

ENA Occupational Health Committee



Musculo-skeletal disorders

These case studies are designed to outline the overall management of musculo-skeletal disorders within ENA member companies, and so identify different approaches to the management of this issue and examples of good practice.

Company Name: Scottish Power Energy Networks

What did the Company do:

Engaged with HSE in a FOILE (Field Operations Interventions with Large Employers) initiative.

Analysis of sickness absence data for the period 01 April 2005 – 31 March 2006 clearly shows a significant number of days lost are due to musculoskeletal causes and it is likely that a significant portion of this is work related or work aggravated. Energy Networks recognizes that the responsible and caring way to prevent such loss is to reduce the causes of absence, whether this is work related or personal. A key part of the strategy to reduce musculoskeletal (MSD) related absence is the FOILE initiative. This is a collaborative project with the HSE to bring about tangible reductions in MSD risk. The primary aim of this FOILE initiative is to reduce the work related risk component. The secondary aim is to reduce the personal risk component. To compliment this FOILE plan, Energy Networks runs the Healthwise programme which aims to promote employee interest in their own general health through a series of themed campaigns and promotions.

Strategy

The Energy Networks strategy has been to identify the employee groups that exhibit the highest orthopaedic related absences. This was done by analysing sickness absence data in detail and confirming the findings with our occupational health physiotherapists. Feedback from occupational health monitoring was also used to verify the findings.

From this exercise 3 aspects emerged; an above average incidence of back and upper limb conditions in clerical staff, lower back and lower limb conditions in linesmen and a significant but not large number of lower back related complaints with a body of anecdotal evidence pointing to driving as an area for investigation.

Acting on this information the FOILE plan has been based around three independent work streams. The work stream method allows great flexibility in the overall approach to FOILE, new work streams can be added as the plan progresses and each can proceed at its own pace. It also helps confine the work to specifics so avoiding the pitfalls of a “fix everything” approach. A record of individual work stream items, actions and progress indicators is included in this pack.

The three current work streams are:

- Office ergonomics
- Linesmen work at height
- Driving ergonomics

Health and safety benefits:

Good management of MSD at work can spill over into an employee's private life. For some the knowledge and awareness they attain as part of a good structured work programme can have a profound effect on their attitude to their own health and well being and good practices take over where bad habits once reigned. This can then feed back into the workplace in the form of less sickness absence, fewer acute strain type injuries, and peer to peer advice (much better than being told by "health and safety") This reinforces the Happy, Healthy, Here ethos.

The following statistics showcase the potential H&S benefits arising from better management of MSD

Scottish Power Staff Distribution

Scottish Power employs 9877 people in the UK of these 2519 work for Energy Networks which is approximately one quarter of the total workforce.

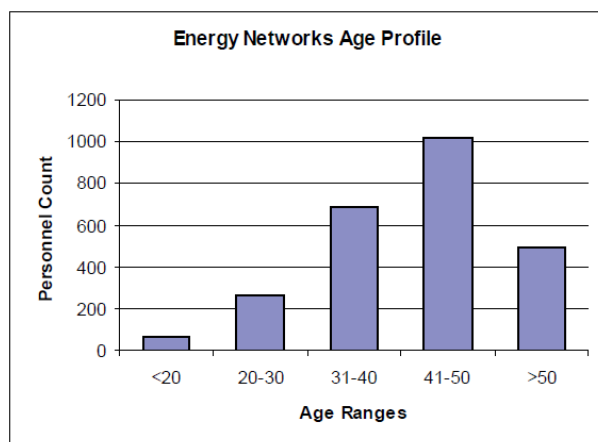
Age Distribution

About 60% of employees are aged over 40 this may have some bearing on sickness absence as these older employees are more likely to have historical work exposures that may have contributed to chronic MSD conditions. Younger workers are more likely to participate in activity pursuits which could result in higher incidence of acute conditions. The data on age and orthopaedic absence has yet to be analysed to determine if this prediction is valid.

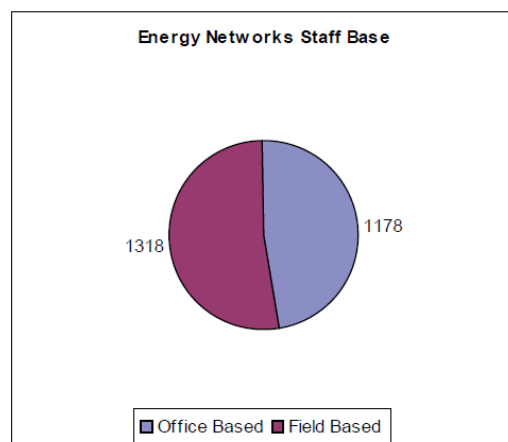
Field – Office Distribution

The office to field staff split is 47% - 53%. The office staff includes clerical staff, control room engineers, planners, co-ordinators and schedulers, field staff are comprised of industrial staff field team leaders and site engineers.

Age Distribution



Field – Office Distribution

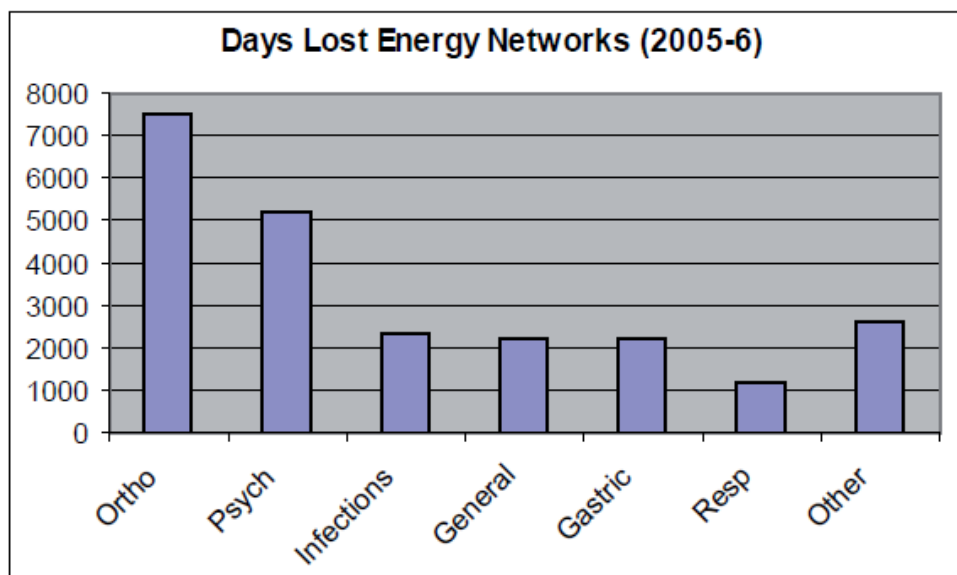


Sickness Absence

The majority of absences are short term and there is loose correlation between short term absence and the gastric, infections and orthopaedic causes. While the gastric and infections causes are explained by the acute and generally short lived nature of these conditions, the orthopaedic contribution to short term absences is most probably representative of acute strains and sprains. The gastric and infections categories are representative of personal conditions hence the high prevalence of these conditions.

Business / Cost Benefits:

The days lost per absence cause exhibits a clearer correlation with cost, with a very small variation showing for infections and gastric values. The total is in the order of £3.8 million of which £1.2 million is due to orthopaedic absence. The statistics clearly show that Energy Networks stands to make significant improvements in the health and attendance of its employees by tackling the causes of MSD. These improvements will translate into more efficient service and cost reductions. With more people at work the pressure on colleagues is reduced and this may well return a reduction in accidents and fewer psycho-social incidences, though these links may not exhibit a clearly definable trend.



Worker involvement:

Office Ergonomics

A group of computer users took part in an evaluation of DSE workstation training and assessment software. The outcome of this trial was positive and a decision to implement the system has been made.

Linesmen Work at Height

A working group has been formed to look at all aspects of this type of working at heights including ergonomics. The group comprises of employees, safety reps and specialists. The impact of musculoskeletal changes is assessed against other considerations such as noise and vibration to ensure an overall balance in the risk assessment.

Driving Ergonomics

The primary aim of the driving ergonomics work stream is raise awareness among employees by providing information on how to adjust a car seat correctly, the reasons why it should be done and what features are desirable when choosing a car seat. Employees who drive works vehicles have input to the generic specification.

Management View:

The general view held by management is that effective management of MSD risk has the potential to significantly reduce costs and improve business efficiency. However it is also considered to be the “right thing to do” and that an open approach is likely to return best results in the long-term