

A vertical column of five circles on the left side of the page. The top circle is a light yellow, matching the header. The middle circle is white, and the bottom three circles are a dark purple, matching the background. The white circle is positioned to the left of the main title.

# ORGANISING FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY: UNION OFFICERS COURSE

**Building organising unions**

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Activity 1</b> Introductions	<b>9</b>
<b>Activity 2</b> Using health and safety to recruit	<b>10</b>
<b>Activity 3</b> Mapping your union branches and workplaces	<b>11</b>
<b>Activity 4</b> Improving safety rep involvement	<b>12</b>
<b>Activity 5</b> Taking up problems – supporting safety reps	<b>14</b>
<b>Activity 6</b> Strategic corporate research on employer's health and safety provision	<b>15</b>
<b>Activity 7</b> Improving health and safety information and communication	<b>18</b>
<b>Activity 8</b> Course review	<b>20</b>

This course is designed to help union officers work with their union branches and workplaces to organise for health and safety. It can be used by union officers and tutors as part of a course or as a short standalone course to help plan recruitment of new safety reps, improve branch and workplace efforts on health and safety and become more familiar with the health and safety performance of companies they are involved with.

Health and safety is a priority for unions and the union contribution to safe workplaces is measurable and considerable. Research shows that better standards of health and safety are achieved in unionised workplaces than in similar non-unionised ones and in union surveys, health and safety is regularly identified as one of the single most important issues for members and for workers. Union officers can engage with management to ensure their health and safety performance monitoring is reported regularly and used to improve standards and consultation.

## **Aims**

This course will help you to:

- review existing health and safety provision and identify improvements in union branches and workplaces that you represent
- identify and develop new safety reps
- build union membership through better organisation of safety reps
- examine company information on health and safety and how it can be used to improve consultation and improvement of standards
- identify negotiating opportunities with employers to build and improve health and safety provision.

## Two-day course outline

### **Day 1**

Welcome and enrolment

#### **Activity 1**

Introductions and course aims

#### **Activity 2**

Using health and safety to recruit

#### **Activity 3**

Mapping your union branches and workplaces

#### **Activity 4**

Improving safety rep involvement

### **Day 2**

#### **Activity 5**

Taking up problems – supporting safety reps

#### **Activity 6**

Strategic corporate research on employer's health and safety provision

#### **Activity 7**

Improving health and safety information and communication

#### **Activity 8**

Course review

## **Pre-course activity**

### **Aims**

This activity will help you to find information that

- will be used on the course
- will start to give you a picture of health and safety in the workplaces and branches you represent.

**Prior to the course please find as much information as you can and answer the following questions and complete the chart on the next page.**

**The information will be used during the course to help map and improve health and safety organisation in the branches and workplaces you represent.**

What involvement have you had with health and safety?

- with safety reps?
- with employers?
- with other health and safety organisations?

Try to find some health and safety information about one of the companies you work with. This might include:

### **Health and safety management**

- investment levels in occupational health and wellbeing
- provision and take up on training
- provision and monitoring of measures to reduce general ill-health in the workplace
- access to professional information and advice
- health and safety structure and responsibilities
- company health and safety performance plan
- company health and safety targets that include compliance with health and safety regulations
- company targets for the reduction of injury, ill health and other incidents
- plans for the introduction of new technologies and/or organisational change
- safety committee structure and consultation with the trade union
- published results of company health and safety performance
- key performance Indicators.

### **'Quantitative' indicators**

- occupational health rates
- injury rates
- serious injury rates
- employee sickness absence rates
- number of HSE prohibition and improvement notices.

**Who do you represent?** Please give details using the headings on this chart.

Your main concerns for this area of your work		
Main health and safety hazards		
Number of safety reps		
Number of union branches		
Work patterns e.g. part-time/night work		
Different groups of workers e.g. women, men, agency, migrant workers, workers with disabilities etc.		
	Sectors	Workplaces

## The organising approach

An organising union is built on high membership involvement, high levels of union activity in the workplace and encouraging union officers to work together with safety reps and members to ensure health and safety provision and standards are effective. Union officers need to find ways to ensure that they:

- understand the health and safety performance of the companies that they deal with
- communicate with safety reps in identifying issues, finding solutions and dealing with problems to become familiar with the level of health and safety provision in branches and workplaces
- increase the number of confident, trained reps and safety reps who are representative of the workplace they come from. There is also a role for union learning reps to help with health and safety education, promotion and events
- improve negotiating strength on health and safety issues
- deal with problems early, when they are manageable, rather than leaving them to get worse
- support safety reps in order to give them confidence to tackle health and safety issues and problems themselves.

## The union effect

One of the main reasons that people join and stay in trade unions is because organised workplaces are safer workplaces. Union officers have direct relationships with safety reps and can support and encourage them in their activities to build union membership.

200,000 safety reps make a difference because they:

- explain the case for unions at induction sessions or courses for trainees
- ensure the workplace is safe by carrying out inspections, checking that injury and incidents are reported and risk assessments are carried out, which helps to reduce injuries and ill health at work
- make workers more confident and informed by providing information and support when they have a health and safety problem or experience an accident or ill health as well as helping with free legal aid for accident and injury victims and for people suffering from industrial diseases
- help to develop a more positive safety culture in the organisation.

Studies have shown that where there is a union presence the workplace injury rate is 24 per cent lower than where there is no union presence (Litwin, *Trade Unions and Industrial Injury in GB*, LSE 2000)

## **Aims**

This activity will help you to:

- get to know more about each other
- work out aims for the course/session
- practice interviewing, listening and note-taking skills.

## **Task**

Work with another person on the course. Find out some information about the area and workplaces they represent using headings below.

- name
- experience and position(s) in the union
- the area/region, workplaces, jobs and union branches of the people they represent
- other courses they have been on in the last two years
- why they are interested in health and safety as a recruitment and organising tool
- what they want to get out of the course.

## **Report back**

Be prepared to introduce the person you have interviewed to the rest of the group.

### **Aims**

This activity will help you to:

- think about how you can support safety reps to encourage people to join trade unions
- develop communication skills and systems.

### **Task 1**

On a flipchart list the top 10 advantages of paying attention to health and safety.

### **Task 2**

You will be asked to prepare health and safety arguments in one of the following situations to:

- encourage people to join a trade unions
- encourage people to become safety reps
- promote the importance of health and safety in maintaining a safe workplace.

- a) a union branch where the membership has decreased and there are only a few safety reps
- b) a non-unionised workplace
- c) a newly recognised workplace
- d) an employer that has large numbers of migrant workers.

### **Report back**

Write your key points on a flipchart.

Elect a spokesperson to report back.

### Aims

This activity will help you to:

- locate your members, non-members, safety reps and union learning reps (ULRs)
- work out where you need new safety reps
- start to identify recruitment and achieve targets.

### Task 1

Working in small groups identify what mechanisms you use to know and keep up to date with developments and opportunities in the companies, workplaces and branches that you represent.

Are these mechanisms effective?

What works?

What needs to be improved?

### Task 2

Mapping can provide valuable information. Look at the list of the different types of information below that can be gathered in a workplace or branch mapping exercise.

What opportunities does mapping offer in

- union recognition campaigns?
- health and safety negotiations?
- encouraging activism?
- testing communication networks?

Information for mapping exercise

- different sectors
- full time working
- lone working
- which are covered by a safety rep or ULR.
- sites/workplaces
- agency or casual working
- which branch covers them

Then further identification of:

- numbers of members and non-members
- where another union is recognised
- number of health and safety reps
- membership interest in health and safety ('active interest', 'some interest', 'no interest')
- where there are good and poor health and safety standards
- areas/workplaces where the union has been involved in a health and safety issue over the last year
- areas/workplaces where you have communicated with an employer about health and safety over the last year
- any other particular areas of concern.

### Report back

Be prepared to explain your key points to the rest of the course.

### **Aims**

This activity will help you to:

- improve health and safety at work
- think through how the union branch/workplace structure organises for health and safety
- examine how safety reps are organised.

### **Task**

Read through the Improving Safety Reps Involvement checklist on the next page. In groups, answer the questions as they apply to your region, area and workplace branches that you represent.

Then consider all the “no” answers and discuss how to make the improvements which would turn them into “yes”.

### **Report back**

Be prepared to report back to the course.

# Checklist – Improving safety reps involvement

- 1 Do you know which workplaces have safety reps and where there are gaps?  **Yes**  **No**
  
- 2 Are there safety reps from different groups?
  - women  **Yes**  **No**
  - black and Asian workers  **Yes**  **No**
  - workers with disabilities  **Yes**  **No**
  - lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender  **Yes**  **No**
  - agency/casual workers  **Yes**  **No**
  - night shift workers  **Yes**  **No**
  - vulnerable/migrant workers.  **Yes**  **No**
  
- 3 Have all safety reps been trained?  **Yes**  **No**
  
- 4 Are employers notified of new safety rep appointments?  **Yes**  **No**
  
- 5 Do safety reps get the information and support they need?
  - from the employer?  **Yes**  **No**
  - from their union?  **Yes**  **No**
  
- 6 Do safety reps rely too much on the union officer to take up health and safety issues at work?  **Yes**  **No**
  
- 7 Is there a regular report provided to the union branch by safety reps?  **Yes**  **No**
  
- 8 Are safety reps consulted on negotiating issues like restructuring?  **Yes**  **No**
  
- 9 Do safety reps get enough time to carry out their duties?  **Yes**  **No**
  
- 10 Are safety reps aware of the role of the union learning rep?  **Yes**  **No**
  
- 11 Do safety reps get involved in or hold events to promote health and safety awareness? E.g. Union health and safety campaigns, Workers Memorial Day, Hazards conferences, European Safety Week.  **Yes**  **No**

### Aims

This activity will help you to:

- check that health and safety issues get taken up efficiently
- encourage confidence and efficiency for those people directly involved in taking up problems
- make sure that problems are shared.

### Task 1

In groups, discuss the following problems and the obstacles that would prevent the issue being taken up directly by those involved.

### Task 2

For each of the problems what would you advise the following people so that they can progress and act on the problem themselves?

- the health and safety rep?
- the shop steward?
- the employer?
- any other person that might be useful?

Make a note of your conclusions and be prepared to report back to the course.

- 1** A safety rep telephones the union officer to say that a member has been off work with stress. There have been several others in the same department who have been off work which has added to the pressure. The safety rep has conducted interviews with the members but is not sure what to do next.
- 2** A safety rep contacts the union officer and says that three weeks ago security staff found marijuana joints on a balcony at work. The employer suspended a member who regularly uses the balcony on which to smoke and took his work pass off him. After a week the employer sent him for a drugs test (marijuana stays in the system for six weeks, cocaine for two weeks and crack cocaine for 48 hours). The test found nothing and the person wants their job back. The safety rep tells you that the employer is still concerned about drug taking.
- 3** A safety rep contacts their union officer to see if you have some information on accidents and young workers in order to run a workplace campaign for Workers Memorial Day and use it to recruit new members.
- 4** The union branch has run an effective campaign on recruiting vulnerable/migrant workers using rights on health and safety at work. One of the migrant workers has agreed to become the workplace safety rep but their employer has refused them the three days' release to do the safety reps induction course. This will be the first safety rep in this medium-size workplace.

### **Aims**

This activity will help you to:

- obtain a picture of a company/organisation business health and safety provision and performance
- identify where to find company/organisation health and safety information
- understand how the information can be used.

### **Task**

Working in pairs and referring to the questions in the checklist on the next page choose **one** company each to discuss and identify:

- What health and safety information from a company would be most useful?
- Which of the information in the table on the next page is available to you?
- How you might use the information?

### **Report back**

You will be asked to report back to the rest of the course.

# Checklist: Strategic corporate research on employer's health and safety provision

## Activity

What is available?

Are details of company/numbers employed/subsidiaries and contractors accessible?

Yes  Some  No

## 'Qualitative' indicators

### Health and safety management

Is there an adequate structure with clear responsibilities?

Yes  Some  No

Are risks managed and minimised effectively?

Yes  Some  No

Is the union consulted and involved?

Yes  Some  No

Does the company have a health and safety performance plan?

Yes  Some  No

Is the plan active and reviewed regularly?

Yes  Some  No

Are there written targets that include compliance with health and safety regulations?

Yes  Some  No

Are there written targets for the reduction of injury, ill health and other incidents?

Yes  Some  No

Does the company have aims and targets to achieve nationally and internationally recognised standards of health and safety management?

Yes  Some  No

Are results reported to the safety committee and trade union?

Yes  Some  No

Are results published in company reports and bulletins?

Yes  Some  No

Is there commitment from the Board of Directors to debate and approve health and safety targets that are set?

Yes  Some  No

## 'Quantitative' indicators

Occupational health rates

Yes  Some  No

Injury rates

Yes  Some  No

Serious injury rates

Yes  Some  No

Employee sickness absence rates

Yes  Some  No

Number of HSE prohibition and improvement notices

Yes  Some  No

## **Company/organisation health and safety performance information – how they can be used**

The HSE encourages companies to use the HSE Corporate Health and Safety Performance Index (CHaSPI) as a tool to communicate their performance on occupational health and safety using a set of 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' indicators.

Company/organisation health and safety performance information can:

- include all aspects of the company group, subsidiary, public, private and voluntary, trade unions, UK and overseas
- provide indicators for reports and benchmarking on how a company is performing in health and safety in the UK and overseas
- measure performance against other sectors and organisations
- demonstrate concern and a public commitment to health and safety and transparency for customers
- be used to complete work tender applications
- encourage potential investors
- help to set improvement targets
- offer opportunities for companies/organisations to engage with those not participating or with particularly poor performance.

Union officers should find out whether a company/organisation participates in CHaSPI or have other systems in place that provide performance monitoring.

The HSE publication HSG65 *Successful Health and Safety Management* provides a set of criteria for management to follow that helps them plan, monitor, control, review and report health and safety measures at work. It is a useful check for union officers to see what measures a company has in place to improve health and safety at work.

## **How/where to obtain company/organisation health and safety information?**

- TUC's *Researching Companies*, a strategic corporate research manual available through the union professionals website [www.unionprofessionals.org.uk](http://www.unionprofessionals.org.uk)
- HSE Corporate Health and Safety Performance Index (CHaSPI) or other systems for performance monitoring
- company annual reports, business journals
- company/organisation safety committee minutes
- Labour Research Department
- Hazards magazine
- International Union Federation

### **Aims**

This activity will help you to:

- build effective teams and networks
- identify how to keep up to date on health and safety
- share health and safety information
- improve information communication/networks.

### **Task**

Look at the action plan on the next page.

Discuss and identify:

- areas to improve: skills, qualities, knowledge and information that you would like to see developed for safety reps, employers and yourself
- target areas for health and safety organising and recruitment teams
- how to involve more safety reps in organising and recruitment activities
- what further health and safety information you need
- other facilities/help you need

### **Report back**

Report back to the rest of the course.

## Action plan: Improving health and safety information and communication

	Safety reps	Employers	Union officers
Areas to improve: Skills Qualities knowledge and information			
Target areas for health and safety organising and recruitment teams			
How to involve more safety reps in organising and recruitment activities	Safety reps Union reps Union Learning reps		
Further training required			
Other facilities/ help you need			

### Aims

This activity will help you to:

- review what you have done on the course
- identify what you have learned
- decide how you can use what you have learned in your role as union officer.

Please use the following headings as a guide:

**1** What did you find most useful about the course?

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**2** How will you use what you have learnt in your role as union officer?

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**3** What did you find least useful?

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**4** Suggestions for improvements

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**5** Further training for that would be useful for you

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**6** Other

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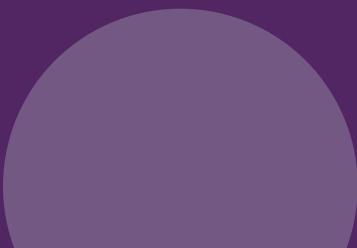
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