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WHAT MAKES HEALTH AND SAFETY A GOOD ORGANISING ISSUE?

Building organising unions

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1. Introduction

Despite health and safety being a prime activity for unions, and one of the major reasons why workers want unions in their workplace, it is all too often seen as a specialist area and sometimes separate from other union activities. This guidance sets out to show how union organisers can use health and safety as a tool in a campaign for union recognition as well as to develop activists and grow the union in already organised workplaces.

The guidance is written with the assumption that the reader is aware of the numerous techniques that unions can employ in an organising campaign such as one-to-ones, workplace profiles, overcoming objections etc. It does not try to apply a health and safety scenario to each of these techniques but rather highlights how health and safety can be used to win an organising campaign.

2. Setting organising in the health and safety arena

Why health and safety and organising?

Workplace safety and health is no different from other issues that unions fight for, like better wages or equality of treatment. Workers should be provided with a work environment that will not rob them of their health, their limbs or their lives. In an organising campaign you must decide whether this is an issue around which you can mobilise the workers and an issue that will give you leverage with the employer.

Union help in resolving health and safety issues has tangible results not only in terms of improving working conditions but also in raising awareness of the union.

Organising is tough – as a union organiser you need to take advantage of any issues that arise during a campaign, including health and safety ones.

3. The hazards of work

Workers should know that not only are traditional work hazards, such as chemical exposure, work at heights or unsafe equipment, hazardous to their health and safety but also work design hazards, such as work pace and shift work. These can have serious detrimental effects on their health and should not be accepted as ‘just part of the job’; something can be done about them.

As an organiser you will often find situations where:

- workers think these problems are just part of the job
- workers are used to the jobs, even when the jobs are uncomfortable and even painful
- workers are not aware of the harmful health or safety effects of particular workplace hazards
- workers think they have no control over safety and health
- workers think it is not possible to change the work environment to get rid of the safety and health hazards.

In an organising campaign you will not only face a management approach to safety and health from employers – e.g. “it’s the worker’s fault” or “fix the worker not the job”, but you will also be dealing with many workers who accept this approach too, since it is the only approach they know.

Therefore, the organiser has to educate workers about the difference between an employer and a union approach to safety and health, expose management’s failings when it comes to health and safety, and help organise workers around a union approach that advocates the identification and elimination or reduction of hazards.

4. Building an organising campaign around health and safety

Many of the strategies and techniques used by organisers – for example, strategic planning, mapping, one-to-ones and organising committees – can also be used to develop and motivate activists around health and safety issues in both unionised and non-unionised workplaces.

What makes health and safety such a good organising issue?

Often there are winnable objectives

Many health and safety conditions can be improved during the course of the campaign. This reflects well on the union and union activists. If the employer doesn't act on the problems this can make the employer look bad – particularly if the union campaign exploits the failure to act. When safety and health problems are corrected, this often makes a considerable difference in working conditions. The effect can usually be seen immediately.

The problems are widely felt and deeply felt

Workers care about safety and health. It affects everyone in a workplace.

The issues are easy to understand

Workers experience health and safety problems at first hand. It's part of their everyday experience unlike, for example, employment rights issues that may need a little study, or pension rights that can be incomprehensible to non-experts.

The issues can give workers a sense of their own power

Safety and health is an area in which, given the right issues, all workers can get actively involved and bring about results for themselves. Collective action and power: these allow workers to start “acting like a union”.

Sends a message to the employer

Shows the employer that workers are defining their own safety and health agenda through the union.

Wins community support

Safety and health is something for which a workforce is more likely to get community support. There is a life outside the workplace and a health and safety failure leading to injury or a health or environment risk, not only effects the individual and their family but may also have consequences for the rest of the community.

So health and safety issues are good organising issues because:

- health and safety affects all workers
- health and safety issues can be won
- health and safety can move workers to take action.

A good organising health and safety issue should meet the following criteria:

- It can be won.
- The problem is serious and solving it will result in a real improvement in workers' lives.
- Many workers are affected and feel strongly about the issue.
- Workers understand the issue and what actions the employer is being asked to take to fix a dangerous situation.
- Workers will gain a sense of their own power and build leadership in the union.

A few years ago Unite Amicus was involved in an organising campaign at book distribution company Gardners Books which is a major player in this sub-sector. The company employed around 1000 people in Eastbourne and had a relatively high turn over, low pay and poor conditions. Its main competitor was Amazon.

One organising issue revolved around heat in the warehouse on hot days. The warehouse had no air-conditioning system and a lot of the fans were broken.

Rather than the union bringing an individual or collective grievance against the firm the union purchased 10 thermometers.

Members were responsible for taking these into the warehouse, placing them in the hot spots and keeping a log of the temperature every two hours, night and day (24-hour operation).

To do this they had to find people on other shifts to help, including non-members. Non-members quickly joined the union because they were actively involved in something to help themselves. Many showed a taste for becoming activists.

The monitoring system was linked to a reporting system giving regular contact to a large group of members and activists. Previously there had always been poor attendance at union meetings but this issue and the method of addressing it not only boosted membership and the activist base, it also gave members a purpose and reason to attend union meetings as they had something to report.

In terms of success it boosted membership by around 200 and doubled the activist base from around 7 to 14.

Health and safety organising in a non-union workplace

The first step is making contact. You will need to know about the nature of the hazards facing people working in the sector so that you can prompt a response when talking to people about the conditions they are working in. Those working in the firm know most about their working conditions so the role of any good organiser at this stage is to listen – aim for 70 per cent listening and 30 per cent talk. As an organiser you will be aware of the various tactics you can use to make contact with and identify individuals who can be your ears and eyes inside the firm and form the basis of an organising committee around health and safety.

These contacts are your major asset in using health and safety as an organising tool. Like any asset, these people need investing in so you need to ensure that they receive the appropriate support, which may include training but most importantly one-to-one contact with you as the union link.

Having developed contacts within the workplace you or the organising action group should carry out a health and safety mapping exercise.

Get to know the company's and the union's strengths and weaknesses in terms of health and safety. There are a number of questions you can ask as part of your mapping exercise to establish levers you can use against the company.

- Has the company been the subject of enforcement action by the Health and Safety Executive or other relevant enforcement body?
- Are there investors in the company that trade upon their own good health and safety record or environmental responsibility and does the company's record meet those standards?
- Are there discrepancies that can be exploited? Do investors wish to be associated with a company that does not meet their own standards? What do you know about hazards in the company's sector and does the company meet the statutory or sector standards to control those hazards?
- Are there safety reps and are they in a union; is there a safety committee and are there union members on the committee?
- Does the union have the appropriate information about the nature of hazards that workers in that sector face and access to expertise on what should be done to control or eliminate them?

Remember that even though there is no union, the employer may be required under the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations to establish a means of informing and consulting with their employees on health and safety issues.

This could give you the opportunity to influence the discussions staff have with their employer or to work towards ensuring that those selected/elected as worker reps are union activists or are in touch with, if not part of, the organising committee. Having people working on the inside is always best.

The aim is to change the safety committee established by the employer, and possibly controlled by the employer, into a committee on which union members, or union supported activists, can dominate the discussions and influence workplace policy. This may be a key element in building the union presence in the workplace prior to negotiations for recognition.

There will be circumstances where the employer has not initiated a consultation process. You will then have to work with the organising team to prime activists in the target company to promote with the workforce the need for the employer to comply with their legal obligations. This is all with the view of trying to get either union members, or union supported reps, into key effective positions in the target company so that other workers can see the benefits of union membership. It is also about getting members active to improve union density and therefore the effectiveness of the union.

Ensure all the time that the health and safety element aligns with the rest of the organising strategic plan and that appropriate resources are being applied suitably across the plan.

Unionised workplaces

In theory it is easier to develop an active union presence in unionised workplaces. Unionised workplaces, though, can present their own set of problems, such as large numbers of non-union members and few activists and inactive or ineffective union branches. But the one clear benefit that a union can demonstrate to current and potential members is the presence of a trade union-appointed safety rep. However, this requires the safety rep to be trained and to receive ongoing support from the union.

But first, of course, the workplace will need mapping to establish if safety reps currently exist, where they are located and what training they have received and when. With the help of the organising team, one-to-ones and surveys will identify what are the key health and safety issues. This 'first-cut' exercise, as well as being an audit of the current situation, should also establish what changes might need to be made in terms of representation to help promote health and safety in areas which may not have effective representation or an active membership and to encourage activists to come forward and become safety reps.

Remember the aim is to get workers to become active themselves and not to 'leave it to the union' even though that may be through a very effective union safety rep.

Safety rep – an integral part of organising and union activity

These examples, from the TUC Safety Representatives Awards, show some of the activities that safety reps engage in, offering possibilities for the organising approach.

Gwen Cherry, safety rep, stores forum rep and branch secretary for USDAW, won a company award in recognition of her idea, called a “plank”, that reduces the reach needed to scan goods at the checkout. It was successfully trialed in her store and is now used nationwide. The holder of a TUC Certificate in Occupational Health and Safety, she had recognised and persuaded management that checkout layouts breached the Manual Handling Regulations. She worked closely with the company’s design team to overcome the problem.

Sandra Vincent is the GMB convenor in her local council. She became a safety rep to improve her union’s involvement in health and safety and make the workplace safer. Her main achievement has been to initiate a project within the local authority education service to develop generic risk assessments, which have protected the workforce and saved the council money. She has brought better representation and organisation to the council, and has recruited more people to the union and protected her members.

Ian Beeby took part in a HSE pilot exercise as a roving safety rep in agriculture, and is a national committee member for the agricultural workers section of Unite. He got involved to try to reduce the number of injuries and deaths in farming, especially on the roads where he has drawn attention to the legal anomalies of farm vehicles not needing MOTs. He is most proud of his role as a roving safety rep, going to farms without union members and helping them improve their safety system. He has also been active in visiting schools talking about safety, having taught 3,000 school children in and around Cambridge about the hazards of farms and construction sites.

In the UK, the legal rights of union health and safety reps in workplaces where the union is recognised by the employer are laid out in the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (SRSC Regs).

The key functions of a safety rep are:

- representing workers in consultations with employers
- investigating potential hazards and dangerous occurrences
- examining the causes of accidents, dangerous occurrences and diseases
- investigating complaints by members
- making representations to the employer
- carrying out workplace inspections
- representing employees in consultations with inspectors
- receiving information from inspectors
- attending joint health and safety committee meetings.

Employers must establish a joint safety committee if requested to do so by two or more trade union health and safety reps. In general, employers must make available to safety reps all the information necessary to enable them to fulfil their functions.

Employers must provide any help and facilities reasonably required by safety reps to carry out their functions. Union safety reps must be provided the time off with pay to carry out their safety reps' duties and to undergo TUC- or union-approved training.

These are minimum rights. Many union safety reps negotiate rights to facilities, information and time off that go well beyond the legal minimum.

Trade union safety reps are protected from victimisation for any acts or omissions in their execution of their duties – the law gives safety reps rights, not duties.

The Employment Rights Act 1996 says safety reps have protection if they are unfairly treated or placed at a disadvantage in circumstances including:

- raising health and safety concerns
- carrying out designated health and safety functions
- proposing to leave or actually leave their workplace or any dangerous part of it, or refuse to return, in the event of what they reasonably believe to be serious and imminent danger, or
- proposing to take action to protect against a perceived serious or imminent danger.

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 gives workers 'whistleblower' protection in a range of circumstances, including raising issues relating to health and safety being endangered.

In workplaces without union safety reps a watered down version of the safety reps' regulations apply – the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996 (HSCE Regs). A similar regime covers those working offshore.

Safety reps have a crucial role as workplace organisers. Their legal status gives safety reps an opportunity to contact and talk to members and non-members alike. An active safety rep is the face of the union in the workplace that workers will see about the workplace on a regular basis. An organiser needs to ensure that safety reps are aware of the organising agenda and realise how their position as a union safety rep can contribute to the organising campaign.

Worker health and safety committees

Under the SRSC regulations, in union recognised workplaces management must respond positively when two or more safety reps ask management to establish a safety committee. Ideally these should be operated on a partnership approach with management and unions having an equal place at the table with mutual arrangements being made on the chairing and servicing of the committee.

Where the union is not recognised the organiser should establish worker health and safety committees to help the organizing campaign with health and safety issues in an on-going and effective way. These are formed of activists that have been identified through one-to-ones and other organising activity and can be more overtly tied in to the union's organising activities.

The activists on the committee communicate with workers in the workplace and organisers on health and safety matters, and recommend strategies and actions to raise issues and improve conditions and are able to take its campaigning beyond the workplace to the community at large.

A 'dirty tricks' campaign in 2005 by parcels company DHL, attempting to derecognise the company, drew attention to serious safety shortcomings at the firm. A survey of GMB members revealed working time, welfare, vehicle ergonomics and personal protective equipment concerns. Union reps became active around these safety issues, leading to an increase in rep numbers and increased confidence. The GMB reports "a consolidation and growth in the membership."

GMB general secretary Paul Kenny said that health and safety is "an area where working people trust trade unions to deliver at both a national and a local level." He added that the union saw health and safety as a key organising and recruitment issue. "By demonstrating their rights to investigate, inspect and discuss health and safety concerns, GMB safety reps can show the effectiveness of trade union membership and the benefits which arise from it."

Functions of a health and safety committee in organising

The safety and health committee should be involved in several main activities:

- 1** identifying current and potential health and safety hazards and problems
- 2** identifying appropriate measures to eliminate or control hazards and problems
- 3** identifying effective union strategies for raising health and safety issues as part of the overall organizing campaign
- 4** assisting the voluntary organizing committee in integrating health and safety issues into the overall organizing strategy
- 5** serving as the focal point for worker concerns about safety and health and building member involvement in the union's health and safety efforts.

With the above in mind, some of the specific activities that worker committees can undertake to accomplish these functions include:

- surveying workers regarding their health and safety concerns as well as work-related symptoms, injuries, illnesses and stresses
- conducting body mapping, hazards mapping and other activities for identifying and tracking hazards and their impacts on the workers
- conducting investigations of incidents, illnesses and near misses
- accessing and regularly reviewing information on hazards, monitoring data, incident reports etc.
- accessing and reviewing information on contemplated workplace changes for the presence of hazards. This would include reviewing plans for new equipment, new work processes, new technologies, work restructuring/changes in how work is organized, etc., to see if adjustments need to be made to assure that the change is safe and healthy for the workforce
- engaging in regular communication with workers on health and safety issues
- educating workers about particular health or safety issues and concerns
- helping select priority health and safety issues to raise during the organizing campaign
- assisting with the development of strategies for getting priority health and safety issues addressed
- monitoring HSE complaints.

This advice is reproduced from the Australian Metal Workers' Union's OHS Manual.

- 1** Management has different goals, even enlightened management. They may care about safety in its own right, but are probably more concerned about workers' compensation costs. And building the union is never one of the management's goals.
- 2** What you do with the company on health and safety is a form of collective bargaining. Even if you don't see it that way, they do.
- 3** Health and safety isn't a technical issue. Technical knowledge helps. But there are plenty of places to get technical information. Strategy and organisation are much more important.

"Fifteen Things every Unionist should Know about OHS" from the AMWU OHS Manual can be found on this page of the AMWU's website www.amwu.asn.au/images/OHS07CHAPTER2.pdf

Above are covered the major health and safety topics as organising issues around which to engage current and potential members. Below are some practical areas that organisers and organising committees can develop in relation to health and safety.

Activities for union organisers around health and safety

Organisers can often use safety and health issues in campaigns to galvanise the support of workers and demonstrate the strength of having a union fight to improve working conditions. Here are some suggested activities organisers can do to incorporate safety and health into the organising drive:

- Conduct a survey among the workers to identify hazards and develop an issues list for action.
- Research past HSE or local authority inspections and citations at the workplace.
- Establish a union safety and health committee among the workers.
- Train workers on their safety and health legal rights and how to identify hazards in the workplace.
- Analyse injuries and illnesses occurring at the work site by having the organising committee or union safety and health committee request copies of the BI 5010 accident report form.
- Find out what chemicals workers use and how much they're exposed to. Request the list of hazardous chemicals, safety data sheets, and worker exposure measurements.
- Initiate individual and group activities among workers to assert their rights by filing complaints on hazards, wearing badges highlighting workplace hazards, asking HSE to inspect the facility. Use the TUC website and click on the Health and Safety and Organising pages in the right hand menu.

Worker's Memorial Day is held on 28 April every year. All over the world workers and their reps conduct events, demonstrations, vigils and a whole host of other activities to mark the day. This could provide a useful point for activity – though don't wait all year! More information on the TUC health and Safety pages.

The employer is, of course, under no obligation to provide you with such information if the employer does not recognise the union and therefore the union does not have its own safety reps in place. However, the employer is obliged to give such information to employees and those who come into contact with their operations so identifying activists through one to ones and other organising strategies is important.

Here's an example of a health and safety organising campaign established by Unite–TGWU

Unite action on health and safety: shared Wellington boots

This was a greenfield site in the Midlands: a new food factory employing 500 workers, from a variety of nationalities. By talking to the workers (one-to-ones) the T&G section of Unite organising team found that their main issue was having to share their work-boots (Wellington boots). The incoming shift had to take over the boots of the outgoing shift! And, as if that wasn't enough, their boots leaked, and no personal lockers were provided. So this was an issue that was widely and deeply felt.

What did they do?

- Newsletters covering these issues were circulated in “all the languages we had knowledge of”.
- The leaders then took around a petition calling on the employer to meet its duty to provide effective PPE and to provide lockers.
- When the employer did not respond to this, or to requests from organisers for access to workers on the site, Unite organised a mass sign-up of members and over 200 individual grievances were lodged.
- The employer was given the choice of dealing with these grievances on an individual basis, which would have taken weeks, or collectively on the basis that they would grant recognition. The employer opted for recognition.
- The employer agreed to remedy the issue of the boots and Unite followed up with another survey to monitor this.
- The employer bought inferior boots. This was soon picked up by the newly elected reps and representations were made.
- Using cheap boots was a false economy as the employer had to replace the boots.

Organisers all know about mapping the workplace but mapping health and safety is very useful too.

Mapping activities: techniques for workers to identify injuries, hazards and problems

The first step in a health or safety campaign is to find common problems. Then begins the detective work to find the hazards behind the symptoms. Many health and safety activists use body and workplace maps to see how workers are injured in their workplaces now, or how they are affected by what they did years ago.

Mapping is participatory and fun. It involves most senses, can be used where workers speak different languages or don't read well, and is a quick way to make sense of complex situations. Maps can show the different experiences of workers by age, seniority, job, or gender.

Body maps can show the patterns of symptoms and the long-term effects of hazards. Workplace maps give an overview that individuals do not have. You can use the two types of maps together to see the workplace in a new light.

Body maps

“This is the first time I’ve known I’m not alone in my pain,” a veteran construction worker said after seeing the body map he and others made in an ergonomics workshop for operating engineers. His reaction illustrates a classic barrier to health and safety organizing – individual workers think their symptoms are just their problem.

Body maps can break that barrier. The most common version is to use the front and back outlines of a body. Make a large version for the overall group you are working with and smaller sheets for groups of workers.

Next, decide what your questions are. Are you looking for aches and pains? All the symptoms workers have now? Long-term effects, such as cancer, chronic pain, stress? Do you want to see the effects by gender, age, job, or seniority?

Get people into small groups. If you want information by age, for example, divide them into groups based on that category. Give each group colored markers or colored sticky dots and a code to mark their outlines. One method uses red = aches and pains, green = where does your stress show up, and blue = other symptoms that may be work-related. To get the overall picture, have them transfer their information to the large body map.

When you’re looking at aches and pains, one person can act out her job. The others identify which body parts are likely affected by force, repetition, and awkward postures. With permission, they can mark the spots directly on the person, using “ouch” stickers. Participation is the key element here. Through participation workers identify the problems and find solutions for themselves and thus become activists.

Work/life balance

Work takes a toll off the job as well as at work. This shows itself in the time we are able to spend with our families and able to deal with family crises or on-going problems; how we use our leisure time – do we have leisure time or do we have the energy to enjoy such time that we have? Also are we able to take part in community activities? Are we so work-focused that what is happening in our neighborhood, as well as the wider world, means nothing to us? Poor working conditions and a poor workplace environment can also have an effect on the general health and well-being of the community in the company locale, particularly where people are dependent for their livelihood on a limited number of firms operating in their area. It may also be that the area is dependent on a particular type of employment, either a sector, such as the garment trade, or type of employment, for example seasonal or part-time work. This too could have an effect on the health and well being of the community where the workforce you are seeking to organise live. Work/life balance mapping or ‘world’ mapping is one way to show these effects.

Put a large sheet of paper up on a wall, with a small human figure in the center. Then draw or add words around the figure to show how lives are affected by work. Someone might draw guitars if they can no longer play because of crippled tendons or broken hearts from a divorce linked to long hours and stress.

Workplace organisation map

Workplace maps usually focus on the hazards behind the symptoms that show up on the body map. If there's time before making the maps, get workers doing similar jobs to fill out a questionnaire and discuss it together. Focus on:

- How is the work organized? (e.g number of workers, shifts, hours worked, and breaks)
- What is the work process? (How is work done? What tasks are involved? What machines and tools are used?)
- What are the hazards? (use the categories below)
- What complaints or symptoms show up in conversations?
- What measures are being taken to prevent or reduce the hazards?
- What else could or should be done?

Groups of workers then draw the layout of their workplace or work area. Be sure to include doors, windows, offices, washrooms, desks, machinery, and equipment. The larger the map, the more details you can add. Try to get the questionnaire information onto the map without making it too cluttered.

Hazards are often divided into six categories:

- safety (immediate causes of injuries)
- physical (energy sources such as radiation, temperature, and noise)
- chemical (dusts, liquids, gases)
- biological or communicable (infection, needlesticks, mold)
- ergonomic (force, repetition, posture, design of control panels)
- work organisation/psychosocial risks (things that cause stress such as long or odd work schedules, no say about the job, workload).

Draw a different colored icon or shape to show each category of hazard. Different sizes can show the seriousness, and the number of workers who may be exposed to the hazard can be marked inside the icon. Use sticky dots or some other format to put the people in the picture and show where they work.

It's also useful to show the flow of work and workers' usual paths (movements) in the workplace. The map is easier to read if you use string for this information. One worker made two maps using different colors of string to show her paths in a nursing home, on 'normal' days and then when working short-staffed. The clear differences between the maps led to an "ah-hah" about her increased workload, a serious stressor.

PCS members at the National Gallery Company (retail) achieved a 100 per cent “yes” vote for PCS union recognition in a ballot on 19 April 2007. The reps who led the campaign tell us how they did it.

“Last summer our employer gave us an option. Agree to changes in our contracts, or they would terminate our employment. A small group of us decided to get ourselves organised to prevent the employer from changing our terms and conditions. We were surprised how willing staff were to join the PCS union and take an active role.

“We held regular evening and weekend meetings and spoke to all staff individually face-to-face. By taking a proactive and collective approach we discovered other issues that staff and PCS members felt strongly about – such as bank holidays and shift rotas. By gathering information on shift patterns and working arrangements, we made sure that all retail staff members had the opportunity to take part in the campaign.

So when our petition on union recognition was circulated the majority of staff signed it in a very short space of time. This also led to many new workers joining the union and a successful campaign.”

Extract from PCS magazine *Organise*

Using the maps

The first question to ask after you’ve made any of these maps is, “What do you see?” Look for patterns and things that don’t fit the patterns.

Put together maps of work areas to get the overall picture of a workplace. Over time, come back to them to record new information or check on changes.

Use your imagination and creativity to make sure that everyone’s story is recorded, if they want it included. If you want to add even more information, you can use see-through plastic layers for separate categories of information or to represent the experiences of different groups.

What is hurting workers on the job? What symptoms, injuries and illnesses are workers experiencing? What and where are the hazards that are causing (or could cause) problems? How is on-the-job stress affecting workers’ lives? How can unions involve members and develop strategies for solving health and safety problems?

Unions across the country and around the world are using “mapping” techniques to help answer these important questions. Mapping techniques provide a way for workers to use their own experiences to document workplace health and safety problems. These techniques are participatory methods by which workers gather and analyse their own knowledge and experiences. With the information gained, workers and unions can develop strategies to

eliminate or reduce workplace hazards and to improve health and safety on the job.

Mapping techniques are effective because they:

- involve workers
- use visual images and do not rely on ability to read or write
- get people thinking about their workplaces in a new way
- show that workers are not alone, that the problems are collective problems, and
- help point to collective solutions.

Here's an example of mapping that led to collective action by those who work alone.

Community – Betting Shop campaign

The use of one member of staff to cover all day in a betting shop has become common practice particularly in 'small' shops. The union Community mapped the structure of Ladbroke betting shops – how were single, almost isolated offices kept in touch and made to be part of the 'corporation'. Community realised that Ladbrokes' own internal communication system could be used to wear down the company's resistance to doing away with all-day lone working in their betting shops. The system could become a potentially useful means of internal communication for the union.

Ladbrokes have a 'Speak-up' programme that encourages staff to contact management, through email, with their suggestions. Having been engaged in a series of discussions and negotiations with Ladbroke's management but getting no-where, Community escalated the action by getting members to use 'Speak-up' on a particular day to complain about having to work alone. In fact, as the Ladbrokes betting shop community is a tight-knit one, non-members found out what was going on and called in as well. 'Speak-up' was flooded with calls all on the topic of single working.

Ladbrokes, if nothing else, are image conscious. With this sort of direct action from the workforce, and with the union threatening to go public on the issue, management backed down and agreement was reached on doing away with single working in the majority of circumstances, though recognising that on some occasions, such as staff sickness or training this may be unavoidable.

The result of this action by Community has meant that union members took action and found that they could do something themselves to improve their working conditions, it meant a greater awareness of the strength of the union and working together in the union and it has meant more employees signing up because of the effective action.

Further information about mapping techniques as well as mapping outlines can be found at the website of the TUC sponsored magazine Hazards – www.hazards.org

Last thoughts

Union organisers are not expected to be health and safety experts. Your union will have health and safety advisers at regional or national level or will have access to health and safety specialists.

You do not need to understand everything about health and safety but you do need to understand its relevance to organising. So you may need to talk to your union about health and safety training to ensure you are suitably up to speed on this area of union activity. Organisers will also need to recruit activists with an understanding of health and safety to the organising team from either within or external to the target company. The safety activists would act as the main source of reference and keep a check on what is happening in the target workplace.

Risks in the TUC's weekly online bulletin, edited by award winning *Hazards* editor Rory O'Neil. You'll get news from the TUC and the Unions (and from the HSE and others) direct. More importantly you'll get it free. To register go to:

www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index.cfm?mins=242

Essential reading is the TUC's *Hazards at Work – Organising for Safe and Healthy Workplaces* which gives comprehensive information on organising and health and safety, the legislation and health and safety in general.

Hazards at Work is available from **www.tuc.org.uk/publications**

By signing-up to **www.unionprofessionals.org.uk** organisers have access to *Researching Companies*, the TUC manual on strategic corporate research as well as a raft of other information useful to union organisers, union safety specialists, full-time officers, researchers and other union workers.

Organisers should also be keeping an eye on the organising pages at **www.tuc.org.uk/organisation/index.cfm** on the TUC website as well as its health and safety pages on **www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index.cfm**

The TUC-sponsored *Hazards* magazine has produced a wealth of resources to help organisers and safety reps including guides to mapping techniques. It provides a wealth of information on all health and safety issues and campaigns as well as news of safety rep activities **www.hazards.org/diyresearch/index.htm**

You can keep yourself up-to-date with the latest in health and safety news and events both in the UK and Internationally by signing up to the TUC's free email magazine *Risks*, read each week by over 16,000 subscribers.

Go to **www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-14092-f0.cfm** for an example of *Risks* and for the free subscription.

The Health and Safety Executive has taken on the message that involving the workforce is good for health and safety and that safety reps improve health and safety management. HSE inspectors have been issued with specific guidance on including safety rep and worker involvement in their assessment of an employer's systems for managing health and safety. The HSE has a webpage specifically on worker involvement with a page for safety reps which highlights the positive role that safety reps and working with unions can have on health and safety. Case studies are included on these pages. Go to www.hse.gov.uk/workers/workers/index.htm for further information. You can also find the good information about the business case for trade union involvement in health and safety management.

This may seem like a lot of information and an overwhelming amount of legislation. Sometimes this is a game that employers like to play – flood the union with irrelevant or over the top amounts of information. But health and safety is a matter of common sense and a safe and healthy working environment is a basic right that every worker can understand and sign up to. Workers know what the health and safety problems are in their workplace and usually have a pretty shrewd idea of how to solve them. The union organiser's job is to help them do that. Whenever possible, keep it simple.





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