

In 1993 SIF carried out an extensive enquiry into hypersensitivity to electricity among its members. A summary of the results, "Hypersensitivity 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 had doubled in two years. The 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.

The following is taken from the website of the Swedish Union of Clerical and Technical Employees in Industry (SIF) and their publication titled:

**Hypersensitive in IT (Information Technology) Environments, Information concerning problems caused by hypersensitivity to electricity, Facts and advice to members of SIF.**

"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."

FACTS from SIF's reports concerning hypersensitivity to electricity

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 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.

## EYES

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

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!

#### NOSE

Symptoms: Stuffed nose, runny nose and sinusitis.

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!

#### MOUTH

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

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.

#### MUCOUS MEMBRANES

Symptoms: Dry mucous membranes and abnormal thirst.

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!

#### SKIN

Symptoms: Skin feels dry, redness and blotchy complexion.

Skin and eye trouble are the two most frequent symptoms of hypersensitivity.

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 if extremely serious skin problems!

#### STINGING FACE

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

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%.

#### FACIAL PAIN

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

In 1993 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.

#### HEADACHES

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

In 1993 17.9% of those asked had serious problems.

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

In 1993 4.2% had extremely serious problems.

In 1996 the number had doubled to 8.8%.

#### TIREDNESS

Symptoms: Abnormal tiredness and difficulty in concentrating.

In 1993 20% had serious symptoms of this type.

By 1996 the number had doubled. 42% 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.

#### 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.

#### 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%.

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.

"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 or your state of health that matters. All measures taken, such as reorganisation of electrical systems, etc., being put on the sick list, rehabilitation, must depart from this fact".

#### 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 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 plated 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 skeptical to reorganising 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 reorganised 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 reorganisation 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 electromagnetic 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 reorganisation 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 eliminated 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.

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 patient 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 painkillers 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 emphasise 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 not 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 authorisation.

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 the 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 ombudsman 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 over-all 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 or 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 minimised 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 ombudsman 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 (MSKE 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 \*\*\*\*\* 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 in to 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.

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. It is independent of political parties.

## **A) The Website**

SIF- the Swedish Union of Clerical and Technical Employees in Industry is a politically independent trade union. SIF organizes around 300,000 white-collar employees in the manufacturing, construction, computer and consulting industries. SIF works for positive development of pay and other terms and conditions at the workplace, and for security of employment and a good working environment. SIF recruits members in accordance with the vertical principle. This means that all of the white-collar workers at a company may become members irrespective of position, training or pay level. 90,000 members are engineers, 120,000 have administrative jobs, 14, 000 are computer professionals and 60,000 are managers.

### **SIF's international work - an internationalized trade union**

We are living in an increasingly internationalized world - a world without frontiers. We can no longer say that here in Sweden we do things our way and that there they have other rules. In the EU we now have many common rules and regulations. SIF's international work and its membership of various international federations gives the trade union the possibility to exert influence and exchange experience. It also gives us insights into the cultures and working conditions of other countries. We share our trade union experience and can work internationally by spreading Sweden's and SIF's view of trade union work.

Membership of the EU is easily the most important international event for Sweden and SIF in recent years. It is now more important than ever for SIF to have close and good contacts with our colleagues in other European trade unions. We need to become familiar with their view of the various areas of trade union work so that we can seek alliances and develop cooperation on different issues, for example equal opportunities and working hours. Our international work should help to give SIF's elected representatives and employees the knowledge and contacts they require in order to be able to influence the terms and conditions of employment of our members, as well as the development of the companies in which they work.

To achieve our goals SIF has defined four areas, or "pillars", for our international work: 1) SIF in international organizations, 2) Contacts with other trade unions, 3) Cooperation in European Workers' Councils and 4) Aid . These four "pillars" seldom stand entirely alone. Contacts with other trade union organizations help the work in European Workers' Councils. The international organizations cooperate on various issues, including questions concerning aid and human rights.

## **1. SIF IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

### **Europe**

SIF's members are in turn members of various international federations. These international federations form an important trade union network. SIF works most intensively in the European

branch organizations of the international federations. Through its membership of The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), SIF is also a member of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The ETUC and the branch organizations play an important role in the EU, for example as referral bodies for the EU Commission on issues concerning labour law and labour market legislation. The EU Commission places many such issues in the hands of the social partners and expects them to resolve these issues directly.

### **The Nordic Countries**

Trade union work in the Nordic Countries forms an important basis for our European work. SIF is therefore a member of the Nordic organizations which are of significance for our European work. Within the Nordic sister organizations we have defined four areas of priority: legislation and agreements; industrial policy; the working environment and the development of competence. The goal is that the Nordic federations should have a common view of European cooperation in these areas.

### **The Rest of the World**

Organizational work is an overriding goal for the international federations at the global level. Apart from acquiring new affiliates this means offering assistance in the recruitment of members and in the formation of new trade union organizations. Other methods for strengthening the affiliated organizations include trade union training, campaigns, solidarity action and legal aid.

## **2. CONTACTS WITH OTHER TRADE UNIONS**

SIF has good contacts with many individual trade unions around the world. SIF gives priority to contacts with trade unions in countries where there are already many Swedish companies, or where Swedish companies are setting up business, and in countries which have companies with many SIF members in Sweden. Most of SIF's contacts are with trade unions in the Nordic Countries and Europe, primarily in Germany, Italy, Great Britain, Austria and Belgium. Attention is now also being turned to countries in Asia, for example China, where many Swedish companies are in the process of starting operations.

## **3. COOPERATION IN EUROPEAN WORKERS' COUNCILS**

Many SIF members are employed in companies which are part of, or owned by, a large international group. Gaining greater opportunities for the members to cooperate with colleagues in other countries, as well as the right to meet the group management, has long been an important goal for Swedish and European trade union organizations. In 1994, the EU directive on consultation and the provision of information between the employees and managements of international groups was presented. This directive came into force in 1996 when all the EU/EEA countries passed national laws on European Workers Councils. In Sweden the law came into force in the Autumn of 1996.

### **Facts on European Workers' Councils:**

The law applies to all types of companies and groups whether they be private, cooperative or public companies. A group must have at least 1 000 employees in the EU/EEA area. It must also have operations in at least two countries, with at least 50 employees in each of the respective countries. The employer is obliged to call meetings of the Council and to meet the costs for travel, interpretation, translation, loss of income, attendance by experts etc. In Sweden, the representatives are appointed

by the trade unions in the company. If the trade unions are unable to agree on the distribution of seats, representatives are appointed in relation to the number of members in the respective trade union organizations. The Workers' Council is entitled to meet the group management at least once a year. In connection with this meeting the trade union representatives have the right to meet without the management being present in order to discuss common issues and joint demands and guidelines. The Council appoints a working committee which, among other things, is responsible for contacts with the management between meetings and for planning the meetings together with the management. All the countries within the group must be represented on the Council, irrespective of the number of employees.

The purpose of the workers councils is that the employees should have the right to receive information about the operations of the company, to discuss with and consult the group management and to hold internal deliberations and discussions with trade union colleagues in

other countries. In simple terms it can be said that the parent company of the group is obliged to give the Workers' Council information and to consult them on those questions which in Sweden are covered by the Act on Co-Determination at Work. A requirement is that the questions must be transnational, that is they must concern employees in more than one country.

#### **4. AID**

SIF works with trade union aid partly through the international federations and partly through its own projects. These projects are primarily financed by the LO/TCO Council for International Trade Union Cooperation and by special fund-raising activities. SIF's solidarity and aid work has to maintain a balance between our own interests on the one hand and the desire to promote solidarity on the other. For example, by assisting the development of well-run trade unions in countries where there are Swedish companies, for example, SIF is laying the foundations for effective Workers' Councils in the future. Through trade union work over national borders SIF can also help employees in other countries to achieve better terms and conditions of employment.

#### **Facts on the LO/TCO Council for International Trade Union Cooperation :**

The Council is a non-profit association founded by the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO). The Council distributes money from the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) to the aid projects of the trade unions. The aid provided should promote the development of democratic and strong trade union organizations. Particular attention should be paid to the equal opportunities aspect. Responsibility for each project lies with the individual trade union or the international federation running the project.

Some of the projects concern developing free trade union movements in, for example, countries which were formerly part of the Eastern Bloc or in Asia. The elected representatives need training in basic trade union work, democracy, the working environment, negotiation skills and so on. SIF has the knowledge and the network of contacts to help them get started. SIF also has the experience and know-how concerning privatization and privately-owned companies which countries in the former Eastern Bloc lack. In other cases SIF works with projects based on solidarity. In West Africa, for example, SIF ran a project for women which primarily concerned how to use the study circle as a training method.

#### **INDUSTRY & INTERNATIONAL AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS**

##### **Construction:**

IFBWW- International Federation of Building and Wood Workers.

EFBWW- European Federation of Building and Wood Workers.

##### **Food:**

IUF - The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations.

ECF-IUF European Committee of Food, Catering and Allied Workers Unions.

##### **Manufacturing:**

IMF - The International Metalworkers Federation.

EMF- European Metal Federation.

##### **Media and Entertainment:**

MEI - Media and Entertainment International.

##### **Mining, Chemicals, Pharmaceuticals and Paper:**

ICEM - The International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers Unions.

EMCEF- European Mine, Chemical and Energy Workers Federation.

##### **Telecommunications:**

PTTI- Post Telegraph and Telephone International.

##### **Trade, Banking, Insurance and Computers:**

FIET- The International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, and Professional and Technical Employees.

EURO-FIET- European Regional Organization of the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical and Professional and Technical Employees.