



Health and safety

The Police (Health & Safety) Act 1997 extended the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to cover police officers.

There is no legal excuse for the police service to be treated differently from any other service or organisation. Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act states that it is the central duty of the employer to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable the health, safety and welfare of all employees.

The qualification "so far as is reasonably practicable" means that there should be no conflict between effective policing and compliance with health and safety legislation. Suitable and sufficient risk assessment should ensure that, whilst dangerous activities may need to be undertaken, the risk involved should be reduced to as low as is reasonably practicable.

The Police Federation of England and Wales:

- Believe that proper observance of health, safety and welfare enhances the effectiveness of policing. In the hazardous police environment, the legislation strives to create work surroundings, which are free, as far as is reasonably practicable, from risk, so everyone is working in situations that are as healthy and safe as possible.
- Are currently encouraging the establishment of a system to share best health and safety practice between forces and to learn from any mistakes made. In cases where there has been a breach of regulations, this information should be disseminated to other forces in order that correct procedures are learnt and developed nationally.
- Recognise that workplace health and safety representatives operating in partnership with management are important elements in an organisation obtaining the greatest health and safety benefits.
- Train their safety representatives to an approved accredited standard in order that they bring a requisite level of knowledge to these partnerships.
- Accident and incident investigation is a fundamental tool in reducing accidents. The Police Federation expects management to use the findings of such investigations to learn and to make the workplace a safer place. This is known to assist in reducing sickness absence. The Police Federation also encourages forces to comply with their statutory duty by training all staff to a minimum standard in health and safety.
- Supports the Health and Safety Commission's Strategy for Workplace Health and Safety in Great Britain to 2010 and beyond and would encourage forces to use the Commission's document as a way of reducing sickness absence.
- Firmly believes that an effective occupational health policy should include the use of rehabilitation programmes to facilitate the earlier return to work of individuals who have had prolonged periods of absence. A guidance paper on the use of fast-track intervention is available from Federation JBB representatives.

- Is working towards achieving a fair, safe and healthier system of work, which is at least compliant with the minimum standards of the Working Time Regulations 1998 (WTR).

The Service's commitment to reducing absence will not be effective unless working hours are reduced to enable a proper work life balance and the first step would be to ensure they do not exceed the WTR's recommendation of 48 hours. Excessive hours are known to lead to health problems, stress and higher accident rates. We have consistently supported the government's approach to introducing a work life balance and are firmly of the view that this will be helped by strict adherence to that legislation which promotes a healthier and safer workplace for all.

There is a statutory requirement for employers to consult at an early stage with their safety representatives on any health, safety and welfare issues which affect all staff, so that together we can resolve issues and where necessary put in place proper control measures to improve the working conditions for all.