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## MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AT WORK

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### SCOPE

This procedure gives practical advice for managers and staff on reducing, managing and helping people cope with stress at work. There are no specific statutory regulations on stress, but the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) believes that it is covered by the legislation listed in Appendix I. HSE has published guidance on it and set up a website on the subject at [HSE Work Related Stress](#). Case law has resulted in further guidelines which are shown in Appendix IV.

### INTRODUCTION

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development defines stress as follows: "Pressure is not only inevitable but essential to help us feel stimulated and excited about achieving the goals that give us our sense of achievement and satisfaction. Stress is pressure which is:

excessive  
prolonged  
comes from too many directions at once"

#### Possible factors causing stress at work

workload	too much/little
work priorities	deciding priorities
job design	could it be improved?
working environment	calm & comfortable
use of skills	used as much as possible
ability to decide	minimise need to consult on decisions
active support	regular help/advice when required
background support	encouragement, cultural/social acceptance
resolving conflicts	tackling bullying, personality clashes

Stress is not caused by a single factor. Often it is a combination of work-related factors, together with influences from home life that combine to cause stress.

#### NERC approach to managing stress

NERC's aim in producing this procedure is to adopt a 3-step approach based on the most reliable research. The 3 steps are to:

- Organise work so as to minimise stress
- Manage stress routinely
- Support those affected by stress

To implement this approach, more detail on each of the 3 steps is shown in the operational procedure. The techniques to be used to achieve this are listed below :

### **Organisational**

- Use a common risk assessment system (see Appendix V)
- Provide stress awareness training
- Encourage good health as part of a stress reduction programme
- Promote job development as a way of reducing stress
- Welcome staff participation in decisions and policies
- Change the culture from “presenteeism” to effective working
- Audit and review the procedures for effectiveness
- Provide effective networks for leadership and change management

### **Management**

- Be aware that you could suffer stress; if stressed, take steps to deal with your own stress before tackling other people’s
- Clearly agree work objectives
- Implement the actions from risk assessments
- Promote time management to discourage the long hours culture
- Encourage staff to take all their leave, and not work while on leave
- Target training for those who need to improve people skills
- Provide mandatory stress awareness training
- Target stress reduction intervention for individuals who need more specific help
- Promote flexible working arrangements
- Provide relaxation and wellness programmes

### **Support**

- Provide NERC Welfare Service
- Provide NERC health & safety management system
- Support counselling
- Encourage support from colleagues
- Consider occupational health referral
- Provide Self-help, including use of computer packages
- Provide Access to site health initiatives
- Encourage staff to discuss issues with line managers
- Refer union members to support available from trades unions

**Stress-related issues should be entered in the local Accident Book. Entries are confidential and will not be seen by colleagues or managers.**

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**Acknowledgements:** most of the material for this procedure was provided by Jessica Winder.

## OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE

### Introduction

This procedure introduces a co-ordinated approach to pressure management throughout NERC, to provide:

- A sympathetic corporate attitude to stress
- Consistent procedures
- People skills for managers
- Effective and sympathetic change management
- General and targeted training
- Relevant, up-to-date information
- Focused, appropriate help for managers and staff
- An understanding of the requirements of statute and case law

### Organisation

**Risk assessment:** the existing risk assessment system at Appendix V will be adopted throughout NERC. Training in pressure management risk assessment will be given to at least one senior manager at each site. Pressure management risk assessment is intended to reduce organisational stress, making stress easier to manage and resulting in fewer staff needing professional help to overcome the effects of stress.

**Actions arising from risk assessment:** the trained senior manager at each site will be responsible for ensuring that the recommendations and actions which arise from the risk assessment are carried out.

**Surveys:** part of the aim of this procedure is to persuade staff and managers to participate actively. Surveys to measure the success of the procedure and the degree of participation should be carried out as part of the audit procedure

**Appointing suitable staff:** staff who are appointed as managers often have other roles and are usually selected for their knowledge or expertise in those roles. They do not always have the necessary people management skills. NERC needs to ensure that management competences are identified, used in objectives and specified when recruiting new managers.

**Training:** basic training for all staff, specific training for the nominated senior manager for each site.

**Awareness campaigns:** there will be both managers and staff who find it difficult to accept that stress is a problem. Awareness campaigns will be arranged to persuade them of the need to accept and deal with stress.

**Standard agenda item in health & safety and Whitley meetings:** stress issues, including progress in complying with this procedure, should be standard agenda items for all such meetings.

**Leadership and change management:** these initiatives are intended to provide, respectively, support for line managers in their leadership role, and for all staff in managing change at work. They are briefly described in Appendix VII.

## Management

**Toolkit for managers:** we recognise that some managers may find it difficult to accept the corporate view of stress management. To aid them in understanding and implementing it, help will be available through:

- Advice and notices
- CD
- Interactive internet page
- Managers' support network

Managers can support their staff by:

- Accepting that pressure and stress can affect everyone
- Cascading the strategy to staff
- Identifying people and areas at risk
- Learning to recognise symptoms of stress
- Listening to staff and acknowledging their concerns before formulating an appropriate action plan

**Time management:** better time management may reduce pressure on staff.

**Actions arising from risk assessments:** it is essential to implement any actions which have been identified in the risk assessments. If there are any difficulties in understanding the actions or finding resources to implement them, managers should raise these issues with the trained senior manager at the site.

**Training:** other training specified in Appendix VI.

- Focused training for existing managers on the competencies required of managers - core skills, communication, people skills.
- On-going training in appraisal – to be seen as all-year round source of support to staff

**Flexible working arrangements:** wherever an individual's stress can be mitigated by flexible working arrangements – ie by part-time work, working at home – then managers will consider this process and how it could be implemented, either temporarily or permanently.

**Toolkit for staff:** Provide individuals with self-help toolkit:

- advice, notices, etc
- CD
- Interactive intranet
- Mentors
- Publicising avenues of support – Health & Safety, Welfare, Personnel
- Publicising the tools available
- Giving easier and better access to information
- Arranging training and development appropriate to the individual's needs

## Support

**What NERC can offer staff:**

- Making reasonable adjustments where appropriate
- Professional assistance from the NERC Welfare Service
- Occupational health referral via Personnel
- Access to professional counselling
- Referral to Welfare Service by line manager (mandated by Procedure on High Potential Risk Groups)
- Flexible working processes
- Self-help computer packages

**What individuals can do for each other:**

- Support for and from peers
- Recognise stress in others
- Recognise the effect of their actions on stress levels in others
- Talk to people; avoid relying solely on e-mail – use the phone or speak face to face, especially if the topic is complex or difficult.
- Listen to their replies, reflect them back to make sure that both people have the same understanding.
- Give feedback.
- Be honest about what causes you stress.

**What individuals can do for themselves:**

- Accept and support the risk management strategy
- Communicate – feed back issues of concern to management
- Consider their own health .
- Use the techniques described in Appendix VIII to focus on their own stressors.

**Record actions.** Managers must keep brief informal notes of action taken, assistance offered, assistance declined, feedback etc. If this information is to be kept it must be agreed with the individual first.

**Review and audit:** the NERC safety team is responsible for monitoring and auditing this procedure.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Swindon Office Director: responsible for:**

- Acting as champion for the procedure
- Endorsing and broadcasting the procedure
- Providing appropriate resources, especially in training existing managers in people skills, appointing new staff who already have those skills
- Incorporating pressure management into managers' objectives in forward job plans
- Making pressure management a fixed agenda item for NERC Executive Board meetings
- Endorsing health promotion as an integral part of a healthy and productive workplace
- Monitoring and auditing the effectiveness of the procedure

### **Centre/Survey Director: responsible for:**

- Cascading the strategy to managers
- Implementing the procedure in their centre/survey
- Making pressure management a fixed agenda item for Centre/Survey Executive Board meetings

### **Head of Site/Head of Administration: responsible for:**

- Day-to-day management of the procedure
- Making pressure management a fixed agenda item for health & safety and Whitley meetings
- Identifying people and areas at risk Ensuring that risk assessments are carried out and acted on
- Arranging awareness campaigns

### **Line managers: responsible for:**

- Meeting core expectations
- Acknowledging and addressing issues raised by staff
- Using people skills in managing pressure
- Using time management and flexible working arrangements to mitigate stress
- Accepting responsibility for health & safety duty of care and risk

### **Occupational health: responsible for:**

- Clear diagnosis
- Advice on recommended changes to work patterns
- Supporting staff and line managers
- Helping senior managers to identify "hot spots"

### **Personnel: responsible for:**

- Co-ordinating inputs from line managers, welfare, occupational health and staff

### **Staff: responsible for:**

- Meeting core expectations
- Reporting symptoms of stress in themselves
- Co-operating with managers and colleagues in implementing the procedure
- Recognising stress in themselves and taking action to deal with it

Staff may offer to help colleagues who show symptoms of stress.

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## **Title – SYSTEM DIAGRAM**

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### **NERC WORK PRESSURE RISK ASSESSMENT FLOW DIAGRAM**

This flow diagram gives a quick overview of the method of performing the NERC ‘Work Pressure’ risk assessment.

Each risk assessment will vary and the process can use all or just some of the measures identified below.



**Identify the hazards of stress in your team/ department/ organisation**

HOW?

**Build a picture of the situation: senior management should**

1. Set up a small working group of key staff to perform the risk assessment (aim to include Union representation).
2. Use the NERC Work Pressure Risk Assessment and the HSE Management Standards to give structure.
3. Run focus group/s with staff to discuss any issues the Management Standards raise.
4. Gather data, e.g. sickness and absence, accident and incident reports, frequency of welfare and occupational health visits.
5. Run a staff survey to build an overall picture, e.g. HSE survey tool.
6. Discuss the risk assessment at other forums, e.g. planning meetings, safety committees.
7. Record your results in your risk assessment.

**Evaluate the risks and develop an action plan**

HOW?

**Communicate and appraise the results at all levels**

1. Breakdown your results into the smallest departmental groups as possible (e.g. sites, sections, teams, pay band).
2. Identify the hotspots, common concerns and areas of good performance.
3. Set priorities for action, resources and training.
4. Run further focus groups within those identified hotspots to discuss your results.
  - o Use focus groups to provide feedback to staff.
  - o Use focus groups to develop local solutions.
  - o Use NERC pressure management policy for guidance.
5. Record your findings and agree an action plan with staff and management.
6. Set a timeframe for completion.

**Monitor and review performance**

HOW?

**Make 'staff wellbeing' a priority in the way we do business**

1. Periodically review progress of actions taken or completed (address issues not completed).
2. Continue to monitor previously gathered data, e.g. sickness and absence figures.
3. Encourage feedback from staff.
4. Repeat staff survey annually.

## WHAT MIGHT GO WRONG? – probable sources of system and individual failure

In many cases these are problems of attitude which the procedure, training and awareness campaigns are intended to address. Identifying the issues and suggesting ways to tackle them will make the management of stress easier and more effective.

### Management:

**In some instances project work requires longer hours:** some managers choose to work long hours and exert subtle (and sometimes unintended) pressure on their staff to do the same. Other managers deliberately put pressure on their staff to work long hours. **Remedy:** managers need to understand that their staff may be unable to undertake longer hours and may suffer disproportionately from what managers perceive as minor pressure.

**Use of people skills:** as already identified in the “Organisation” section of the operational procedure managers do not always have the necessary people skills to identify excessive pressure. Sometimes managers’ actions may – deliberately or inadvertently – increase the level of stress on their staff. **Remedy:** NERC must train existing staff in people skills, including the effects of pressure and stress and how to minimise them. When appointing new managers NERC must include these competences in the selection process.

**Cultural reasons:** in some parts of the organisation there is a cultural assumption that “we are tough guys and don’t need pampering.” Admitting to stress is seen as soft and this in itself can worsen individuals’ perception of stress if they cannot (for any reason) meet this standard. **Remedy:** managers need to be aware of their cultural attitude. They should be sympathetic to others’ point of view and encourage staff to discuss any concerns.

**Managing change:** the organisation has been changing rapidly over the past 15 years and the pace of change is accelerating. Some individuals welcome change; others resist it. **Remedy:** managers must deal with change sympathetically, taking into account individuals’ attitude towards it. NERC has appointed and trained change facilitators at each research centre who should be used in implementing any programme resulting in significant change.

## MAKE SURE THE MESSAGE IS CONVINCING, CONSISTENT AND ENFORCED

### Staff:

**Accepting that stress exists:** some individuals may not understand that stress exists or may be unsympathetic to those suffering from it. **Remedy:** all staff need to participate in the training and awareness campaigns referred to in the “Organisation” section of the operational procedure (see page 4). It is essential for staff to “own” this procedure because it cannot work otherwise.

**Recognising symptoms of stress:** people may not be aware of the symptoms of stress in themselves or others. **Remedy:** staff need to be trained in recognising such symptoms. Sympathy and understanding, and knowledge that there are practical ways of tackling stress, will be essential in dealing with the issues successfully.

**Accepting change:** there is little advantage in managers dealing sympathetically with change if staff do not make an equal effort to accept it. **Remedy:** staff need to analyse – using the tools provided – what it is about change that concerns them, and take the necessary action to deal with it.

## **MANAGEMENT, MONITORING AND AUDITING**

### **Management:**

The management of pressure and stress requires:

- clear lines of responsibility
- clear objective setting and appraisal
- resolving conflicting demands
- commitment to provide facilities and resources
- appropriate training and skills
- changes in cultural attitudes
- monitoring, benchmarking and surveys
- provision for staff feedback

### **Monitoring:**

The monitoring of pressure and stress requires:

- accurate recording and investigation of sick absence
- documented risk assessments
- evidence that actions arising from the assessments have been carried out
- staff surveys about individuals' attitude to stress and their knowledge of its effects
- assessment of the effectiveness of training and awareness through evaluation
- focus groups

### **Auditing:**

The auditing of pressure and stress requires:

- checking that documentation complies with this procedure
  - certifying that training is adequate and carried out by competent trainers
  - interviewing management and staff to assess their attitudes (staff surveys)
- monitoring stress cases and statistics

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## APPENDIX I: THE REGULATIONS - Summary

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There are no specific regulations concerning stress. On its website at the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) states that employers have the following duties imposed by the law:

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999:

- To assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities.

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974:

- To take measures to control that risk.

HSE expects organisations to carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for stress, and to take action to tackle any problems identified by that risk assessment. The advice in the HSE Management Standards referred to in Appendix III is not law, but following it can help you meet your legal duties.

The Working Time Regulations 1998 place a normal limit of 48 hours on the working week, though workers are able to opt out of this restriction by making a written declaration if they wish. See the Gov.UK website [Maximum weekly working hours](#) for further information. Long hours of work may have a bearing on stress.

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## APPENDIX II: GENERAL GUIDANCE

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HSE guidance at [HSE Work Related stress](#) gives examples of good practice.

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## APPENDIX III: SPECIFIC HSE GUIDANCE

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"Real solutions, real people" (ISBN 0 7176 2767 5) is a comprehensive pack designed to help employers identify risks associated with work-related stress and develop locally applicable solutions in partnership with staff. The pack includes:

"Tackling work-related stress: a manager's guide to improving and maintaining employee health & well-being", guidance book HSG218.

"Real solutions, real people: a manager's guide to tackling work-related stress."

A short introductory guide to HSE's Management Standards for Stress – to help employers measure their performance in managing stress (free leaflet INDG406).

"Tackling work-related stress – a guide for employees" (free leaflet INDG341).

One A2 action planner, 6 prompt cards and 18 case study cards.

The HSE website at HSE [Work Related Stress](#) contains useful advice for staff and managers.

All the guidance listed here is available free of charge on the Technical Indexes safety reference system at each site, and from web sites where specified.

### **The Hatton case law guidelines** (also known as the Hale guidelines after Lady Justice Hale)

In its decision of 2002 on the case of *Hatton v Sutherland*, the Court of Appeal set out 16 guidelines for determining cases of stress at work of which the following 9 are the most important. It is NERC policy to follow these case law guidelines. See below for details of how the *Intel Corporation (UK) Ltd v Daw* case has modified the guidelines.

1. Stress at work is not a special case – the ordinary principles of employer’s liability apply. Was injury to health of a particular employee reasonably foreseeable, and was it attributable to work?
2. An employer is usually entitled to assume that the employee can withstand the normal pressures of the job unless it knows of some particular problem or vulnerability. \* \$
3. The test is the same whatever the employment; there are no occupations that should be regarded as intrinsically dangerous to mental health. Relevant factors include:
  - a. the nature & extent of the work done by the employee:
    - is the workload much more than is normal?
    - are the demands unreasonable?
    - are there signs that others doing the job are suffering harmful levels of stress?
  - b. are there signs from the employee of impending harm to health:
    - has s/he already suffered from illness attributable to stress at work?
    - have there been uncharacteristic absences that might reasonably be attributable to stress at work, for example because of complaints or warnings from the employee or others?
4. To trigger a duty to take steps, the indications of impending harm to health arising from stress at work must be plain enough for any reasonable employer to realise that it should do something about it. \$
5. The employer is generally entitled to take what it is told by the employee at face value, unless there is good reason to think otherwise. The employer does not generally have to make searching enquiries of the employee or seek permission to make further enquiries of his/her medical advisers. \* \$
6. The employer is only in breach of duty if it has failed to take the steps that are reasonable in the circumstances. The size and scope of the employer’s operation, its resources and the demands it faces are relevant in deciding what is reasonable.
7. An employer who offers a confidential advice service, with referral to appropriate counselling or treatment services, is unlikely to be found in breach of duty. \* \$
8. If the only reasonable or effective step is to dismiss or demote the employee, the employer will not be in breach of duty in allowing a willing employee to continue in the job. \$
9. The employee must show that the harm resulted from a breach of duty; it is not enough to show that 'occupational stress' has caused the harm.

The Court of Appeal has not formally changed its guidelines, but the case (appeal) of *Intel Incorporation (UK) Ltd v Daw* (2007) has modified them in the following ways:

1. Courts should decide which parts of the Court of Appeal guidelines in the case of *Hatton v Sutherland* are applicable on the facts of each case.
2. The case of *Intel Incorporation (UK) Ltd v Daw* places a duty on employers to take urgent action when there is a clear risk that excessive workload is liable to cause imminent damage to the mental health of an employee.
3. An employee who chooses to remain in a stressful job does not automatically lose his/her right to bring an action for personal injury against the employer.

4. An employee assistance programme or workplace counselling service is not a panacea in stress at work cases – they cannot substitute for a failure to take appropriate management action.

5. In some instances, employees might be expected to use a counselling service, but where such a service would not provide the solution, an employee would not prejudice his/her claim by not having made use of it.

\* The Hatton guidelines marked with an asterisk have been affected by the *Daw* case as follows:

2. The employer was notified of the excessive workload – 14 times in 6 months – but took no action to deal with it.

5. Further enquiries were necessary but apparently were not carried out. *Daw* referred obliquely to post-natal depression that she had previously suffered but which only one of her 3 managers knew about.

7. *Daw* could not be criticised for not using the counselling service because the issue was her excessive workload, and only management could deal with that.

\$ In addition, the Appeal Court guidelines relate to cases where the injury occurred before the issue of guidelines on stress management by HSE. The HSE guidelines would impinge on the Appeal Court guidelines marked \$. The main thrust of the HSE guidelines is that stress management must be proactive and based on risk assessment. Under these principles, it will not be acceptable to assume that staff are not stressed unless there are obvious signs to the contrary; employers need to be predicting stress and actively avoiding it. It is also unacceptable to allow stressed staff to remain under stress if it is not easy (or even impossible) to alleviate it and if the employee chooses to continue to work; it is unlawful to knowingly allow workers to operate in unsafe conditions even if they are prepared to do so.



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## APPENDIX V: RISK ASSESSMENT

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The procedure for Risk Assessment can be found at :-  
<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/policy/safety/procedures/procedure-pressure-risk/>

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## APPENDIX VI: TRAINING

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Awareness and stress reduction training will be given to all staff. More specific training will be given to managers and those who would benefit from focused training:

**Senior managers:** pressure risk assessment

**Managers:** core skills, communication, people skills, appraisal, time management

**Focused training:** people skills  
**(at all levels)** stress reduction techniques for those particularly at risk  
time management

**All staff:** general stress awareness  
general stress reduction

A number of key training interventions have been developed in relation to leadership and change management and are now being rolled out across NERC.

The Leadership for NERC (L4N) initiative was launched to better equip NERC's senior managers with skills to lead the organisation in an ever-changing organisational environment. A key component of L4N is change management orientation, and training on this has now been delivered to some 70 senior managers. This training has introduced a NERC framework for change which complements NERC's existing project management tools but which focusses particularly on the people aspects of change.

In addition, a network of change facilitators has been introduced to assist those leading change. This group has received specialist training in areas such as planning and mapping change processes, facilitating group discussion, obtaining and analysing feedback. They will work with change leaders to support identified change initiatives.

JTS have developed a Managing Change course to support team leaders in Research Centres in areas such as facilitating, leading and managing change. It includes understanding the impact that change can have, and provides tools to support people through a change process.

Stresscheck “Under pressure” – pack of 2 CDs by Cary Cooper. A copy of this pack will be provided for use at each NERC site.

[British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy](#) – advice on seeking a therapist

Egan’s skilled helper model – person-centred counselling skills in which all Local Welfare Officers are trained.

University of Ballarat solution-focused counselling – *workbooks available to staff*

Massage, reflexology, relaxation, yoga etc – can be arranged locally using contacts provided by local welfare officer/welfare adviser.

Effective listening skills – Sue Grey – [greypartnership@talk21.com](mailto:greypartnership@talk21.com).

NERC welfare website at <http://net.nerc.ac.uk/people/welfare/> and welfare leaflets “Providing support” and “Managing staff welfare” (both available from website)

[HSE Work Related Stress](#).

Local initiatives – POL, BGS Keyworth, BGS Edinburgh. *Refer to them as examples*

Training – managers, staff. See Appendix VI

“Tension control & relaxation techniques” – CD from Penny Yendall, qualified stress management trainer, tel 01903 242470.

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## APPENDIX IX: SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development – “Managing organisational stress – a guide” 2002.

“Strategic stress management – an organisational approach”, Valerie J Sutherland & Cary L Cooper, Palgrave 2000, ISBN 0-333-77487-6.

“Self-reported work-related illness in 2001/02: results from a household survey”, J R Jones, C S Huxtable, J T Hodgson, M J Price, HSE research report 2003.

“Review of existing supporting scientific knowledge to underpin standards of good practice for key work-related stressors”, Institute for Employment Studies for HSE 2002 – research report 024.

“Best practice in rehabilitating employees following absence due to work-related stress”, Institute for Employment Studies for HSE 2003, research report 138, ISBN 0 7176 2715 2.

[Bullying at work: a review of the literature](#) – HSE Books 2006

Existing policies:

Staff Notice 2/00, Whistleblowers’ charter	}
Staff Notice 5/01, Openness and transparency within NERC	} available on NERC intranet
Staff Notice 2/03, Respect at work	}

Apart from the staff notices, all the guidance listed here is available free of charge on the Technical Indexes safety reference system at each site, and from web sites where specified.