

Hypersensitive in IT environments

Information concerning problems
caused by hypersensitivity to electricity.

Facts and advice to members of SIF.



SWEDISH UNION OF CLERICAL AND TECHNICAL EMPLOYEES IN INDUSTRY

- for individual and industrial development -

Så kan elöverkänslighet förebyggas på din arbetsplats

Stockholm(NW)

Elektriska och magnetiska fält runt datorer, kopiatorer, skrivare och andra elektroniska apparater kan orsaka besvär som sedan leder till elöverkänslighet.

Men med några enkla åtgärder kan problemen

när dessa laddas elektrostastiskt och hamnar i det magnetiska fältet, fortsätter han.

Fritt från kemikalier

Materialet i bildskärmar och annan kontorsutrustning är annat som, enligt Bruno Hagi, måste åtgärdas.

- Kraven på att bildskärmar ska vara fria från TCO-miljöhöjare.

verkänslig och han ser en fördel i att inte prata i egen sak. De senaste 18 månaderna har han hållit cirka 70 seminarier i ämnet och hans arbete också blivit internationellt märksammat.

- Vi får förfråga världen på hjälp.

SIF vill påverka forskningen om elöverkänslighet

SIF fortsätter att driva frågan om elöverkänslighet. Nästa steg är en arbetsgrupp och ett nätverk.

Enligt kongressbeslutet om ska påverka utvecklingen på området. I mitten av år ordnade miljöombudsman Bruno Hagi första kongressen "SIF och miljö" med docent Johan Johansson och EMF-tekniker Andersson. Åren 1994-1995 kommer medlemmar behandlas i SIF. Har SIF tagit klar ställning till elöverkänslighet? SIF är det första förbundet i världen som tagit ställning till att elöverkänslighet är ett problem. Vi är också det första förbundet som kommer ut med riktlinjer om hur man kan förebygga problemet. Kompendiet "kontorsprovaren" kommer i höst. I denna ges punktvisa förslag på hur kontorsmiljöer kan förbättras, samt en checklista för el- och bildskärmsanvändning.

I SIF-undersökningar om elöverkänslighet

Många törs inte avslöja sin elöverkänslighet

UMEÅ (VF)
Elöverkänslighet psykiskt betingad. Det hävdar Svenska Industri- och Arbetsförbundet, och är uttalandet med det första förbundet som tagit ställning och nu också går ut med en arbetsgrupp.

Attention has been drawn to the question of hypersensitivity to electricity in Swedish press, radio and TV. A few of the head-lines are: "How to prevent hypersensitivity to electricity at your work place", "SIF wants to influence research on hypersensitivity to electricity", "Many people dare not reveal hypersensitivity to electricity", "Swedish Board of Health and Welfare: Patients often treated with nonchalance", "Hypersensitivity to electricity charted", "Ban dangerous chemicals in computers", "Hypersensitivity to electricity a growing problem", "Rose of the week: SIF allocates funds to electricity researcher".

Överkänslighet mot el kartläggs

Regeringen håller på att trycka på sig initiativet när det gäller den omdebatterade frågan om elöverkänslighet. Bakom aktionen står socialminister Ingela Thalen som personligen engagerat sig för de drabbade och deras problem.

mentet att under 1996 kartlägga bland annat hela den svenska forskningen, kommunernas ansvar för elsanering och skydd mot elektromagnetisk strålning, behandlingsmetoder för patienter i vården. En arbetsgrupp ska också utreda om det finns några andra områden som kan drabbas av elöverkänslighet.

Förbjud farliga kemikalier i datorer

Totalförbud mot alla farliga kemikalier i datorer och annan elektronik. Det kräver SIF:s arbetsmiljöombudsman Bruno Hagi. SIF vill att TCO:s miljömärkning annars ska vara till nytta för arbetarna.

Veckans ROS

SIF ger pengar till elforskare

SIF ger den omstridda neurobiologen Olle Johansson vid Karolinska institutet 100 000 kronor till forskning om elöverkänslighet. - Det är utomordentligt glädjande, säger professor Sten Grillner, chef för institutionen för neurovetenskap på Karolinska institutet.

Elöverkänslighet växande problem

KRISTIANSTAD. Christin Wennberg är elöverkänslig. Hennes problem började i februari 1991. Hon fick värme- och kyla i ansiktet, kände sig allmänt förkyld, hade grus i ögonen. Elöverkänslighet är ett växande problem på arbetsplatserna. SIF, som under 1996 ska kartlägga problemet, har utgivit en broschyr om elöverkänslighet.

Hypersensitive in IT environments

Facts, advice and support to people who are worried about
and troubled by electric and magnetic fields and
chemical emissions from electrical equipment
in their working environment

FACTS from SIF's reports concerning
hypersensitivity to electricity _____ Page 3

ADVICE to those wanting to know
what to do about it _____ Page 7

SIF takes hypersensitivity to electricity
seriously _____ Page 14

HUMAN EMC
Electromagnetic compatibility
with mankind _____ Page 16



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SIF's report from 1996 shows

that the number of people who stated that they have *serious* or *extremely serious problems* has doubled in comparison with 1993. The number with *extremely serious problems* had increased from 3.1 to 7.6 per cent and the number of serious problems had increased in the latter investigation from 10.6 to 20.3 per cent.

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FACTS

from SIF's reports
concerning hypersensitivity to electricity

*Hypersensitivity to electricity
among members of SIF
1993 enquiry*

In 1993 SIF carried out an extensive enquiry into hypersensitivity to electricity among its members. The reason for the enquiry was increased concern and problems from an ever-increasing use of electricity. All SIF members were afforded opportunity to describe symptoms of hypersensitivity to electricity. A club questionnaire was also included with questions to union sections, white collar worker clubs and work place ombudsmen. At the end of 1994 SIF presented a final report in which the responses to the questionnaires had been scientifically processed. According to the report many SIF members were affected. Up to one in ten white collar workers noted some form of trouble caused by electrical apparatus. An estimated 6,700 cases of hypersensitivity to electricity were found among the union members.

In 1995 a twelve-page summary, *Hypersensitivity to electricity*, was made of the final report. It attracted considerable attention and was translated to German and English. In easily-understood form it presented facts about hypersensitivity to electricity, who is affected by it, where and how symptoms appear, and a plan of action.

In November 1996 SIF compiled a new report. This aroused considerable interest since the results in 1993 had been so alarming. Had the members' problems increased or decreased? The new report, *Hypersensitivity to electricity*, shows that the problems have increased. The number of SIF members who complained that they have serious or extremely serious problems had doubled in two years!

This pamphlet presents facts from the latest report, and information as to what those affected can do about it.

By 1996 roughly twice as many people suffered from each of the thirteen symptoms listed in the 1993 questionnaire. As previously the problems were concentrated to the face and the problems here had substantially tripled. From eyes, nose and mouth, facial skin, and physical pain.



*Hypersensitivity to electricity
Report from an enquiry among members*

FACTS

from SIF's reports concerning hypersensitivity to electricity

EYES

Symptoms: Difficulty in seeing, smarting, pain in eyes and feeling of grit in the eyes. Eye trouble is the most frequent symptom.

1.

In 1993 26.4% of those asked stated that they had serious trouble with their eyes.
In 1996 the number had increased to 48.4%.

In 1993 4.9% of those asked stated that they had extremely serious trouble with their eyes.

In 1996 14.6% stated that they had extremely serious trouble.

Three times the number in three years!

SKIN

Symptoms: Skin feels dry, redness and blotchy complexion. Skin and eye trouble are the two most frequent symptoms of hypersensitivity.

2.

In 1993 21.6% of SIF members asked stated that they had serious skin problems.

In 1996 the number had increased to 44.6%. Double.

In 1993 4.7% had extremely serious skin problems.

In 1996 the number was 12%. That is a tripling of extremely serious skin problems!

NOSE

Symptoms: Stuffed nose, runny nose and sinusitis.

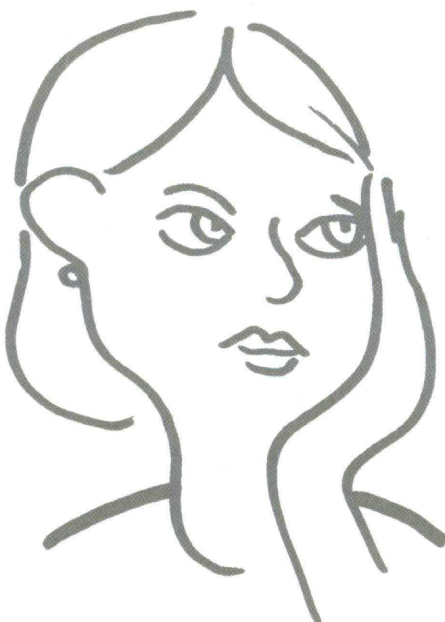
3.

In 1993 13.7% of those asked had serious nasal problems.

In 1996 25.4% stated that they had serious problems.

In 1993 2.3% had extremely serious nasal problems.

In 1996 5.6% stated that they had extremely serious trouble. More than double!



STINGING FACE

Symptoms: Face feels hot, swollen, stings, and blisters appear.

4.

In 1993 13.9% had serious facial problems.

In 1996 36% stated that they had serious problems. Almost a tripling in three years

In 1993 4.2% had extremely serious problems.
In 1996 it was 11.7%.

MOUTH

Symptoms: Sores, blisters and metallic taste in the mouth.

5.

In 1993 7% of those asked had serious problems.

In 1996 the proportion had increased to 15%.

In 1993 1.2% had extremely serious oral problems.

In 1996 the number had increased to 3.7% among those asked.

FACIAL PAIN

Symptoms: Besides all over the face, the pain is concentrated in teeth and jaws.

6.

In 1993 9.1% had serious problems.

In 1996 the proportion was 24.3%. That's almost a tripling in three years.

In 1993 2% had extremely serious problems.

In 1996 the number had more than tripled. 7.4% stated that they had extremely serious problems from facial pain.

MUCOUS MEMBRANES

Symptoms: Dry mucous membranes and abnormal thirst.

7.

In 1993 13.5% of those asked had serious problems.

In 1996 the number with serious problems has risen to 29.4%.

In 1993 2.4% stated that they had extremely serious problems.

In 1996 the number had increased to 6.5%. Double!

HEADACHES

Symptoms: Not only headaches but loss of memory and feelings of depression.

8.

In 1993 17.9% of those asked had serious problems.

In 1996 the number had more than doubled to 37.6%.

In 1993 4.2% had extremely serious problems.

In 1996 the number had doubled to 8.8%.

FACTS

from SIF's reports concerning hypersensitivity to electricity

TIREDFNESS

Symptoms: Abnormal tiredness and difficulty in concentrating.

In 1993 20% had serious symptoms of this type.

By 1996 the number had doubled. 42.9% had serious trouble with tiredness and difficulty in concentrating.

In 1993 the number with extremely serious problems was 4.9%.

In 1996, three years later, 11% stated that they had extremely serious trouble.

DIZZINESS

Symptoms: Feeling of faintness, nausea and dizziness.

In 1993 8.8% stated that they were seriously troubled by these symptoms.

In 1996 the number had more than doubled to 19%.

In 1993 2.3% were extremely seriously troubled by giddiness.

In 1996 the number had increased to 5.3%.

BREATHING

Symptoms: Difficulty in breathing, palpitations.

In 1993 5.8% had these serious problems.

In 1996 the number had increased to 14.5%.

In 1993 2% of those asked had extremely serious difficulty. *In 1996* the proportion of those with extremely serious difficulty had increased to 4.2%.

JOINT PAINS

Symptoms: Pain in shoulders, arms and joints.

In 1993 22.4% of SIF members had serious problems.

In 1996 the number of 35%.

In 1993 5.3% of those asked answered that they had extremely serious trouble with joint pains.

In 1996 the number had increased to 10% – substantially double.

NUMBNESS

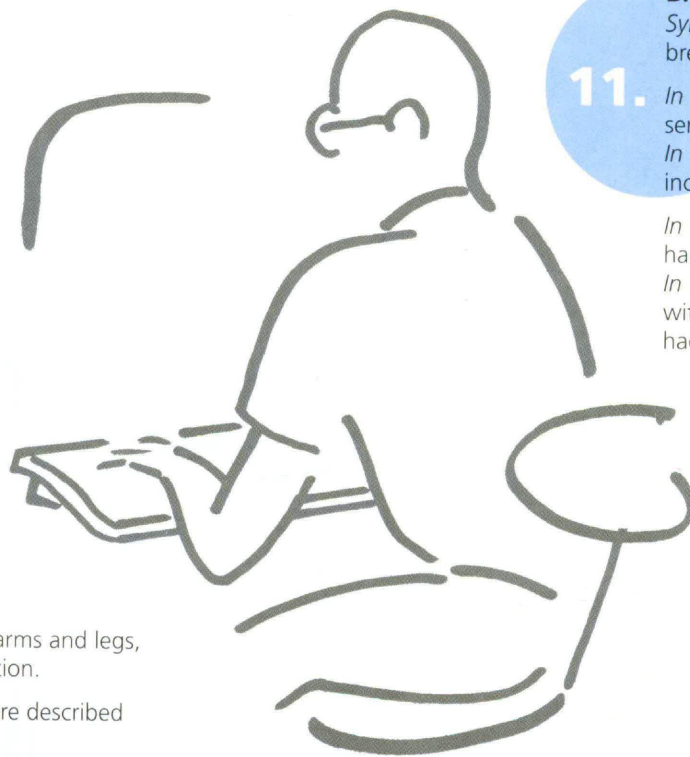
Symptoms: Numbness in arms and legs, cramp and pricking sensation.

In 1993 the symptoms were described as serious by 12.9%.

In 1996 24% stated that they had serious symptoms.

In 1993 2.8% had extremely serious symptoms.

In 1996 the number had increased to 7.1%. That is thus double as many who indicated that they were troubled by numbness, cramps and pricking sensation.



If all 13 of the symptoms listed are combined it is found that the number of SIF members stating that they suffer serious problems has doubled.

In 1993 10.9% of those asked stated that they had serious problems.

In 1996 the number had increased to 20.3%.

In 1993 3.1% stated that they had *extremely serious* problems.

In 1996 7.6% stated that they had *extremely serious* problems.

That is more than double in three years.

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You are the one to notice

the warning signals from your body. Regardless of whether your health is affected by electric and magnetic fields, chemical emissions or something else, it is your own self-diagnosis, your own impression of your state of health that matters.

All measures taken, such as reorganization of electrical systems, etc., being put on the sick list, rehabilitation, must depart from this fact.

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ADVICE

on what to do

ELECTRIC AND MAGNETIC FIELDS are becoming denser around us, both at home and at work. They are polluting our environment and every tenth white collar worker suffers in some way from them. Besides problems from electric and magnetic fields it is now suspected that many chemicals are emitted from electrical apparatus. These are frequently placed close to the user and in areas without sufficient ventilation to remove the damaging substances. The problems are thus caused both by electric and magnetic fields and also by the chemicals emitted by the apparatus.

Most research does not support sufferers. Research takes a long time. DDT, growth substances, asbestos plates and liquid putty were used for many years. People became ill but it took decades before research workers were able to establish the health risk.

Neither do those affected receive much support from society. Doctors seldom diagnose the problem as hypersensitivity to electricity. Furthermore, the social insurance office refuses to accept this diagnosis.

The supervising authorities are sceptical to reorganizing electrical systems in work places. It is considered too expensive. However, it is often quite the contrary: the insurance company Skandia is one of several companies that has reorganized the electrical systems at its work places. Skandia sets aside SEK 100 per employee and this has resulted in a dramatic reduction in sick listing. 300 SAS employees had symptoms prior to reorganization of electrical systems and other measures. Today no-one is sick-listed for hypersensitivity to electricity and the company has established a purchasing policy for display screens and electrical apparatus.

SIF's objective with this publication is to provide facts, support and advice to its members. As a member you are entitled to know your rights and to be able to arrive at a solution to your problems.

The following pages offer information and hints on how to act in approaching your colleagues, union, employer, company health services, medical services and local social insurance office. Information is also provided about various supervising authorities and their areas of responsibility.

What to do if you suffer symptoms

AT WORK we are surrounded by a constantly increasing quantity of electrical apparatus. Computers, copying machines, printers, mobile telephones, fluorescent lighting, coils of cables, etc. all generate electric and magnetic fields. Health-impairing chemicals such as flame-resistant compositions are also emitted from the apparatus.

Problems from electrical equipment constitute a work environment problem. It is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that no employees suffer ill-health. The employer shall draw up a work environment policy which is updated following a specific plan. The work environment shall be checked regularly and problems dealt with. According to the work environment act, measures shall be taken to prevent all imaginable forms of work environment damage.

THE PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE shall prevail. According to the work environment act *concern* over the situation in the work environment is sufficient reason for the employer to take measures. On the basis of known working life know-how, risks or possible injuries from electric and magnetic fields, for instance, shall be prevented and remedied. Limit values for electro-magnetic fields no longer exist. The precautionary principle has been adopted by the supervisory authorities.

Environment ombudsmen are available at SIF's branch offices and at the union's offices in Stockholm, who can give you, your colleagues and the management advice and opinions. An overall view is essential to ensure success in questions of hypersensitivity to electricity.

DON'T WAIT to take up problems. From the responses to the questionnaires it is evident that many people (particularly men) remain silent about their discomfort. It is important to start a discussion at the work place as soon as symptoms of hypersensitivity to electricity appear. Relatively simple measures may be sufficient if the problems are dealt with early. Start by listing and documenting problems. Get the work environment ombudsman to help. Go through the following points:

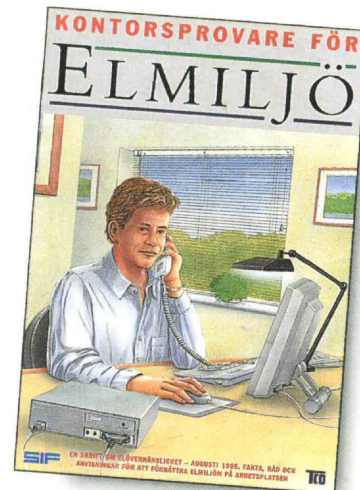
- Which apparatus is/are causing the problems?
- Are there several in the company who may experience problems?
- What is the situation at other similar work places?
- Is expert help available for study and analysis of the electrical work environment?
- Does the equipment comply with requirements drawn up by the company or required locally by SIF?
- Carry out study visits to companies which have implemented successful reorganization of their electrical systems, in order to get ideas for various types of solutions and to exchange experience.

According to the work environment act the employer is responsible for ensuring that no employee suffers ill-health

SIMPLE MEASURES can be taken to improve the work environment and prevent problems. Move electrical equipment further away from your own work place. The distance to the computer screen should be 70–80 cm and spectacles for use during work at computers should be adjusted for this distance. Try to limit the time spent working at the computer screen. Another important measure is to keep the whole office as free from dust as possible. Try to have a clean desk and clean floors. Other simple measures:

- Replace fluorescent lamps with earthed lighting and bulbs
- Avoid steel constructions in office equipment when building or converting
- Sort out cable coils
- Allow newly purchased office equipment to run at maximum power for several days in a well-ventilated room that is not used as a work place (This eliminates problems from chemical compounds being emitted from various components in new equipment.)
- Check the ventilation
- SIF's *Office Tester for Electrical Environments* is a good help. This is a guide to preventing hypersensitivity to electricity and can be used in the work of planning internal control. It provides a list of various critical points that should be checked and dealt with.

*Office Tester for
Electrical Environments*



If you have to seek medical advice

YOUR OWN OPINION SHALL BE RESPECTED. It is *your feeling* which is relevant. You should not have to “prove” that you are not feeling well. If you talk to your boss, the company doctor or another doctor about your problems, your opinion, your feelings shall be the starting point for the conversation.

In May 1997 a major investigation from Lund University was presented in which 40,000 patients had been monitored for 14 years. The research workers ascertained that people are very well able to observe the body's warning signals themselves. The conclusion was that considerably more attention must be paid to what the patients themselves say.

CONSULT THE COMPANY'S DOCTOR if your trouble becomes acute. Most companies have either their own company health service or are associated with a health service. If this is not the case at your place of work, then consult your own GP.

The level of knowledge concerning hypersensitivity to electricity varies greatly in company health services and public health services. Don't be satisfied with ointments and pain-killers that just relieve the symptoms for the time being. Listen instead to your body's warning signals and seek the cause of the problems.

To discover the cause of your problems, start by talking to your work colleagues. There may be others who react like you do. Go to your boss and to the work environment ombudsman. Request a meeting at which you take up your problems. A representative from the company health services may attend the meeting. Take up such problems as: What your symptoms are; Which electrical apparatus may have caused the symptoms; Is there any experience in the company of dealing with these problems? Draw up a time schedule for concrete measures. It is important that a record is kept of the meeting.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU YOURSELF ARE ACTIVE and push for feasible solutions. Rely on your symptoms and make sure that the company health services do not look upon your problem solely as a medical or psychosomatic problem but as a work environment question. Demand that an analysis of the work environment be carried out before any referral to skin specialists or the like is written out.

TURN TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES if you have acute problems and the company you work for has no company health service. You can also be referred by the company's doctor. It may be a good idea to have a close relative or friend who knows about the problem with you when you visit the doctor. Two understand more than one and it helps to have the support of someone who is not so emotionally involved as oneself.

You must be prepared to be active. Discuss your problems thoroughly with the doctor, your symptoms and what you think is causing them. *Do not demand a diagnosis of "hypersensitivity to electricity"*. It is not accepted by the social insurance office. Keep to specific symptoms instead – headache, burning face, problems at the computer screen, etc. Make sure they are entered in your case record.

If you visit the medical services several times it may be a good idea to read through your case record together with the doctor so that you can explain and emphasize certain things. If anything has been left out or is not clear from the notes you can ask to have it entered. Good documentation provides legal protection for both doctor and patient.

"Treatment of patients who relate their problems to amalgam or electricity" is a pamphlet which can be ordered from the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare. It is included in the Board's statute book *"General advice"*, and is published as guidance to medical staff, particularly doctors in primary medical care.

"Hypersensitivity to electricity" is not accepted as a diagnosis.

THE SOCIAL INSURANCE OFFICE (local and national) does not accept a diagnosis of "hypersensitivity to electricity". However, the insurance office must consider all *symptoms* of hypersensitivity to electricity. According to the definition in a letter from the Swedish Ministry for Health and Social Affairs to the Swedish National Social Insurance Office, the following should be deemed an illness:

...Any abnormal state of body or mind not in keeping with the normal process of life is designated an illness...

The senior consultant of the Swedish National Social Insurance Office comments on the Ministry's definition as follows:

"An expert opinion concerning being allergic to electricity directed to RFV, the Swedish National Social Insurance Office, confirms that it is sufficient that the clinical symptoms show that functional ability is affected. The patient cannot be blamed for the fact that the diagnosis is scientifically unclear."

The RFV writes as follows in an investigation (November 1996) concerning rules for compensation in cases of hypersensitivity to electricity:

"Problems or symptoms the insured person suffers from may in certain cases give entitlement to sickness benefit, at least for short periods. These may be problems such as headaches, tiredness, dizziness, nausea, rashes, mental disturbances, etc. It is not necessary for the cause of the problems to be explained but for the insured person to be entitled to sickness benefit the problems/symptoms must reduce his/her ability to work."

Major decisions on early retirement, handicap compensation, mileage allowance and the like shall be determined by the municipal social insurance board. If you are notified that your sickness benefit is to be withdrawn you can ask for the case to be reviewed. You can request to be present yourself, or through a representative, to argue your case at the meeting of the Board.

If the Insurance Office cites an assessment from the insurance doctor you are entitled to request a meeting with the doctor to state your case and to "give the problem a face".

If you become ill – file an industrial injury report

IT IS CURRENTLY EXTREMELY DIFFICULT to have hypersensitivity to electricity classified as an industrial injury. If hypersensitivity to electricity is classified as an industrial injury the insurance offices will automatically appeal against the decision and it is without exception revoked in higher instances. Furthermore, the new industrial injury regulations have in general made it more difficult to get injuries on the job classified and approved as industrial injuries.

However, to draw attention to the problem it is important for as many people as possible to act as often as possible so that the extent of the problem of hypersensitivity to electricity appears in official statistics.

THIS IS WHAT TO DO when you experience problems from electromagnetic fields or chemical emissions from apparatus at the work place. Inform your boss, the work environment ombudsman and your company health services (or public health services), and make sure that the problems are documented!

It is the employer's responsibility to investigate all cases of ill health, to perform risk analyses and to compile statistics every year concerning the state of the work place (according to regulations of the Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health on internal control of the work environment).

If you become ill as a result of the electrical environment, make sure that the employer files an industrial injury report. It is important that it is signed by the employer, you yourself and the work environment ombudsman. The report shall be sent both to the insurance office and Labour Inspectorate.

What does the Labour Inspectorate do?

THE LABOUR INSPECTORATE IS A REGIONAL SUPERVISORY AUTHORITY which examines how the work environment law is applied in practice. The Labour Inspectorate offers advice, performs inspections and sometimes writes injunctions to take measures.

The Labour Inspectorate can be called in, preferably in agreement with the local work environment ombudsman and your immediate superior, to contribute with an analysis of your work environment situation: heating, ventilation, chemical emissions, density of electrical apparatus, unearthed tubular steel constructions, etc.

Since there are as yet no limit values for the most usual electrical office machines, a discussion of the work environment can be held with the Labour Inspectorate based on the Office Tester, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees' guide values and official precautionary principles. The pamphlet entitled "*Official precautionary principles relating to low-frequency electric and magnetic fields, Guidance for decision-makers*" is available from the Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health. The Labour Inspectorate also gives advice and answers questions on the Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health's regulations from private individuals.

SUPERVISION AND LEGAL SECURITY

Parliamentary Ombudsman, JO

JO examines primarily complaints from individuals against official authorities and departments. If, for instance, an authority does not respond to a letter of enquiry, or if the letter has not been recorded as received, JO may be approached and will then determine whether the authority has acted in accordance with current parliamentary and government instructions.

The Health and Medical Services' Responsibility Board, HSN

If you consider you have been treated incorrectly by the medical services you can yourself report the circumstances to HSN who will investigate the matter and determine any consequences for the person responsible. The consequences may vary from a mild disciplinary reminder to revocation of medical authorization.

The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare

You can also turn to the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare which is responsible for the public medical services. This Board can investigate information concerning grievances. In the case of serious errors the Board may pass the matter on to HSN or even to a court of law for disciplinary action.

The patients' ombudsman

Advice and support is available from the patients' ombudsman – to be found at all large hospitals. You can discuss the problem here, retaining your anonymity as regards the medical personnel to whom the criticism or grievance applies. The task of the patients' ombudsman is to ensure that a patient's points at issue and legal security are observed should the patient wish to carry the discussion further with, for instance, a doctor.

The Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health

The task of the Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health is to ensure that work environment regulations are adhered to in all public and private companies. Work environments shall be regularly inspected via the various labour inspectorates all over Sweden. A labour inspector can instruct companies to take certain measures in the work environment and can even decide to close down work places. Copies of injuries and accidents at work places and in schools shall be sent to the labour inspectors. Employers, safety ombudsmen and even individuals can turn to the labour inspector concerning such matters as interpretation of the many regulations concerning

work environment existing in the Swedish National Board of Occupational Safety and Health's statute book, AFS.

The Swedish National Social Insurance Board, RFV

The Swedish National Social Insurance Board has the overall responsibility for the local health insurance offices. RFV is responsible for ensuring that the local offices follow the current regulations and issue directives for applying the rules concerning sickness benefit and industrial injury questions, for instance. RFV investigates complaints relating to the local offices and answer questions relating to principles concerning sickness insurance.

Major decisions of the local offices are reached by the social insurance committees consisting of elected representatives. These may concern sickness benefit, handicap compensation, taxi service for the disabled, etc. Appeals may be filed against the decisions in the next instance, the county administrative court.

The Swedish National Electrical Safety Board

The Swedish National Electrical Safety Board is responsible for issuing directives for installation of electrical equipment at work places and in homes. It is responsible for ensuring that the equipment is safe for personal use, reliable and fireproof through the electrical inspectorates existing throughout Sweden. Advice and information is available from either the nearest electrical Inspectorate or to the National Electrical Safety Board in all questions concerning the construction of electrical equipment.

The Swedish National Board for Consumer Policies and the consumer ombudsman, KO

The Board for Consumer Policies and KO shall offer households and consumers advice and support concerning dangerous products, for instance. The product safety act and product responsibility act (as well as the regulations in the Strong current directives at the National Electrical Safety Board) are applicable for electrical apparatus for which KO has inspection responsibility. Clear safety information and instructions for use shall be provided in the Swedish language for all products. Misleading advertising, poor or incomplete information about electrical products are issues that KO investigates and advises consumers on.

Although no limit values are yet defined for electromagnetic fields specifying that a certain apparatus is dangerous, the cautionary principle shall be cited. Does the product information lack guidance as to the cautionary principle or does it even claim that the product is not dangerous? If so the matter shall be pointed out to KO, the National Electrical Safety Board or the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health.

SIF

takes hypersensitivity to electricity seriously

THE LOCAL UNION EFFORTS determine the development of work environment issues. SIF's attitude is to cooperate resolutely with the employer in order to analyse and remedy problems in the work environment. The aim of the SIF club and elected representatives is to work towards environmental burdens from electricity and chemical emissions to be minimized to levels which are harmless to mankind.

To attain this goal SIF must be active in the choice and purchase of equipment and apparatus, resulting in adaptation to the users and thus prevention of illness. This is best achieved by every SIF club or work-place ombudsman (clubless member through contact with the union branch) contributing to a purposeful purchasing policy for equipment for the company being drawn up, with specified requirements (laid down in the work safety committee) for the equipment, based on known facts.

According to SIF's policy, in the case of hypersensitivity to electricity the SIF clubs and work environment ombudsmen shall avail themselves of current know-how, compile experience from the local work place and offer those affected support in various ways. They shall see to it that the employer complies with the laws and regulations in existence and, by cooperating with those affected, represent them when necessary against employers and authorities. They shall also spread know-how and inform their members about hypersensitivity to electricity.

SIF SHALL WORK CENTRALLY towards hypersensitivity to electricity being accepted as an industrial injury, towards those affected receiving rehabilitation, and to research contributing explanations. This has been determined at the last two congresses. SIF therefore carried out the enquiry on this problem among its members and drew up the Office Tester as a practical check list.

SIF's environment ombudsman has established an interdisciplinary network in which various specialists cooperate to draw attention to the issues.

SIF is investing funds in work trial places with associated accommodation sections. There are five of these in Aderstorp, Skellefteå. SIF provides computers and other equipment to enable work to be carried out at a distance. People who are hypersensitive to electricity can test how much electricity they can stand since the work places have different levels of electricity.

SIF is also investing considerable sums in research to find reasons and connections as to why some of us suffer from hypersensitivity in office environments.

SIF is planning to issue a *Guide* on electronic products and apparatus as a tool to give users the knowledge to place demands on products with harmless levels of emission.

SIF's policy with regard to hypersensitivity to electricity

Stipulated by the union's Board 19 June 1995

On its own initiative SIF shall:

- 1.** Take the concern of its members and the problems of those affected seriously. This means that the union endeavours to support those affected through measures.
- 2.** Through education and information the union shall work towards creating a work climate of trust, understanding and accommodation.
- 3.** Through education and information the union shall work towards increasing knowledge about hypersensitivity to electricity.

In cooperation with others SIF shall:

- 4.** By contributing to producing aids, the union shall encourage SIF clubs/work environment ombudsmen to assist those affected.
- 5.** By means of political pressure the union shall encourage intensified research into finding the connection between symptoms and cause.
- 6.** By means of political pressure the union shall work towards hypersensitivity to electricity being classified as an illness and industrial injury.

Congress decisions on hypersensitivity to electricity

In 1990 the SIF congress decided to establish a computer screen scholarship.

In 1993 the congress decided to demand that hypersensitivity to electricity be classified as an industrial injury. The congress also decided to force the requirements for increased resources for research into the factors suspected of triggering injuries in electrical and computer screen environments.

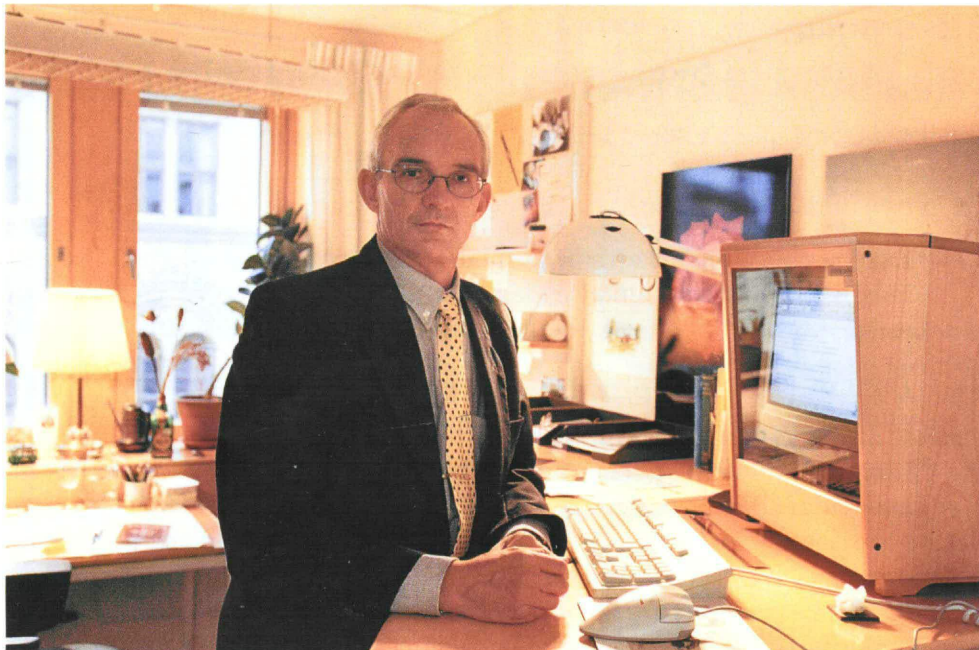
The congress decided to push the issue of financial support to all those with injuries from electricity and computer screens and that SIF shall give strong support to members suffering injuries and shall require improvements enabling everyone to return to work.

The congress decided that SIF shall urge TCO to increase its efforts to find a solution to hypersensitivity to electricity.

In 1996 the congress decided that SIF shall work towards a work environment that does not make anyone ill and that this is a right that goes without saying.

The congress decided that SIF shall provide financial support to the research into hypersensitivity to electricity (MSEK 0.8/year for four years).

The congress also decided that SIF shall continue to further the demand to have hypersensitivity to electricity approved as an industrial injury and that SIF shall help to obtain documentation for a reference work place where those who are hypersensitive to electricity can work.



Nobody should become ill due to the work place. That was what the SIF congress decided. SIF's work on work environment is based on this decision, among others. The decision is in turn based on all the conversations with and correspondence SIF receives from members who have become hypersensitive to electricity as a result of the ever-increasing electronic density in the IT environment at work places.

SIF's latest questionnaire, reported starting on page 6 of this publication, reveals that symptoms of hypersensitivity to electricity are affecting more and more people and becoming increasingly serious. Those affected often lack any support from society. Research is directed to the antiquated explanation of mental disturbance. The health insurance offices withdraw sickness benefit that has already been granted and refuse to grant sickness benefit for new cases of hypersensitivity to electricity resulting in reduced work ability.

SIF's work on work environment into the new century is directed to a human IT environment. SIF is therefore working towards the concept of HUMAN EMC. The EMC directive involves demands on the manufacturer to produce computers that do not disturb a pacemaker, for instance, but there are no directives stating that a computer may not disturb the biology of a human being.

SIF appeals to the art of Swedish engineering to gradually develop electronic apparatus and components which are free of non-functional emissions in the form of chemicals and electromagnetic fields.

We will then have a work environment in which nobody need risk his/her health at the place of work.

Bruno Hagi

Environment ombudsman particularly concerned with questions of hypersensitivity to electricity

Prisad forskning om elkänsliga

Bekvämlighetsflagg. Det var sif-
ordföranden Bo Hennings
karaktistik av läkares, forskar-
ens och myndigheters psykolo-
giska förklaringsmodell till de
elöverkänsligas problem.

Han använde uttrycket i ett
tal när docent Olle Johansson
vid Karolinska Institutet fick ett
pris av förbundet på 100 000
kronor för sin forskning kring
ändringar hos patienter
som blivit sänkta av bildskär-
men.

Elöverkänsligas sjukpenning dras in

SJUKPENNING Elöverkänsliga
personer mister sin sjukpenning.
Försäkringskassan drar in den
med motiveringen att elöver-
känslighet inte är en sjukdom.
- Elöverkänslighet har inte
accepterats som diagnos av soci-
styrelsen. Då kan det inte vara
grund för sjukpenning.

Nytt projekt för elöverkänsliga

I Skellefteå ska elallergiker från
hela landet kunna testa att
jobba på provarbetsplatser och
bo i speciella lägenheter. SIF
är med och betalar närmare en
halv miljon till projektet.

Sex elsanerade lägenheter och lika
många bostäder för elöverkänsliga.

Få elkänsliga anmäler besvär

Bara var femte elöverkänslig
har anmält sina besvär som
arbetsskada. Och bara var
tjugo deltar i någon form av
undersökning. Åtgärder

på arbetsplat-
ser framgår av en
undersökning inom
förbundet, uppger
föddsnämndens

vår så många kvinnor
ansåg sig drabbade.
av fyra uppgav bild-
skärmen som orsak till be-

Banbrytande insatser för elöverkänsliga

Attention has been drawn to the question of hypersensitivity to electricity in
Swedish press, radio and TV. A few of the head-lines are:

"Prize awarded for research into hypersensitivity to electricity", "Sickness benefit
for hypersensitivity to electricity is withdrawn", "New project for people suffering
from hypersensitivity to electricity", "Major union issue", "Pioneering work for
people suffering from hypersensitivity to electricity", "Few people who suffer
from hypersensitivity to electricity report the problem", "SIF conducting new pilot
case about electricity", "Hypersensitivity to electricity is not a mental distur-
bance", "Readers' opinion: hypersensitivity to electricity at last a union issue".

SIF driver nytt pilotfall om el

SIF ger inte upp hoppet
om att medlemmar som
skadats vid bildskärmsar-
bete ska kunna få detta
erkänt som arbetsskada.
Nu betalar man en jurist
utanför TCO för att driva

de tre juristerna sade
Britt-Marie Ros-
genomdrivit sin rätt
svara sitt ärende i
varken TCO eller
med jurist. Nu
gå in och med
stående juri-
st ärendet i."

En forskningsstudie gjord vid
Huddinge sjukhus slår hål på
myten att elöverkänsliga perso-
ner skulle ha fler psykiska pro-
blem än andra. Studien presente-
rades på torsdagen vid ett semi-
narium om elöverkänslighet ar-
betslivsforskning i Stockholm.
I Huddingestudien

eller färre problem än kontroll-
gruppen av icke-elkänsliga.
Det symtom på elöverkänslig-
het som brukar dyka upp först är
stickningar i huden. Sedan följer
rödflammighet, torrhet, hett
och/eller brännande känsla, ofta
i ansiktet, och värk. I steg två
finns en tendens till ögonbesvär,
känsla i ögonen liksom ögon-
het

LÄSARNA HAR ORDET

Elöverkänslighet äntligen en facklig fråga

Genom Bruno Hagis insat-
ser har SIF som första för-
bund en policy och målsätt-
ning för arbetet med elöver-
känslighet som i högsta grad
är en facklig fråga.

Det är också en allvarlig
samhällsfråga. Många in-
stanser och verk har delan-
svar för hanteringen men där
vill ingen ta huvudansvaret.

Därför är SIF:s ställnings-
tagande så mycket viktigare.

Numera finns ett omfattan-
de internationellt kontaktnät
mellan enskilda elöverkänsliga
men även mellan sam-
manslutningar som företrä-
der dessa. Därmed inses att
det även är ett globalt pro-
blem.

Det är en gigantisk uppgift
som även andra fackförbund
bör ta sitt ansvar för. Kanske
vår tids största miljöproblem.

Självklart ska elöverkänslig-

lighet klassas som arbetsska-
da. Den debuterar ju oftast i
arbetssituationen.

Vi uppmanar alla som upp-
lever besvär som de relaterar
till arbetet att kontakta sitt
fack. Det är viktigt.

Ett varmt tack till SIF och
Bruno Hagi för det ni nu gjort.
Ett tack också till Gunni
Nordström på TCO-tidning-
en som under många år över-
tygande tagit våra problem

på allvar. Många andra får
också del i vår uppskattning.

Sidan 9 i SIF-tidningen nr
13/95 kommer att gå till his-
torien.

Men - glöm bara inte alla
de elöverkänsliga som svi-
kits under resans gång!

Hälsningar från en påtving-
ad asyl i husvagn i bergslags-
skogarna.

Inger och Axel



In 1993 SIF carried out an extensive enquiry into hypersensitivity to electricity among its members. A summary of the results, "Hypersensitive to electricity" was compiled in 1995. It attracted considerable attention and was translated to German and English. Facts, who was affected, where and how the symptoms appear were presented in easy-to-read form, as well as an action programme.

At the end of 1995 SIF carried out a new enquiry. There was considerable interest in view of the fact that the results from 1993 were so alarming: Had members' problems increased or decreased? It was found that the problems of hypersensitivity to electricity have increased. The number of SIF members who answered that they suffer serious or extremely serious problems caused by hypersensitivity to electricity has doubled in two years!

This publication, **"Hypersensitive in IT environments"** briefly presents facts from the latest questionnaire in which SIF asked all members if they were troubled by hypersensitivity to electricity. It also offers advice on how the person affected can act at work, in contact with the medical services and the national insurance office.

SIF - for individual and industrial development!

- Development of competence and profession
- Individual salaries
- Away with differences in pay between men and women which are not objective
- Shorter and more flexible working hours
- Renewal and growth in industry
- More jobs and support for unemployed members

SIF is

- The union for all clerical and technical employees in industry, building, property, IT, media, energy and consultancy branches
- Independent of political parties.



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