

## **CALL CENTRE WORKERS SUFFER VOICE PROBLEMS**

One in four call centre workers suffer voice problems because managers are failing to properly protect their health, a study has found. Researchers commissioned by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) found around one in 10 call handlers had been diagnosed with a voice problem, while the same proportion said their work was now suffering because of the stress placed on their vocal cords. Of the call agents surveyed, 60 per cent reported having difficulty making themselves heard against background noise and 41 per cent said they had failed to be heard by the customer on the other end of the line.



More than one in three call agents said their voice was hoarse often or very often. The researchers identified new starters, particularly female workers, as a high-risk group who are more likely to develop voice problems. Experts at Ulster University surveyed nearly 600 call handlers from 14 call centres across the UK and Ireland. Lead researcher Dr Diane Hazlett of Ulster University said: 'Policies on voice care should exist in all call centre environments, and should be reviewed regularly. Going forward, there needs to be an emphasis on the prevention of voice problems within the industry - to maintain optimal vocal health. Employers in this sector need to show they better recognise just how important the voice is, to having a healthy, well supported workforce and a thriving business.' In 2005, public sector union UNISON called for urgent action to address the voice loss risk for call centre workers, and made recommendations to tackle the problem. Adult education teacher Joyce Walters received a six figure payout in November 2010 for the occupational voice loss that forced her to give up her job.