



**S**tress  
Tobacco **O**  
Alcohol **L** & Drugs  
HIV **V**/AIDS  
Violence **E**

# SOLVE

## Addressing Psychosocial Problems at Work

*An ILO SafeWork Educational Programme that examines both  
policy and shop floor action to address psychosocial  
problems in a comprehensive way*

[www.ilo.org/safework/solve](http://www.ilo.org/safework/solve)

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## **What is SOLVE?**

*SOLVE is an interactive educational programme designed to assist in the development of policy and action to address psychosocial problems at work.*

### **The SOLVE Concept**

Stress, alcohol and drugs, violence (both physical and psychological), HIV/AIDS and tobacco all lead to health-related problems for the worker and lower productivity for the enterprise or organization. Taken together they represent a major cause of accidents, fatal injuries, disease and absenteeism at work in both industrialized and developing countries. These problems may emerge due to the interaction between home and work, they may start at work and be carried home (or into the community) or vice versa. SOLVE focuses on prevention.

The combined effects of these psychosocial factors have considerable negative ramifications for workers, employers, the worker's family and society. For the worker, these problems can result in isolation, stigmatization, injury, illness and even death. For the organization or enterprise, these factors can result in increased absenteeism and accidents, reduced productivity, increased recruitment, training and insurance costs and decreased profits and therefore a lack of competitiveness. The family invariably suffers the full brunt of the loss of income, reduced welfare, missed opportunities for children, psychological trauma, lack of self-respect, and injuries, to the extent that the family may break up altogether. For society, the impact may be seen in terms of increased social costs, decreased consumer spending, increased crime and adverse economic development.

There are numerous interrelationships between stress, alcohol and drugs, violence, HIV/AIDS and tobacco. Any one of these psychosocial problems may be a causal factor for the others. Each one may be an end result or find its roots among the others. Thus psychosocial problems can initiate or exacerbate an increasingly damaging cycle that will lead to negative consequences for the individual, the organization or enterprise and society as a whole. The traditional approach in dealing with psychosocial problems has been reactive and isolated, focusing on just one of the problems and treating its symptoms. But the problems are increasing and because they are interlinked treating just one can be ineffectual. Therefore a major paradigm shift towards an integrated, proactive and prevention-oriented approach is essential.

To address these problems at the enterprise or organizational level, a comprehensive policy should be put into place. Apart from day-to-day operational issues, an enterprise policy should focus on occupational safety and health needs including psychosocial problems. Traditional approaches have neither addressed the policy requirements nor action required to reduce the negative impact of psychosocial problems.

The ILO, with its tripartite structure and its leadership in occupational safety and health, is in a unique position to develop and support activities which translate concepts into policies and policies into action at the national and enterprise levels. It is one of the goals of the ILO to develop national capacity as well as the capacity of individual enterprises and institutions to reduce the negative impact of workplace psychosocial problems. The SOLVE methodology enables governments, workers and employers to improve working conditions and productivity. Through improved psychosocial working conditions, workers are healthier with a higher morale and employers see productivity increase. The government as an employer can also benefit from such capacity building, but in addition can use the SOLVE methodology to meet its own mandate to improve working conditions.

Through educational courses, SOLVE encourages senior executives, directors of human resources, occupational safety and occupational health professionals, employers' and workers' representatives and others to develop a comprehensive policy for their respective workplace. This policy should incorporate issues such as prevention, non-discrimination, social support, worker involvement, the provision of training and information and the provision of treatment and rehabilitation. The policy should call for an occupational safety and health management system to assure smooth development, implementation and evaluation. For workers and supervisors, SOLVE provides for action through education and training translating policy into action at the shop-floor level.

Bringing SOLVE into a country is a positive way to involve all the social partners: government agencies, employers and workers. In a number of countries university programmes at the honors or graduate level are engaging in courses or research related to SOLVE. In the near future the SOLVE methodology will be expanded to include five additional psychosocial issues: sleep deprivation, inadequate nutrition, lack of regular exercise, gambling and addiction to new technologies.

### ***The SOLVE Methodology***

The SOLVE methodology is currently offered as five different courses. Two are managed by ILO-trained Course Directors and for two others, the materials are provided, at no charge, to companies or organizations that have been through the SOLVE Policy-Level Course for them to implement as part of their continuing education programme. Finally the Course Directors' Workshop is provided exclusively by ILO SOLVE Master Trainers.

#### *Courses managed by ILO-trained Course Directors*

1. **SOLVE for Managing Directors.** This is a two hour course designed to motivate the heads of industries, corporations, institutions or services to bring the SOLVE methodology into their organization. The course introduces the integrated approach and demonstrates the impact on corporate survivability. This course uses an interactive approach incorporating case study analysis, cost analysis and group discussion. SOLVE for Managing Directors is, as the name says, aimed at top executives.
2. **The Policy-Level SOLVE Course** is a 32-hour interactive programme for operational managers designed to provide the elements necessary for participants to design a comprehensive corporate policy including psychosocial factors.
  - This course is highly interactive, using case study analysis, simulation exercises and policy development activities to reach its objectives. It may be conducted over four days or over a longer period of time, dividing the course into smaller units.
  - The course is designed to work best in groups of 16 participants. Ideally the group should consist of four workers' representatives, four government officials and eight employers or their representatives.
  - During the course, six simulation exercises are linked together by a story line that starts on the first day of the workshop and ends on the last day. The story is an on-going scenario with problems that require participative high-level management

decisions for resolution. The simulation exercise is designed so that each participant in the course is actively involved in a role-playing capacity.

- The last element of the course is dedicated to action planning. At the end of the course participants are required to develop an action plan that will indicate how the SOLVE concepts will be applied in their respective organization or enterprise within the three months after the course is completed.

#### *Course materials provided to organizations having completed the Policy Course*

3. **SOLVE for Workers** is a one-hour orientation course for workers, workers' representatives and supervisors. It is designed to demonstrate how multiple psychosocial factors can impact on an individual at work, during leisure activities and at home. It also provides an opportunity for the worker to become familiar with the comprehensive corporate policy. SOLVE for workers uses exercises, group discussion and individual action planning to achieve its objective.
4. **MicroSOLVEs** are subject-specific courses relating to one of the five psychosocial problems covered in SOLVE. They are the action-oriented follow-up to the policy-level SOLVE activities and are designed for workers and supervisors in enterprises that have already completed the Policy-Level course and have developed a comprehensive policy that addresses psychosocial issues. MicroSOLVE elements come in sets of three for each topic; module one addresses recognition of the problem; module two addresses action and module three prevention. Each module is about 1.5 hours long.

#### *Courses provided exclusively by ILO SOLVE Master Trainers*

5. **The SOLVE Course Directors' Course** is three days long. The course covers several vital components necessary to successfully organize and instruct SOLVE for Managing Directors and the SOLVE Policy-Level Course. Like all other SOLVE courses it is highly interactive and encourages active participation by the trainees. The prerequisite to the course directors' course is the four-day Policy-Level course. Once an individual becomes a course director, they are in an ideal position to significantly facilitate the implementation of the SOLVE methodology.
  - The course director is trained to manage the implementation of SOLVE for Managing Directors and the SOLVE Policy-Level Course in his or her respective country. After completing the course, Course Directors can then instruct and direct SOLVE in different locations. From here, SOLVE packages for workers and supervisors can be distributed to participating enterprises and organizations in order to reach large sections of the working population.
  - A crucial part of the Course Directors' Course are the demonstrations of different levels of SOLVE, which are carried out by the participants themselves. In this way the participants can experience first hand how the courses work, and also can be guided in their instruction by the ILO SOLVE Master Trainers. The demonstrations of SOLVE for Workers and MicroSOLVE, which are for the shop floor level, also ensure that participants appreciate how SOLVE is intended to reach to all levels of an enterprise or organization and that all levels have to work together to achieve changes in working conditions.

## ***The strength of SOLVE***

SOLVE combines economic and social objectives by stressing win-win, low cost, practical solutions that meet the needs of both industry and workers. With the implementation of SOLVE activities, a capacity can be established to address, in a combined way, drugs, alcohol, violence, stress, tobacco and HIV/AIDS issues within occupational health and safety and industry development programmes.

To achieve this SOLVE is:

***People-centred.*** Workers are increasingly recognized as the crucial asset for the success of any business. Their well-being is essential to the development of the "new" flexible, quality-oriented, knowledge-based, healthy enterprise.

***Preventive.*** Prevention is much more cost effective and successful than waiting until a significant problem has developed before action is taken. A healthy work organization and environment are pre-conditions to the development of a productive workplace.

***Results-oriented.*** The SOLVE programme's success can only be measured by the results in the workplace. Taking action to promote change in the workplace should be the natural follow-up to the project. The project will also show how strategic and immediate objectives are compatible.

***Adaptable.*** Situations are complex. Solutions are multiple. One approach to any problem does not work in all environments and cultures. Several approaches and options will be presented and discussed so that users can develop programmes and action that meet their unique needs. The design of the SOLVE training package is based on the manufacturing industry. It is also adapted to the health care industry, the fire service and the maritime sector through modifications of handouts, activities and the simulation exercise. Future adaptations are foreseen. Through the extensive use of simulation activities, the participants naturally bring their own cultural norms relating to themselves as individuals, their homes and communities and their work into the exercises. Thus SOLVE activities are readily tailored to the participants' needs.

***Self-sustainable.*** Programmes and action that are developed through the SOLVE programme are designed to meet the needs of employers and workers. They show positive results, can be modified to meet changing circumstances and are cost-effective. The resulting effect can be seen as a positive economic and social gain which grows, sustains and adapts itself to changing needs in the organization.

## ***SOLVE information and implementation***

- **Promotion**

A comprehensive introduction to SOLVE has been developed as an audiovisual presentation with an accompanying text. French, Spanish and German translations of the introduction are available on the SOLVE Internet homepage ([www.ilo.org/safework/solve](http://www.ilo.org/safework/solve)). Users can either view the material on-line or download the electronic files. Promotional presentations have been delivered in a number of meetings, symposia and conferences over the past three years.

- **Training courses**

Policy-Level SOLVE Courses have been held in Belgium, Cameroon, Canada, France, India, Italy, Malaysia, Namibia, the Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, the United States and Zambia. Participants have included government officials, university professors, employers and workers, officials from six United National agencies and the Athens Olympic Committee.

There have been Course Director's Courses in a number of places, including Turin and Rome (Italy), Cape Town (South Africa), Montreal (Canada), Bangkok (Thailand), Manila (Philippines), Brussels (Belgium), Douala (Cameroon) Penang (Malaysia) and Hollywood, MD (USA). Some of these courses have included participants from other countries, thus creating capacity to implement SOLVE both nationally and regionally.

- **Translations**

English, French and Thai versions of the SOLVE manual have been printed and are available for use. The SOLVE manual has been translated in draft into Bulgarian, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and Italian. Translations into Chinese and German versions are foreseen.

- **Adaptations to sectoral activities**

In concert with WHO, SOLVE for the Health Sector has been drafted and was tested in the summer of 2004 in South Africa. SOLVE for Public Administration was tested at the UN (ESCAP) in Bangkok, and SOLVE for the Air Transport Sector was validated with the IAMAW (International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers) in Hollywood, Maryland in the USA, both in late 2004. SOLVE for the Maritime Sector is currently being developed in the Philippines and SOLVE for Firefighters is currently being drafted in Geneva. is under discussion.

- **SOLVE Course Directors**

There are now over 180 SOLVE Course Directors in 37 different countries. A password protected Course Director's web site has been established to serve as a repository for existing materials and to provide new materials for review.

- **The SOLVE web site**

The SOLVE homepage is located at [www.ilo.org/safework/solve](http://www.ilo.org/safework/solve). There is a public section offering information about SOLVE, frequently asked questions, and a listing of courses. Promotional material can be read on line or downloaded for use. There is also a private section on the Web (password protected) which serves as a repository for instructors of the latest materials as well as material under development.

- **The SOLVE manual**

A new edition of the SOLVE manual will be authored in 2005. The new manual will be in a book format including five additional psychosocial issues: sleep deprivation, inadequate nutrition, lack

of regular exercise, gambling and addiction to new technologies. The materials for SOLVE course participants will be published separately.

***Through the implementation of SOLVE psychosocial issues can be addressed in an integrated and therefore effective way to contribute to improved health and productivity.***

For additional information contact us:

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or consult the internet web site: [www.ilo.org/safework/solve](http://www.ilo.org/safework/solve)

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