**South East of England sees over 350 cases of abuse of those working on the public highway in the last 12 months**

New data from the South East area has revealed the shocking rise in physical abuse against public-facing workers, including those that work on the public highway, such as road workers.

The statistics from the Think Respect campaign show that there were over 360 cases of abuse against road workers in the region the last year.

Of those cases 324 were verbal abuse with a shocking number of 36 involving physical abuse including violence against the workforce and instances of spitting in the faces of those working on the public highway.

The most shocking of these include an attack by a gang who entered a worksite and attacked a worker and plant equipment with weapons including baseball bats and wood..

These figures are mirrored around the UK, as more public workers face threats of physical and verbal abuse with almost 60% reporting this to be a weekly occurrence with certain job roles such as traffic management experiencing it on a nightly basis.

The campaign launched during Respect Our Workforce Week, is helping raise awareness of the challenges facing public facing workers when they are verbally and physically abused.

According to the campaign, and across the UK, 80% of all roadworkers and other people working on the public highway, for example, get abused on a monthly basis.

This abuse is holding up work being completed on sites and in some cases works have had to stop altogether, ironically one of the things that the public find most annoying about roadworks.

Speaking about her own experiences, site foreman Sinead Ryan said, “It’s (abuse) almost every night, sometimes more. Most of the time its just people screaming abuse at you but it can be worse, meaning you have to lock yourself in your van and one time I had a gun pulled on me in a petrol station by an irate member of the public.”

The negative impact of this on the mental health of the individuals subjected to the abuse is something which is, inevitably, of concern to employers , as Steve Day, Contracts Manager at Go Traffic Management explains:

“Obviously this has a massive impact (on the mental health of people), nobody likes to go to work and find themselves subjected to a constant torrent of abuse, let alone to have this every day.”

Kevin Robinson, founder and Campaign Director of Think Respect added: “The significant increase in workforce abuse in the North East against those who work on the public highway is sadly rising not only there but in every part of the country. This has become a societal problem that is getting worse by the day.

“If you were a teacher, a doctor or a nurse, you wouldn’t expect someone to come into your workplace and physically abuse you, so why should these workers?

Sadly the situation is not restricted to those who work on the public highways, but instead is one faced by all of those in public facing roles.

At the end of 2023, a YouGov survey of 2,082 adults found that attacks on shop workers are worsening amidst the rise in retail crime, with two in five shouted at, spat on, threatened or hit every week, leaving half feeling unsafe at work, but one in four don’t report abuse.

In the survey for the Retail Trust, results showed that two in five (41%) are now shouted at, spat on, threatened or hit every week, and nearly half (47%) are left feeling unsafe at work.

For more information visit [www.thinkrespect.uk](http://www.thinkrespect.uk)

Notes to Editors:

Think Respect is a nationwide campaign launched by the Stamp it Out programme to highlight the socially unacceptable abuse of those who work on the public highways.

The campaign is supported by leading client organisations such as National Highways, East West Rail and the Trans Pennine Route Upgrade, all of whom have seen an increase in the levels of abuse of their workforce in the post covid era.

The data collected in this release has been collated by a series of focus group interviews across the UK, through our own internal reporting app and a database of contractors many of whom work on the UK’s most significant infrastructure projects as well as a YouGov survey conducted across the retail sector on behalf of the Retail Trust.

The Think Respect campaign aims to:

\*Raise awareness with the public about the challenges relating to work force abuse

\*Work with police forces around the country to work towards delivering more convictions of those who abuse public-facing workers

\*Work with government to raise awareness and to encourage them to understand the extent and challenges related to abuse of public-facing workers

\*Work with the press and industry associations to help communicate the messages of the campaign and help get this issue discussed in board rooms around the country

\*Create industry resources, encourage use of reporting app and conflict management training for highways contractors and the supply chain.

Separate data is available for Scotland should this be required.

All media requests and enquiries should be directed to [adrian@boundarymarketing.co.uk](mailto:adrian@boundarymarketing.co.uk)