



White Paper

What are the workplace management trends to consider for 2023?

January 2023



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The last three years have seen significant change, not only in how our workplaces are used, but in the expectations of those using them.

2023 is likely to see many of the now established trends and practices continue and further develop. While the hazards may not have substantially changed, the risks in the eyes of employees and from a reputation perspective have shifted. Health, safety and environmental management will all be high on the agenda.

But what does this mean for those managing workplaces and supporting their organisations? To start the year, we are considering some of the areas we see as impacting the agenda.



1. Workplace environment

Air and water quality, occupancy, utilisation and comfort are features of 'the office' that will remain. Together with cleaning and hygiene they have seen some of the biggest changes in operation and expectation. Numbers of organisations we are working with have put in place effective management controls and monitoring for the former (air quality management in particular) and are adopting a more agile style for the latter.

Encouragingly indoor air quality (IAQ), despite much comment to the contrary, has been very good/excellent in the buildings we are assessing - indeed as it was before the pandemic. Be it dust levels, microbiological contaminants, or gases (Carbon monoxide and Carbon dioxide as examples) the indoor air quality in well maintained, forced air ventilated buildings, indicates levels being well below current health and safety guidance and significantly improved on that outside the building.

Balancing the needs of occupant comfort (air flow/temperature/relative humidity), can be a little more challenging, especially when the building is sparsely populated and with energy use in mind too. Many organisations have adopted a more flexible approach to building control however, and for most this is also working well.

Water management has for many come under considerable pressure, with warm weather and low occupancy combining to cause temperature and stagnation issues. Risk assessments and arrangements need to be carefully viewed and reviewed, if problems are not to occur/reoccur as we get into the warmer months, when Legionella cases are at their highest historically.

Supply chain management is another aspect that has changed in everything from service to parts and consumables. Have you identified the stock levels and lead times on not just your critical infrastructure, but elements such as air filters, chemical, alarm systems and those fewer regular purchases, covering for example evaporative cooling tower packs and drift eliminators?

- If you were asked to demonstrate to management or employees how you are managing air, comfort, and water quality, what would you show them?
- Have any parts of your building changed in form or function, is this reflected in your processes and arrangements?
- Are you confident that the levels of plant maintenance and consumables for your air and water systems are where they need to be?

Buildings are, like us, all different and can react in different ways to change. An independent, accredited assessments of your workplace environment can be of use to you and your organisation.



2. Health and safety

For the most part, and COVID-19 guidance notwithstanding, health and safety regulations and dutyholder obligations have not changed. Neither sadly have the main causes of injury, rates of fatal and self-reported non-fatal injuries in 2022 were broadly similar to those before the pandemic (HSE figures).

Slips and trips, handling lifting and carrying, hit by object and falls from height continue to cause most issues. From a health perspective (for mental health and wellbeing specifically see below) musculoskeletal disorders are still prevalent and on top of those caused by lifting and carrying, etc. our 'work anywhere culture' sees much less control over how our employees are working. How are you considering this?

In a hybrid workplace, issues in areas such as lone working, first aid and fire warden cover, emergency drills are still evident and are being worked on. Establishing activities such as health and safety committee meetings and briefings are also taking time. The influence of these on your organisational health and safety culture should not be underestimated and if they are not in place again yet, what might they be affecting?

- How does your workplace today match up to that pre-pandemic, when most of your health and safety arrangements were produced?
- Do your policies and risk registers reflect your organisation as it is, not as it was?
- When was the last time you had an independent audit of your health and safety provision?



3. Mental health and wellbeing

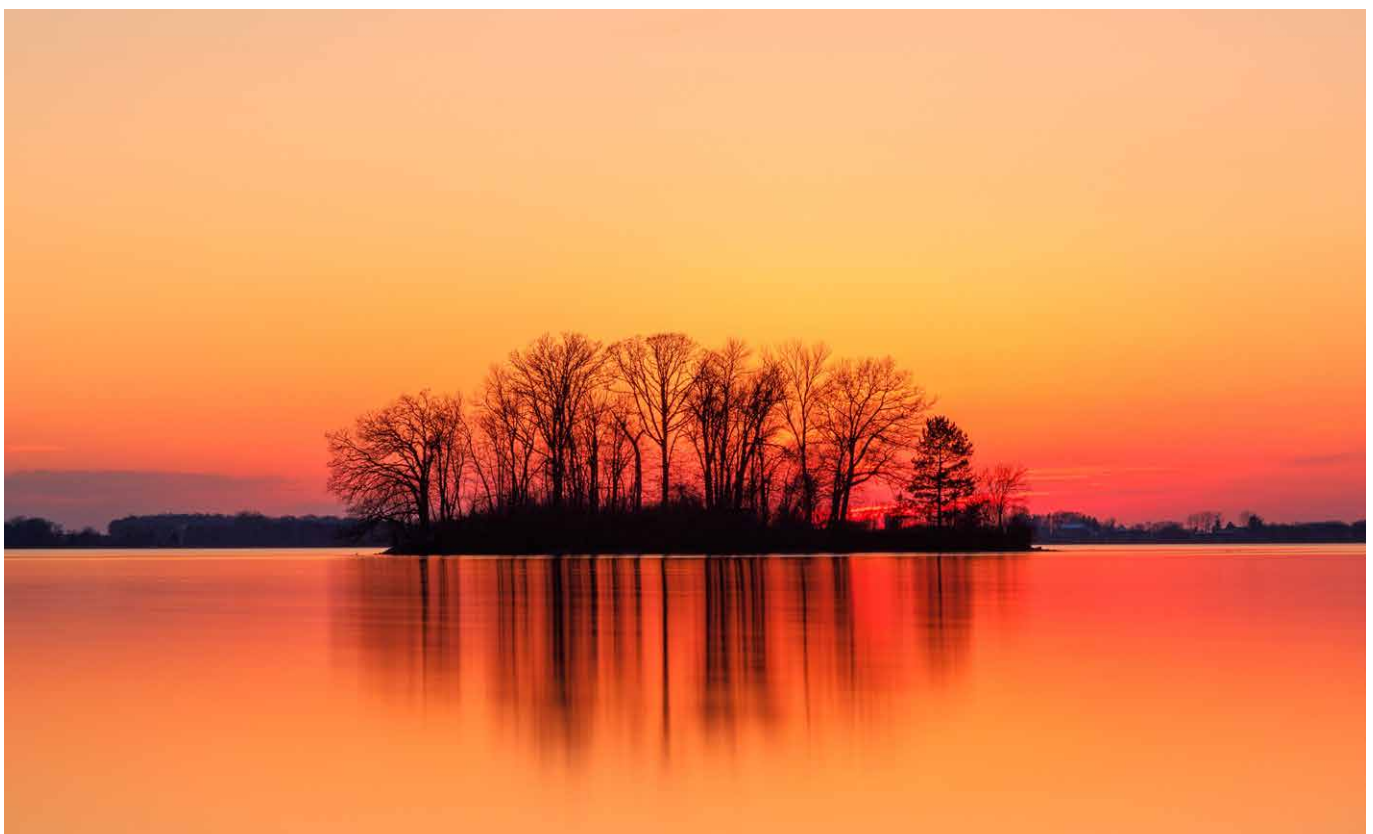
Work related stress, depression, and anxiety, unlike health and safety, was an increasing trend and it has continued to do so. 17.0 million days were lost, with 914,000 workers suffering from work-related stress, depression, or anxiety (new or long-standing) in 2021/22 (HSE figures).

In combination with this, with many employers looking to recruit and those in post needing to keep pace with changing demands, worker fatigue is a factor to consider as well. Most of you reading this will hopefully have in place provision, be it EAPs, mental health first aiders and aware/trained managers. The 2022 IWFM sustainability survey on wellbeing found most organisations place a 'high significance' on wellbeing (75%) with working practices (87%), mental health (84%) and the physical workplace (79%), being the three top areas, actively invested in.

The areas identified in the IWFM survey where investment was 'least likely', included nutrition (44%) and outside work activities (e.g. giving back days) (32%). With a social element and current economic climate, perhaps these are opportunities to explore in 2023.

Making sure your programmes stay effective and utilised, as well as keeping vigilant and identifying signs and trends, will be important in keeping your employees fit and healthy (mentally and physically) over the coming year.

- Look for opportunities to support and promote wellbeing with healthy eating and exercise promotions.
- What are your departments current mental health trends telling you?
- Are there any collaborations with the local community, charity partners and/or service providers you could be exploring?



4. Fire safety management

For those managing property, the introduction of the Fire Safety Act 2021 and Building Safety Act 2022 cannot have gone unnoticed. And at the time of writing, the further regulation promised is already coming into force (the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 (SI 2022 No.547) on the 23rd January 2023).

Targeting multi-occupied and high rise multi-occupied, residential buildings initially, it places additional requirements on the 'responsible person(s) in relation to fire/safety management'.

While it does not cover commercial premises falling outside the definitions currently, that does not mean things won't change in the future. Many of our customers and others have already been asking for and are having delivered briefings on the new requirements, so they can establish how the changes could affect them. How are the new changes in fire safety and building safety potentially affecting you, do you know?



5. Senior management

One of the other consequences of the pandemic has been a significant increase in the amount of training, health and safety management in particular, we've been delivering to senior managers and boards. Some of this to be fair had been driven by the 2016 introduction of the sentencing guidelines for health and safety and food safety, but it has increased further over the last two to three years.

Whether health and safety or net zero and carbon, the decisions they make need to be informed and realistic, knowing the liability they carry too is very important, if a little uncomfortable on occasion. The same is true for middle managers as well.

Briefings on new legislation (as mentioned above in the fire section) are always good opportunities, a reminder of the general requirements and duties they hold, intelligent risk management and responsibilities are no less important.

Having an engaged and informed senior management team is vital your culture, legal compliance and successful operation of your health, safety, and environmental management.

- When was the last time your senior management team had any health and safety training?
- If it needed to, how would your organisation demonstrate its high-level commitment to health and safety or environmental management?

6. Sustainability

For many workplace professionals' sustainability is going to play a big part in 2023, with an array of bold statements being made around topics such as carbon and net zero.

While undoubtedly the carbon agenda is a key one for us and the planet, it is not the only area of sustainability we need to be active on. In its widest sense for building and property management, it also includes, health, safety and wellbeing, social value, circular economy, equality, diversity and inclusivity and governance.

With carbon and net zero, the 'elephant in the room' is firstly understanding and then effectively measuring and managing scope 3 emissions. It is difficult and there is no short-term fix to doing this properly. The embodied carbon model has a place, but as anecdotally operational carbon emissions can be between 20% and 80%* of the total, and as most of this will at some point go across an FM's desk, it is a big hole and one our industry manages.

(*there is a lot of debate and as yet there are no hard figures (they are being worked on), but early indications are that operational carbon emissions are going to be a big percentage of carbon for many organisations).

Having already discussed previously health, safety, and wellbeing, I won't again, but the circular economy and equality, diversity and inclusivity have not been mentioned yet.

Circular economy, as opposed to linear waste management (buy/use/dispose), is, like scope 3 emissions (and part of them in reality), a big topic but one firmly in our remit. Its future importance is best summed up in two quotes from the World Economic Forum (WEF), following COP 26 (do you remember that one, in Glasgow), these were:

"Research shows the transition to renewable energy can only address 55% of emissions; the remaining 45% comes from producing cars, clothes, food and everyday products. Circular economy models offer a clear pathway to achieving our collective climate goals, tackling emissions tied to extraction, processing, manufacturing, and landfilling of goods."

Needing to integrate the concepts of circular economy into your working practices will happen, perhaps 2023 is a good time to start looking at it, if you haven't already of course.

While many aspects of equality, diversity and inclusivity will be managed elsewhere in most organisations, the agency for access and an inclusive work environment is one for those managing buildings. A lot has been invested in the past in facilities, improving accessibility and information and as needed alternative provision, but how have changed working practises and locations affected this previous provision, and what should you be doing about them?

- What carbon are you measuring currently and to what extent is it covering your organisations scope 3 emissions?
- What can you be doing to engage your organisation and look to develop and enhance the circular economy model?
- How accessible/inclusive is your building environment today and do you need an up-to-date access audit?

Our profession has a major role to play in sustainability and currently we are pushing on an open door, so take the opportunity and get involved.

7. Data data data

Another pre-pandemic development, the role, collection and use of data for smarter buildings has not diminished. With big data, IoT, AI and ever more sophisticated monitors and sensors our ability to gather lots and lots and lots of data on our buildings has never been so easy. The question is though, what data do we really need and just because we can generate it, should we?

Data can help you make informed decisions, improve and target resources and processes and provide feedback on performance. It can flag issues, map trends and confirm operation. Data of itself though is not information or knowledge, it is what you do with it that turns it into those precious commodities.

Be careful however, as that is not always the case. We have already commented more than once on our website insights on some of the aspects of IAQ where, in our experience and using calibrated and certified equipment, static monitoring may not be giving you the most representative view of your building's performance. But that is just one of very many ways your building may be generating data.

Dealing with building and property managers very regularly, must have already identified the data they need and use frequently, and what they need to send on to others by way of reports etc. It is about keeping you managing the data, not the data managing you!

There are many different systems and software solutions on the market to help provide data for you too. From asset checks to management reports, having the ability to tailor and create the reports you want, not those a developer may think you need, will be key to keeping on top of an ever-increasing data mountain. Next time you are reviewing the solutions available to you, bear this in mind.



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