



Supporting occupational health
and wellbeing professionals

The Future of Work, Health, Wellbeing and Sustainability: **Time to Act on Climate and Health**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is designed to answer two questions:

- 1. What would good sustainable work look like, both for organisations and individuals?**
- 2. How do we design actions on health and climate into our everyday decisions and seize the moment to make common cause and accelerate action, whilst not detracting from the importance of wellbeing as a leadership challenge?**

Many organisations have had to change their business and operating model to deal with market forces which require more sustainable products and services. This has meant that occupational health in these businesses is serving organisations at the leading edge of the transformation towards a green economy or are seizing the opportunity to innovate to accelerate this change.

Other organisations are pro-actively linking action on climate and health to strengthen their organisational strategy and success or are using their technical expertise to advise other businesses.

SOM acknowledges the contribution of members of SOM who attended a round table on this issue and in particular the input of Dr William Tigbe and Dr Jennifer Napier to this document.

2. WHY ACT AND WHY NOW?

Urgent societal and political pressure:

COP26 showed there has never been a more crucial time to talk about climate and health, and to act. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the UK Government are bringing together over 50 health systems to work together globally and are reaching out to business to support them.

Climate is already impacting on health:

In the past few months, the news has shown daily how floods, fires and extreme weather events have threatened people's livelihoods and health. Coming on top of the COVID-19 pandemic it has emphasised our vulnerability to natural forces and led to an increase in concerns about climate change amongst the public and calls on governments and business to act.

Investors and governments are expecting businesses to respond:

Financial markets will be legally required to consider the carbon risk of capital, so that investor scrutiny of companies is now focusing on ESG factors (Environment, Social, and Governance), whilst government and public procurement frameworks increasingly place social value and environmental impact at their core, and businesses rediscover the value of purpose. In fact, it is hard to comprehend the scale of the green transformation needed as our whole society and economy is currently built on fossil fuels and disregards environment and nature in our everyday choices.

Action is possible that bring co-benefits for climate and health:

It is here that we find common cause with health. The pandemic has shown us just how important health is for a functioning society and economy, and that a culture of health needs to be central to the way we live and work. We need to make health part of our everyday decisions because healthy people need a healthy planet. In fact, what we are discovering is that action on the environment and climate change also improves health.

Increasingly, business-led reports recognise that acting on health and environment can have shared and synergistic co-benefits. From promoting mental health by connecting with nature to linking the benefits of renewable energy with improved air quality, businesses are advocating for change. At the same time, the role of business and investors in improving health is also gaining greater recognition.

3. HOW MIGHT WE ACT?

There are several ways this could be framed, both in terms of how workplaces can act on sustainability and health, and how occupational health professionals can support and provide leadership for this by:

i. Protecting and Promoting Health and Preventing Disease

Preparing for the impact of climate change by becoming more resilient for the future and being responsive to its impacts today by protecting its workforce. Highlighting how existing well-established practices, such as an emphasis on prevention can reduce the need for health care and in turn reduce its impact on the environment. Linking actions to promote health, prevent chronic disease with the shared benefits for the planet, such as:

- ***Designing safe and sustainable work environments*** – such as, protecting outdoor workers from heat stress and designing industrial processes that are good for human and planetary health, such as reducing pollution from PM 2.5;
- ***Sustainable food and plant-based diets*** at work to reduce environmental impact and improve health and productivity;
- ***Sustainable transport to work and active travel***– incentivising active transport schemes, such as bicycle sharing schemes to improve exercise levels, reduce pollution, and prevent chronic disease;
- ***Cleaner air, and reduced pollution*** – business action through reducing vehicle use, greening logistics and procuring renewable/green energy;
- ***“Green chemistry”*** – using more efficient chemical products/processes, reducing the use of toxic materials, producing less waste and energy usage, promoting circularity, and both reducing human exposure to chemicals and environmental impact;
- ***Nature Based Solutions*** – linked to the approach of green chemistry - highlighting the role of nature in business processes/products including opportunities to promote biodiversity and human health;
- ***Eco-anxiety*** – recognising the impact that concerns about the planet are already causing and promoting solutions that give individuals a sense of meaning as part of a broader organisation environmental and social purpose. Offering solutions, such as a connection to nature and protecting biodiversity aligned to that purpose. Seizing the competitive advantage by understanding that increasingly employees want to work for organisations that act in a socially and ecologically responsible way.

Occupational health will have a key role to play in preventing and responding to these and other emerging hazards during the transition to a net zero economy.

3. HOW MIGHT WE ACT?

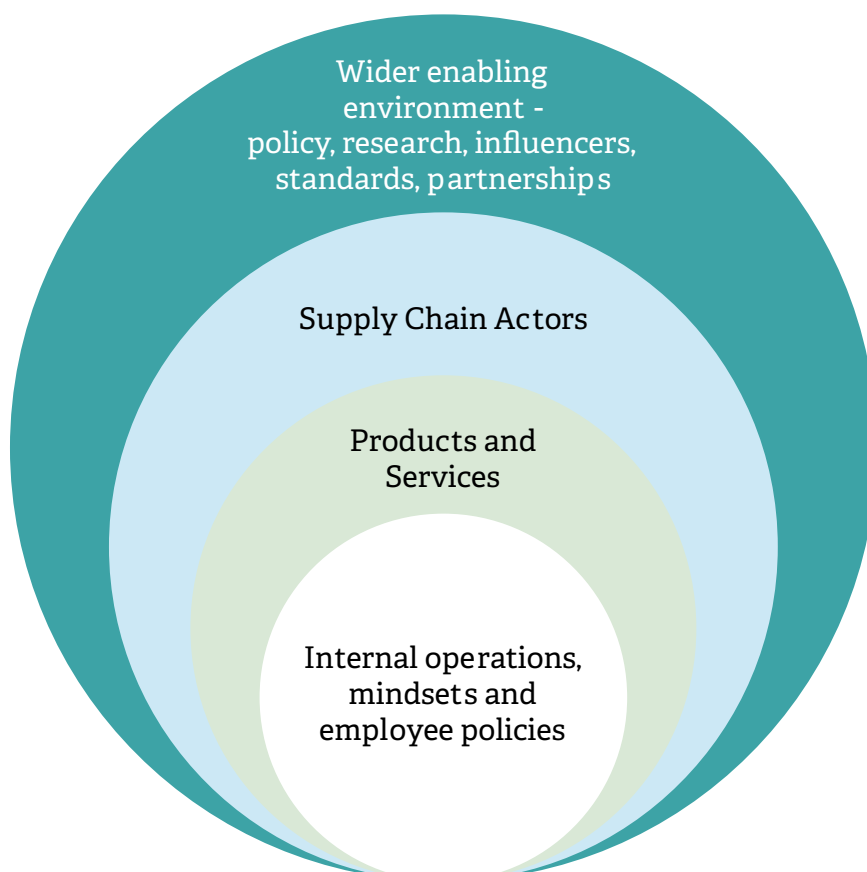
ii. Leading for Health

Occupational health practitioners can lead for health by influencing their organisation's strategic leadership, helping them to understand the important links between climate change and health, providing evidence of what works, and by designing health linked to climate action into organisational culture, strategy, governance, organisational processes, and everyday decision making. So that ultimately a culture that values human and planetary health underpins and contributes to organisational and/or commercial success.

Action can be taken at various levels. Several referenced reports give examples of how organisations have attempted to promote this interconnected system change. Forum for the Future's diagram, derived from existing health promotion and inequality models show how the spheres interconnect and can be described.

Integrating health and climate action using Forum for the Future's 'spheres of influence' model

Source: <https://www.forumforthefuture.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=6d4ff5ee-9880-4b60-a6a2-94e9ed813144>



3. HOW MIGHT WE ACT?

iii. Advocating for Health and Climate action

Occupational health works across sectors and its expertise means it is well placed to influence a broad range of organisations to act on climate and health. By joining up across professional organisations and sectors occupational health could be a powerful force for change.

A specific opportunity is to influence the governance and accountability frameworks which are currently being developed to underpin a green economy: strengthening health and wellbeing metrics in emerging ESG reporting, so that their own importance is recognised and the value of linking to action on climate change is appreciated and not in the longer run overshadowed by it.

CASE STUDY: WORKING IN EXTREME HEAT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Prolonged or intense exposure to abnormal amounts of heat and humidity without relief or adequate fluid intake can cause several types of heat-related illness. In the Middle East it is not uncommon for temperatures to reach 50°C and 90% humidity and with global warming this is likely to become even more of a challenge than it is already. However, by having a 'Beat The Heat' programme in place, heat-related illnesses can be significantly reduced. As an in-house occupational health department we teamed with business stakeholders a few years ago to identify elements required for a heat management system; who might be harmed and how, what was already being done and what else needed to be done. We held weekly meetings to address issues including:

- engaging leadership by addressing the potential impact on staff and operations of working in extreme conditions of heat
- setting up a program to measure heat stress using the Thermal Work Limit (TWL)
- consideration and implementation of controls
- education of management and staff regarding their respective responsibilities
- implementing a reporting system for any heat related incidents
- review of cases and collaboration between occupational health and the stakeholder

We used the TWL as this had been validated for use in the Gulf region. (It is a measure of the work rate that acclimatised workers can safely maintain in a particular environment before heat storage occurs and offers work/rest recommendations.)

Hierarchy of controls

The heat source could not be controlled, and the work was essential to the business. Hence, we needed to consider methods of reducing heat stress to our employees based in the highest risk workplace – working outside in the sun. A two pronged approach was undertaken with the responsibilities of the employer and employees in mind.

Employer responsibilities

- risk assessments to identify areas of highest risk and workers at maximum risk using a TWL monitoring plan
- provide shaded areas and mobile rest areas
- access to cool water – ice water igloos, mobile water dispensing teams to remote areas of work, issuance of reusable water bottles to workers
- cooling fans
- rest breaks and work/rest cycles according to workload and peak periods
- educational roadshows/campaigns with other stakeholders outside of the business
- PPE - lightweight materials, sleeves, hats with wide rim
- incident reporting systems
- referral of potential heat related illness cases to occupational health as well as self-identified vulnerable workers
- First aid training and emergency response protocols

Employee responsibilities

- declare medical history e.g. diabetes, heart disease, pregnancy, recent illnesses/hospitalisations and medications without breaking confidentiality as a means of requesting occupational health review
- understanding heat related illnesses and to watch for early symptoms and notify supervisors
- hydrate before, during and after shifts
- ensure adequate sleep/rest prior to shift
- eating healthy
- avoidance of alcohol and caffeinated drinks
- keeping physically fit
- acclimatising after periods of annual leave

The programme has been reviewed each year since with an emphasis on improvements through lessons learned the previous summer season, changing operations (especially in COVID-19 times) and audits of heat-related cases. It is fair to say there is still much more that can be done but the fact that heat is a stress on the worker that is likely to continue and spread globally, we must all start somewhere.

CASE STUDY: EMCOR UK

The adoption of sustainable development Goal 3, good health and wellbeing, and Goal 8, decent work, promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. Along with six other global goals, these drive our business agenda in creating a better world at work for the people and in the places in which we operate.

EMCOR UK's wellbeing strategy has evolved against the ever-changing COVID-19 landscape and the impact of work on employee wellbeing and psychological safety. The adoption and certification of ISO 45003 has cemented our foundation whereby we take a whole person approach to the safety of our people. Recognising psychosocial safety risk including how work is designed, social factors at work and the workplace environmental factors, in conjunction with physical safety risks.

Working in the FM industry gives us the unique opportunity to advise, support and guide customers. Our psychosocial risk management approach requires collaboration with supply chain, customer, and communities in which we operate to identify the severity, duration, and frequency of workplace hazards of a psychosocial nature that may have a negative impact on employee wellbeing. These will differ based on the people and place of work.

Global Goal 3 indicators relate to ending the epidemic of communicable disease, achieving universal health coverage, and reducing the numbers of deaths and illness from hazardous chemicals. Organisations have a direct role to play in prevention through proactive occupational health surveillance, early identification of illness and mitigation where possible through signposting to organisation funded benefits such as employee assistance programme, mental health support services, occupational health, private medical insurance, physiotherapist to name a few. Risk management enables the identification of health hazards both of a physical and psychological nature to enable implementation of meaningful and sustainable control measures within the environments in which we work.

One aspect of psychosocial risk management is the working environment. Since the earliest times, humans have been sensitive to their surroundings to both survive and thrive. People seek security, safety, physical and psychological comfort. The case for the environmental impact on mental health and wellbeing has been made, and this extends through relationships, physical health, motivation, engagement, absenteeism and retention. In sum, the risks feature in every part of an organisational system.

Further examples of our workplace environment include carbon monitoring, access to green space, responsible waste management and responsible business operations. Identifying the hazards within these areas for improvement play a key role in psychological safety, have a positive impact on wellbeing and simultaneously protect our planet. The connection between wellbeing and nature is coming to the fore.

At EMCOR UK, psychological risk management is captured in our enterprise risk register as a statement of intent and forms part of our wellbeing, sustainability, and assurance departments' strategic objectives. We believe wellbeing and psychological safety is a vital component of social, environmental, and commercially responsible business.

DOCUMENTS, KEY GROUPS, RESOURCES

ESG METRICS AND INTEGRATING HEALTH

1. Business for Health: Enhancing Health and Economic Resilience for a Better Future

A campaigning group with several resources including ESG risk management framework for health <https://www.businessforhealth.org/risk-management-framework>

2. Culture of Health for Business: Guiding Principles to Establish a Culture of Health for Business <https://www.globalreporting.org/public-policy-partnerships/strategic-partners-programs/culture-of-health-for-business/>

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and GRI project to build a consensus-based framework for the Culture of Health through the lens of the environmental, social, and governance (ESG) information marketplace of indicators, measurement, and disclosure.

3. Measuring Stakeholder Capitalism: Towards Common Metrics and Consistent Reporting on Sustainable Value Creation, 2020 <https://www.weforum.org/reports/measuring-stakeholder-capitalism-towards-common-metrics-and-consistent-reporting-of-sustainable-value-creation>

World Economic Forum work on harmonising ESG report with big 4 firms with pillar 3 on people; the health team within WEF are keen to link health and wellbeing metrics into this approach.

4. BITC series on Employee Wellbeing Measurement and Metrics – Guides 1, 2, and 3 – gives overview of approach but does not consider environmental links: <https://www.bitc.org.uk/toolkit/page/6/>

5. Health an Untapped Asset: How investors can strengthen returns by improving health outcomes, Share Action, case for including health in broader investor stewardship: <https://shareaction.org/reports/health-an-untapped-asset-how-investors-can-strengthen-returns-by-improving-health-outcomes>

6. Business Framework for Health: Supporting businesses and employers in their role to enhance and level up the health of the nation. Business for Health and CBI – argues for integrating health into ESG reporting and suggests a framework for achieving this: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f9444ec7009945ec749f5d5/t/617665afd3dcc10717ca6d92/1635149265260/Business+Framework+For+Health+Report+%28final%29+20+October+2021+v2.pdf>

BUSINESS ACTION ON CO-BENEFITS FOR CLIMATE AND HEALTH

7. Driving Co-Benefits for Climate and Health: How Private Sector Action Can Accelerate Progress, Forum for the Future, 2021. General discussion on links between climate change and health for business focusing on three conditions giving a framework that includes actions for employees <https://www.forumforthefuture.org/driving-co-benefits-for-climate-and-health>
8. Business Leadership Brief For Healthy Planet, Healthy People, UN Global Compact, 2019 <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/5714>
9. Tackling Climate is the Greatest Global Health Opportunity of the 21st Century, UN Global Compact, Business Platform for Action on Health, 2021 <https://www.unglobalcompact.org/library/5881>

Both reports from the UN Global Compact's Business Ambition for Climate and Health Action Platform look at the interplay between health and climate. The first outlines the business case for taking integrated climate and health action, provides guidance on how companies can deliver climate and health co-benefits by pointing towards relevant action-oriented initiatives with case studies. The second builds on this and focuses on the five areas for action on climate and health: air pollution, nature and biodiversity, food systems, water resilience, and the future of work and just transition. They do not however bring an occupational health approach to these.

10. The Power of Nature for Employee Wellbeing, BiTC, 2021 <https://www.bitc.org.uk/toolkit/the-power-of-nature-for-employee-wellbeing/>

An example of a shared climate change and health solution using nature-based solutions for mental health.

11. Recent research undertaken by Bupa on Eco-Anxiety illustrates why businesses should be interested: <https://www.bupa.com/news/press-releases/2022/gen-z-seek-ethical-workplaces-as-enviro-mental-health-burden-bites>

CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH: A GLOBAL CRISIS

12. Two articles by Dr Jenny Napier describing the links between climate and health and the role of occupational health:

<https://www.rpsgroup.com/insights/health-hygiene/climate-change-and-the-global-health-crisis/>

<https://www.rpsgroup.com/insights/health-hygiene/the-role-of-occupational-health-in-transitioning-to-a-greener-future/>

GENERAL ARTICLES ON ESG

13. Measuring what matters the scramble to set standards for sustainable business, Sarah Murray 2021

<https://www.ft.com/content/92915630-c110-4364-86ee-0f6f018cba90>

14. ESG Impact is Hard to Measure – But It’s Not Impossible, Jennifer Howard-Grenville HBR 2021

<https://hbr.org/2021/01/esg-impact-is-hard-to-measure-but-its-not-impossible>

COP26 HEALTH RELATED MATERIALS

15. WHO Summary of materials

<https://www.who.int/initiatives/cop26-health-programme>

16. Adaptation Research for Health – a global collaborative on research for adaptation

https://southsouthnorth.org/portfolio_page/adaptation-research-alliance/ and <https://ukcop26.org/adaptation-research-alliance-ara-joint-statement-on-launch-9-november-2021/>



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