

Press Release

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Mental health biggest crisis for business after Covid-19, Dräger's Safety at Work Report 2021 reveals

Emergency service workers at biggest risk of health and safety compromises

- Lack of awareness regarding potential side-effects of common anxiety and depression medication set to become a major challenge to workplace safety.

Hemel Hempstead, UK: A [new research report](#) launched today by medical and safety technology company [Dräger Safety UK](#), which assesses the impact of Covid-19, Brexit and workplace culture on health and safety in UK workplaces, warns of an impending crisis as a result of soaring mental health issues and compromises on investment.

Almost three quarters (74%) of managers say their organisation is concerned about workplace impairment and resulting injuries and accidents due to alcohol and drug use. This concern, perhaps unsurprisingly, is highest in the transport and logistics sector (93%).

Despite growing awareness around mental health in the workplace, it is often still seen as a distinctly separate issue from physical health. However, the growing mental health crisis following Covid-19 and the ensuing lockdowns, combined with a lack of awareness regarding the potential side-effects caused by some of the common medical treatments for issues such as depression and anxiety, suggests that the issue is set to become a major challenge to workplace safety in the next year.

According to [ONS figures](#), one in five adults in Britain have experienced symptoms of depression during the pandemic, with young people, disabled people and renters hit the hardest. At the same time prescriptions for benzodiazepines and anti-depressants have dramatically [increased](#).

The side effects of this kind of medication vary but may include drowsiness, dizziness, loss of balance, confusion, or memory loss.

Matthew Bedford, Managing Director, Dräger Safety UK comments: "The research has clearly highlighted that mental health is becoming more prominent

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in our society and that this has led to an increased use of alcohol and drugs, both legal and illegal.

“It is striking that the research indicates that there is a good level of awareness of the dangers of drugs and alcohol in the workplace – 72% of managers stated that they are fully aware of the risks of workplace impairment. However, this figure drops to 54% when it comes to prescribed medicine, suggesting that there is significant less understanding of the side effects and risks associated with these medications. It is vital that businesses educate themselves better on the potential issues associated with prescribed medications and make workplace safety provisions to support employees.”

More than a third (37%) of employees feel that, aside from Covid, they face more day-to-day workplace hazards now than they did two years ago, a statement particularly true of employees in the emergency services, defence, and healthcare settings (51%).

It is therefore even more significant that despite safeguarding the nation on the front line during the pandemic, the emergency services (along with the defence and security sectors) are those most likely to be affected by compromises in safety investment. 70% of managers in these sectors report an adverse impact due to financial challenges and cost cutting – a concern made more pertinent considering recent [figures](#) released showing mental health problems quadrupled in NHS staff during the first wave of the pandemic.

Matthew Bedford concludes: “The paradox of compromises to health and safety as the result of tackling a global health crisis is a question of resources. Business leaders have had to make difficult decisions, but health and safety can no longer be put on the back burner. More than half of managers (52%) believe that the ongoing focus on the pandemic and its consequences will compromise safety investment over the next year.

“Practically speaking, with many training teams on furlough, safety training was hard to come by in the early stages of the pandemic. Whilst in certain instances grace periods have been granted for safety certifications which lapsed over the last year, there is a significant backlog to clear and the potential regulatory implications are significant.

“As businesses get back to the office, and the world starts to open up again after the pandemic, it’s essential to understand the state of health and safety in

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2021, from the key concerns to the state of awareness and priorities of business leaders.”

Read the full report to discover more about:

- **The impact of Brexit.** For example, 40% of managers felt that Brexit had led to increased confusion in relation to UK / EU compliance.
- **Safety and the UK Renewables Rush: have we really learned from the Piper Alpha disaster?** Whilst the urgency around Net Zero accelerates the UK’s rush for renewable fuel sources, and as the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) prepares to take place in Glasgow later this year, there is a steadily developing sense of urgency on another, related, frontier: safety in the renewable energy sector. Thirty-three years after the Piper Alpha disaster of 1988 served as a significant wake up call for safety improvements across the oil and gas sectors, the slow pace of progress regarding safety standards in the UK’s clean and renewable energy sector is becoming a major cause for concern.
- **The role of culture in health and safety.** Whilst compliance issues are fundamental to the state of health and safety at work, the reality is that culture plays a vital role in how people feel safe in the workplace. The research sheds light on the complex issue of what sorts of measures help to make employees feel safe at work, and it is clear that a range of factors contribute to this, including employees being encouraged to discuss or raise any safety concerns with management (92% agree), safety equipment being easy to use and understand (89%), and the provision of regular safety training and education (89%). The issue of mental health being treated with equal importance as physical health and safety at work is also a key factor (87% agree).

Ends

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Dräger is an international leader in the fields of medical and safety technology. Our products protect, support and save lives. Founded in 1889, Dräger generated revenues of around EUR 3.4 billion in 2020. The Dräger Group is currently present in more than 190 countries and has more than 15,000 employees worldwide. Please visit www.draeger.com for more information.

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About the research

This report is based on research conducted in the United Kingdom via an online survey of 1033 people; comprised of 751 employees and 282 line managers (managing at least 5 people) in UK businesses.

Respondents were screened for company size (50 employees or more) and for a mix of industries.

The research was conducted for Dräger Safety UK Limited in February and March 2021 and managed by Insight Avenue, an independent research consultancy based in Windsor, UK.

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