite explicit, ***all deaths to workers and non-workers, with the exception of suicides, must be reported if they arise from a work-related accident.***

Scottish Hazards believes this position is completely unjustifiable for a regulator wanting to be seen to be leading the improvement of workplace health through [#HelpingGBworkwell](#)

In the absence of any investigation of suicides to establish a connection with work, prosecution of employers or any Fatal Accident Inquiry into suicide where there may be a connection

to the deceased's work, the ignorance and denial surrounding work-related suicide will only get worse, as will the suffering.

To mark International Suicide Prevention Day, Scottish Hazards is making the following demands on the HSE, United Kingdom and Scottish Governments;

1. Where there is clear evidence left by the deceased that the suicide was related to work it should be investigated, enforcement action taken and prosecution considered in the same manner as any other work related fatality.
2. Where there is evidence available from colleagues, or other sources, that the suicide may be related to work it should also be treated as a work related fatality,
3. Deaths occurring under circumstances (1) and (2) should be subject to mandatory Fatal Accident Inquiries,
4. Trade union reps and managers at all levels in the Scottish public sector should undergo Asist suicide intervention skills training
5. Deaths by overwork and work related suicides should be recognised as work related deaths, as is the case in Japan where they are know as karoshi and karo jisatsu respectively.

Work related suicide can no longer be hidden away purely because it is perceived to be too difficult to address, with political will at every level, constructive dialogue involving Governments, employers, trade unions and the wider work force we can start to take action to make our workplaces far more mentally healthy, safer and fairer.

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