



Risks Newsletter



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Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 13,000 subscribers and 1,500 on the TUC website. To receive this bulletin every week, click [here](#). Past issues are [available](#). This edition contains [Useful links](#) [TUC courses for safety reps](#) [Disclaimer](#) and [Privacy statement](#).

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ACTION

Speak up for better safety reps' rights!

The Health and Safety Executive has now published the dates of its regional “discussion meetings”, to road test opinion on new workers’ consultation rights. HSE last month issued a consultative document, after lengthy pressure from the TUC, and now wants “to seek views on how to encourage, improve and increase worker involvement in health and safety risk management.” TUC is urging union reps to attend the eight consultative meetings, to be held in May and June in Wales, Scotland and England, to put the case for extended union safety rep and other safety rights, including the right to issue Provisional Improvement Notices (PINs), the right to stop the job and the right to a response from the employer.

- [Meeting dates and locations](#): 24 May, Cardiff, 17.30-19.30; 25 May, Cardiff, 08.30-10.30; 31 May, Scotland (location to be finalised), 17.30-19.30; 1 June, Scotland (location to be finalised), 08.30-10.30; 6 June, Manchester, 17.30-19.30; 7 June, Manchester, 08.30-10.30; 13 June, London, 17.30-19.30; 16 June, London, 09.30-11.30.
- [Improving worker involvement – Improving health and safety](#), Consultative Document CD207, full consultative document, summary document, print-off-and-use feedback form and online feedback form. Single printed copies of the Consultative Document and summary can be obtained from [HSE Books](#), PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA. Tel: 01787 881165, Fax: 01787 313 995. Comments should be sent to arrive by 8 September 2006 to: [Zoe Woodrow](#), Worker Involvement Programme, HSE, 5th Floor, North Wing, Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge, London SE1 9HS.

UNION NEWS

Usdaw safety reps want to PIN down dangers

Retail union Usdaw is to call for extended rights for union safety reps, including the right to issue Provisional Improvement Notices (PINs). A proposition backing the call for safety reps to have the power to issue the legally-binding notices to stop illegally dangerous work was passed at the union’s Blackpool conference. Maureen Shanks from the union's Southern division told delegates Australian-style PINs are necessary because of concerns that the government could be undermining the health and safety system to reduce so-called “burdens on business”. She said: “Experience in Australia has shown that employers are more likely to involve safety reps at an early stage rather than risk a PIN being issued when changes are implemented.” She added: “In my experience even senior managers in stores have very little knowledge of health and safety laws and yet the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) appear to be moving toward self-regulation. How can you self-regulate when you do not know the rules?” Responding to the proposition, Usdaw general secretary John Hannett said the union is supporting the TUC's campaign for greater powers for health and safety reps. Other propositions passed in the health and safety debate included calls for more resources for the HSE and more training for health and safety reps on risk assessments.

- [Usdaw news release](#).

Unions warn HSE on asbestos risks

Trade unions and safety campaigners have reiterated their warning to the Health and Safety Executive about proposed alterations to the regulations covering asbestos work. The warning came ahead of a Construction Safety Campaign organised march and rally in London on Workers’ Memorial Day, 28 April, supported by construction sector unions and south-east region TUC, SERTUC. The campaigners said asbestos is

a proven killer, deregulation will cost lives because it downgrades the perception of the hazard and self-regulation will cost lives because experience has shown that not all contractors can be trusted. Unions fear that a relaxation of the rules to exempt textured coatings like Artex from the stringent asbestos licensing requirements will expose construction workers working on small-scale projects. They say the cumulative effect of working on a large number of jobs with “sporadic and low intensity” asbestos exposure would put these workers at risk. Mick Connolly, regional secretary of SERTUC, said “it is highly dangerous to remove current regulations restricting those who can work with it. The Health and Safety Commission is keen on employers regulating themselves, in this context, further deregulation of asbestos laws will only expose more workers who are employed by businesses who are less than rigorous in their self-regulation.”

- [TUC news release.](#)

MPs back call for 28 April holiday

Dozens of MPs have backed union calls for Workers’ Memorial Day to be recognised as a national holiday. In its first week – a week that included the May Day holiday weekend – 78 MPs signed up to an Early Day Motion (EDM) in the House of Commons calling for official recognition of the 28 April annual event. The GMB-backed EDM, submitted by Labour MP Michael Clapham, said “this House recognises that Workers’ Memorial Day is an international commemorative event held on 28 April of each year and dedicated to those who have been killed and injured by workplace accidents or diseases; is aware that the International Labour Organisation reports that worldwide one person dies every 15 seconds as a result of an injury at work or a work-induced disease; is mindful that in the UK more than 3,500 workers die each year as a result of exposure to asbestos; and urges the government officially to recognise this important day.” GMB national health and safety officer John McClean commented: “Thanks to

the many MPs who have already signed the GMB’s EDM, but we need them to do more than just lift their pens. GMB members want International Workers’ Memorial Day, 28 April, as a national holiday in order to mark properly this international day that commemorates the deaths, injury and illness that so many workers and their families have suffered.”

Communication workers’ union CWU is also backing the call. National health and safety officer Dave Joyce has written to all CWU-supported MPs urging them to support the EDM. Reports suggest Workers’ Memorial Day 2006 was by far the biggest yet, with massive events worldwide. In the UK, hundreds gathered at meetings countrywide. An estimated 400 union members downed tools for a minute’s silence on the Bridgewater Place construction site in Leeds.

- [GMB news release.](#) [BBC News Online.](#) [HSE news release.](#) [STUC news release.](#)
- [Workers’ Memorial Day events worldwide.](#) [TUC Workers' Memorial Day webpage.](#) [Hazards Campaign](#) webpage.
- Check to see if your MP has signed [EDM 2025, 24 April 2006](#). If not, ask why not. [Find your MP](#) – you just need to know your postcode, MP’s name or constituency name.

Hospital workers vote to wipe out MRSA

Hospital workers should not be required to take home and clean work clothing contaminated with body fluids, says health service union UNISON. Delegates to the union’s health conference in Gateshead called for proper laundry facilities for their uniforms to help combat MRSA and other hospital acquired infections. Staff complain that domestic washing machines are not capable of ensuring that any infections carried on their uniforms, from bodily fluid splashes, are destroyed completely. In addition, there is widespread concern that washing uniforms and the family wash in the same machine might in itself present a danger. A

new survey from the union has found that 80 per cent of the public are worried about going into hospital because of the risk of catching MRSA or other hospital acquired infections. UNISON's head of health Karen Jennings, said: "Cleaner hospitals must be at the heart of the battle against MRSA, whether that is on the wards or making sure uniforms and equipment are kept clean and germ free. Over the years, the number of hospital cleaners has been virtually cut in half and we want the government to recognise the damage that is doing and start recruiting, not cutting." She added: "Why should nurses and hospital workers whose uniforms are covered in blood and other bodily fluids have to take them home to wash them – that seems a recipe for spreading infections."

- [UNISON news release.](#)

Fire crews back action for safe staffing

Fire crews in Hertfordshire have voted eight to one in favour of strike action over a cuts package they believe could place the public and firefighters at risk. Some of the most savage cuts are falling on stations which were the first to respond to the Buncefield fire ([Risks 246](#)). Hertfordshire FBU vice-chair Tony Smith said: "Hertfordshire fire crews have demonstrated the strength of their opposition to these savage cuts. We will continue exploratory talks with the fire authority as a matter of urgency." He added: "The action is in protest at cuts at nights and weekends, fewer rescue appliances, fewer firefighters on fire engines and a longer wait for crews to arrive to 999 calls. The result would be fewer frontline firefighters responding more slowly to 999 calls with less rescue equipment available." He said: "Saving pennies and making the county less safe and our job less safe does not make any sense to us or to the public."

- [FBU news release.](#)

OTHER NEWS

Lords slash asbestos payouts

Thousands of widows will not receive full compensation for their husbands' deaths from asbestos-related cancer, Law Lords have ruled. The 3 May majority decision will mean there will be a compensation limit in cases involving several employers, none of whom can be blamed categorically for the onset of the fatal illness. Employers' compensation liability will be drastically reduced in many cases. Insurers had challenged a judgment favouring bereaved families and workers who contracted mesothelioma at work. Commenting on the appeal against awards to Mary Murray and Sylvia Barker, the widows of John Murray and Vernon Barker, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "It's shocking that the families of mesothelioma victims are to be denied compensation on a mere technicality. Despite being able to show that an employer exposed their husbands to asbestos and that the men died as a result of coming into contact with the fatal fibres, Sylvia Barker and Mary Murray and many more families in similar circumstances will now have to take action against all the employers their relatives have ever worked for." He added: "Today's ruling means that some mesothelioma victims and their families may only recoup a fraction of the compensation they should have received because by now some employers will have gone out of business. As it can be 40 years before this tragic disease develops, this ruling has huge implications for thousands of victims and their families." The TUC leader added: "The government must act immediately to change the law and ensure that this cruel and unjust decision is reversed." Sylvia Barker, 58, said: "I'm angry that after these people took away Vernon's life, they are adding insult to injury. They admitted that they should have protected him from asbestos. I can't understand why the House of Lords would change the law to save them paying for what they have done." Tom Brennan, northern region secretary of GMB, which provided legal backing for Mrs Murray, said: "We, GMB union, will do all within our

power to call upon government to introduce legislation so that our members and dependants get the full compensation they deserve; this decision does not do justice to all those who have suffered incapacity, death from exposure to asbestos whilst carrying out their every day job.”

- [TUC news release](#). [GMB news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- Barker (Respondent) v. Corus (UK) plc (Appellants) (formerly Barker (Respondent) v. Saint Gobain Pipelines plc (Appellants)) Murray (widow and executrix of the estate of John Lawrence Murray (deceased)) (Respondent) v. British Shipbuilders (Hydrodynamics) Limited (Appellants) and others and others (Appellants) Patterson (son and executor of the estate of J Patterson (deceased)) (Respondent) v. Smiths Dock Limited (Appellants) and others (Conjoined Appeals). [Full House of Lords judgment](#).

Asbestos ruling will mean thousands lose out

Asbestos cancer victims have been made to pay the price for their employers’ negligence, top legal experts have said. Corus UK Ltd has been successful in denying mesothelioma widow Sylvia Barker compensation which had previously been awarded by a court for the death of her husband Vernon, a former employee at Shotton Steelworks in Deeside in the 1960s. The case was taken to the House of Lords on 13 March by Corus UK Ltd and its insurers ([Risks 247](#)). The 3 May judgment means that victims of mesothelioma will not get full compensation through the courts unless they sue all of their former employers who exposed them to asbestos. Negligent employers will not be liable to pay 100 per cent compensation if other culpable employers have gone out of business and their insurers cannot be found. James Thompson from Pickering & Partners solicitors, who represented Mrs Barker, said: “The lords seem to be saying that employers can be excused paying in full for their past law breaking activities while their insurers and their shareholders will get a multi-

million pound windfall, even though in the UK they can well afford to pay full asbestos compensation. Severe financial hardship will result from individual awards being slashed by tens of thousands of pounds. We call on parliament to correct this massive injustice.” Ian McFall, head of asbestos litigation for Thompsons Solicitors, who acted for asbestos widow Mary Murray, on behalf of her husband’s trade union, GMB, said: “The court has, on a legal technicality which will make no sense to anyone but the driest of lawyers, deprived our client of full compensation for the death of her husband.” He added: “We will be urging trade unions and asbestos victim support groups to press for legislation to counteract this massive injustice.” Top asbestos solicitor Adrian Budgen of law firm Irwin Mitchell said: “This blame ‘apportionment’ argument by companies will mean people with only months to live, and their families, will lose out through no fault of their own. Given the length of time symptoms from asbestos exposure take to manifest, which in the case of mesothelioma is between 20 and 50 years, many of the other equally negligent companies will have gone out of business.” Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) president Richard Langton said: “To take away their right to full and just compensation is like saying they contracted the disease through nothing more than bad luck.”

- [Thompson Solicitors](#). [Irwin Mitchell news release](#). APIL news release [[pdf](#)]. [ABI news release](#). [The Lawyer](#).

Corus investigated after another death

The police and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are investigating the latest death at a Corus steel plant in Port Talbot. A father-of-two who was injured in the 2001 explosion at the south Wales plant died in hospital after falling into molten waste. Corus said Kevin Downey, 49, was “instrumental” in helping to tackle the 2001 incident in which three workers died ([Risks 28](#)). HSE announced in February that Corus would face charges relating to this incident and

last month started criminal proceedings against the company ([Risks 244](#)). Married with a daughter and a son who also worked at the plant, it is believed Mr Downey fell into a piece of equipment known as a 'slag runner' while working in blast furnace number four. He suffered massive burns. Corus said the accident had “created an unbelievable amount of shock and grief.” The company confirmed that it would conduct its own investigation, which would feed into the joint police and HSE inquiry. Hazards magazine has criticised Corus’s safety record, which has included a sequence of recent fatalities.

- [BBC News Online. Evening Post.](#)
- [Recent safety offences at Corus](#) – Hazards website.

No prosecution for record lung disease firm

There will be no safety prosecution of the Birmingham engineering firm which in 2004 saw what officials say may be world’s largest outbreak of a long-recognised work-related lung condition. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) experts launched an investigation in 2004 following the chance discovery by hospital specialists of widespread respiratory ill-health among staff at the Powertrain plant in Longbridge in Birmingham ([Risks 177](#)). Some 101 employees at the plant had developed occupational asthma and extrinsic allergic alveolitis (EEA). Powertrain was run by Phoenix Venture Holdings which went into administration when MG Rover collapsed in April 2005. Sandra Caldwell, director of HSE’s field operations, said: “The outbreak at Powertrain is thought to be both the world’s largest linked to metalworking fluids, and the largest single outbreak of occupational asthma.” She added: “The HSE investigation has been long and thorough, and we now know that the cause of the disease was mist from metalworking machines, which was widespread throughout the factory.” Hilda Palmer of Greater Manchester Hazards Centre expressed concern at the failure

of both the firm and HSE to take more prompt action. She told Risks: “A 1989 Institute of Occupational Health conference in Birmingham identified oil mist exposure as the most common cause of occupational asthma in the Birmingham area, and cases of EEA caused by metalworking fluids have been reported in car manufacturing plants in the US and Canada. Why were neither HSE nor the company alert to this problem? And why is no enforcement action being taken now?” She added: “I am aware of several other manufacturing plants where there were also recent cases of respiratory illness associated with metalworking fluids and HSE’s response had been inadequate.” HSE has revised its guidance in the light of the outbreak.

- [HSE news release. BBC News Online.](#)
- Outbreak of respiratory disease at Powertrain Ltd, Longbridge, Birmingham – emerging lessons [[pdf](#)].
- HSE questionnaire on assessing metalworking fluid risks [[pdf](#)]. HSE [asthma](#) and [metalworking](#) webpages.

Scots backing smoking ban

A month after Scotland’s smoking ban took effect on 26 March, threats of legal challenges and a customer revolt appear to have been nothing more than smoke and mirrors, as the ban is proving very popular indeed. Seven out of 10 pub-goers in Scotland agree with the smoking ban in pubs, according to new research conducted for trade magazine The Publican. And six out of 10 customers say they are more likely to eat in the pub now smoking is outlawed. One in four pub-goers say they like the smoke-free environment and will go the pub more often – out-numbering the one in five who said they were less likely to go. “Reports a month after the ban came into force indicate that many publicans have been weathering the storm well,” reports the magazine, which had been a prominent opponent of smoking bans. JD Wetherspoon - which has 38 pubs in Scotland - said it had not

noticed a large drop in sales in its pubs since the ban came in.

- [The Publican](#).
- [TUC smoking webpage](#). [Hazards smoking news and resources](#).

Mild bird flu confirmed in farm worker

A poultry worker is suffering from conjunctivitis after contracting the H7 strain of bird flu, the Health Protection Agency has confirmed. The person was infected through close contact with birds at the Witford Lodge Farm in North Tuddenham, Norfolk. H7 has no relationship to the deadly H5N1 strain which has killed over 100 people, mainly in South Asia. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) said the worker has no other symptoms. It added that the worker, who does not want to be named, has the H7N3 strain of bird flu which is not highly infectious and which was last seen in the UK in 1979. The strain is not easily passed from poultry to people, or from person to person, the HPA said. "In almost all cases of human H7 infection to date, the virus has only caused a mild disease," it said in a statement. "Therefore, the risk to the general public in this outbreak is extremely limited." Close contacts of the infected worker were provide advice and preventive medication as appropriate. Dr Jonathan Van Tam, a flu expert at the HPA, said: "It is important to remember that H7 avian flu remains largely a disease of birds. The virus does not transmit easily to humans, as evidenced by the small number of confirmed infections worldwide to date. Almost all human H7 infections documented so far have been associated with close contact with dead or dying poultry." Farm and food union TGWU has asked to government to introduce a plan to protect poultry workers and jobs in the event of a bird flu outbreak ([Risks 250](#)).

- [HPA news release](#). [HPA H7 avian flu guidance](#). [The Guardian](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- [Hazards magazine infections webpages](#).

Want to know why your boss is a pain?

Increased anger and loss of humour amongst bosses are just two of the knock-on effects that businesses now have to deal with due to poor workplace health, according to new research. The 'Quality of Working Life' report published by the Chartered Management Institute CMI) and the Health and Safety Executive's small business occupational health off-shoot Workplace Health Connect has uncovered a high number of physical and psychological symptoms and highlights the impact these have on business performance. The survey questioned 1,541 managers in the UK revealing a poor picture of health, with only half (50 per cent) believing they are currently in 'good' health. Nearly half (43 per cent) admitted to feeling or becoming angry with others too easily and one third (31 per cent) confessed to a loss of humour creating workplace pressures. The report found that ill-health is having an impact on morale and performance. One-third (30 per cent) admit they are irritable "sometimes or often" towards colleagues. Some managers also want to avoid contact with other people (26 per cent) and many (21 per cent) have difficulty making decisions due to ill-health. CMI chief executive Mary Chapman said: "With the impact of ill-health being keenly felt in the workplace, managers need a better understanding of the consequences of letting relatively minor symptoms escalate. They need to take more personal responsibility for improving their health because inaction is clearly having an effect on colleagues and the knock-on effect is that customer relationships will suffer, too." A large body of evidence shows the burden or work-related ill-health is more prevalent the lower you get down the workplace pecking order.

- [CMI news release](#). [Quality of Working Life report](#) [executive summary, [pdf](#)].
- Hazards [work and health](#) and [getalife](#) webpages.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australia: Safety reps face government-inspired harassment

An Australian single mother and safety rep has been hauled before a special building commission hearing under the threat of six months' jail. Brodene Wardley, a crane driver and union health and safety representative for Roche Mining, appeared before a hearing of the Australian Building and Construction Commission. The commission last year was given royal commission-style powers by the notoriously anti-union federal government to compel witnesses to answer questions and produce documents as part of an enquiry into alleged illegal union behaviour in the building sector. Ms Wardley, a mother of three, was sent a letter by the commission saying she would be jailed if she did not appear before the hearing or answer questions about her workmates taking unofficial industrial action over imminent safety fears. The workers were building a mineral sands processing plant for Roche Mining when they took action for a day and a half last year to protest at what they believed was a serious safety risk. They said a mini-bus ferrying workers to work almost collided with a freight train only metres from the site's main gate. Ms Wardley said the hearing was intimidating. "I'm just a mum trying to earn a living and trying to take on another role on the job with occupational health and safety, and this is what I ended up doing - getting dragged through court." Martin Kingham of the construction union CFMEU likened the hearing, which is conducted in secret and which gives witnesses fewer rights than criminals, to "a star chamber with powers that would make Stalin blush." Ms Wardley could have faced six months jail time if she had failed to answer any question posed by the commission and could still face jail if she makes any comment about the proceedings.

- [The Age](#). [The Standard](#).

Australia: Government attacks health and safety

Workplace health and safety is being jeopardised as a result of industrial relations reforms in Australia, national union federation ACTU has warned. It is calling on the federal government to repeal the sections of its new industrial relations laws that ban workplace agreements from giving workers leave to attend union-provided health and safety training or meetings. ACTU secretary Greg Combet said the government's new 'WorkChoices' industrial relations laws ban workplace agreements from mandating that health and safety training can be provided by a trade union. "Anyone inserting prohibited content in a workplace agreement can be subject to government fines and penalties of up to Aus\$6,000 (£2,500) for individuals and Aus\$33,000 (£13,700) for unions," he said. "Thousands of Australian workers in almost every industry receive health and safety training by unions every year." The union leader added: "It is essential that Australian workers continue to have access to health and safety and other training that unions provide. I call on the Prime Minister to intervene and repeal the ban on union training in workplace agreements in the new WorkChoices legislation." Workplace law expert Professor Michael Quinlan of the University of New South Wales has warned that a planned second round of industrial relations reforms could weaken occupational health and safety legislation and leave young workers particularly at added risk.

- [ACTU news release](#). [Sydney Morning Herald](#).

India: Union survey reveals shipbreaking perils

Vulnerable migrant workers are being exploited and placed in dire danger in India's shipbreaking yards, a union survey has found. The shipbreaking project of global metalworkers' federation IMF surveyed over 1,600 workers from shipbreaking yards in Mumbai and Alang,

India. India is a world leader in shipbreaking, accounting for between 25 and 38 per cent of all shipbreaking activities in the last four years. At full employment, 6,000 shipbreakers are employed in Mumbai and another 60,000 work in Alang. IMF said because the industry employs mainly migrant workers with little education or legal protection, shipbreaking workers are easily exploited with no voice to defend their most basic rights. The survey found even skilled workers had not received basic training in health and safety, there was no protective clothing provided and there was massive under-reporting of serious accidents. Marcello Malentacchi, IMF general secretary, said: "What this survey now provides is an overview of the exploitative situation that up to 60,000 workers confront, exposed to extremely dangerous and unhygienic working conditions, the majority of workers earning less than Rs50 (\$1/£0.50) per day." He added: "These workers are among the most vulnerable workers in our sectors, constantly migrating in search of seasonal jobs in the shipyards, subject to ruthless employers and totally ignored by the political authorities. Workplaces lack everything from drinking water to protective gear and medical aid, workers live in huts without sanitation or electricity, right beside the shipbreaking yards." IMF said the research will serve as a basis for organising the shipbreaking industry and drawing attention to the basic needs and rights of its workers.

- [IMF news release](#). [IMF shipbreaking webpages](#). Status of shipbreaking workers in India, IMF report [[pdf](#)].

New Zealand: Workers pay for work hazards

Work-related ill-health in New Zealand is massive drain on workers and the economy, an official report has concluded. The National Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee (NOHSAC) report calculated the combined costs of suffering, premature death and financial loss from occupational disease and injury for the first time. This total figure of NZ\$20.9 billion (£7.3bn) is four times higher

than previous estimates. It consists of \$4.9bn (£1.7bn) in financial costs and \$16bn (£5.6bn) for the cost of pain and suffering. The committee said past estimates were based only on those who were covered by compensation, and the new figure gave a much more accurate picture. "The report of the National Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Committee (NOHSAC) supports long expressed union concerns that the costs of workplace disease and injury are born largely by injured workers and their families," commented Council of Trade Unions (CTU) president Ross Wilson. The report also flagged the vital importance to the economy of improving the country's occupational safety and health performance, he said, adding: "Unions are committed to playing their part in bringing down New Zealand's unacceptably high levels of workplace injury and disease, and we will continue to build on the network of 15,000 trained health and safety reps that have been making a real impact in New Zealand workplaces."

- [NOHSAC news release](#). [NZCTU news release](#). [Radio New Zealand](#). [Stuff.co.nz](#).
- The economic and social costs of occupational disease and injury in New Zealand: NOHSAC Technical Report 4, 2006 [[pdf](#)].

USA: Making beds is breaking backs

Luxury bedding might be a blessing for hotel patrons, but it is a major pain for overworked hotel staff. A just-released study of 40,000 hotel workers' injuries at 87 hotels from 1999 to 2005 found that the room attendants responsible for changing bedding had the highest injury rate. The study, compiled from hotels' legally-required injury records and released by the UNITE HERE union, found hotel room attendants had a 10.4 per cent injury rate. That was more than 85 per cent higher than the 5.6 per cent injury rate of other hotel staff. The study said room attendant injury rates increased from 2002-2005. A major culprit is the industry's switch to heavy mattresses, triple-sheeting and more pillows, said

UNITE HERE, which represents 90,000 US hotel workers. Peter Orris, a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health who helped analyse the findings, said: “This is among the highest-stress jobs (on the body) in the service and production industries. This is not just a union-generated thing, this is a real problem. And it looks like it's getting worse.” UNITE HERE health and safety director Eric Frumin said hotels had been cutting staff and increasing workloads without providing ergonomic training. “We've had what could best be described as resistance from hotel companies,” he said. “Basically, they're in denial.”

- [UNITE HERE news release. San Francisco Chronicle. USA Today.](#)
- Creating luxury, enduring pain: How hotel work is hurting housekeepers [\[pdf\]](#).

USA: Union report reveals work deaths increase

The rate of fatal injuries in US workplaces has increased for the first time in a decade, according to a new report from national union federation AFL-CIO. ‘Death on the job’ reveals the reported rates of workplace fatalities rose overall and the reported rates of illnesses and injury declined slightly. On an average day in 2004, 152 workers lost their lives as a result of workplace injuries and diseases and another 11,780 were injured, according to the study. “Our nation is still grieving the Sago mineworkers' deaths and we find it outrageous that in this era more than 150 workers die on the job each and every day,” said AFL-CIO president John Sweeney. “It doesn't have to be this way. America's corporations must invest more in health and safety protections for working men and women, and our nation's leaders must start holding them tightly accountable.” The study also shows workplace deaths for Latino and immigrant workers sharply increased. In 2004, the fatality rate among Latino workers was 19 per cent higher than the fatal injury rate for all US

workers. At the national level, fatal injuries to immigrant Latino workers increased 11 per cent from 2003 to 2004. AFL-CIO criticised the Bush administration for cutting back the budgets of safety enforcement agencies and instead putting much greater emphasis on voluntary efforts and partnership programmes with industries. It said it would now take federal health and safety watchdog OSHA 117 years to inspect the workplaces under its jurisdiction just once.

- [AFL-CIO news release. Death on the job: The toll of neglect - A national and state-by-state profile of worker safety and health in the United States. Confined Space. Boston Globe. Boston Herald.](#)

RESOURCES

Asbestos and corporate greed

A group of Euro MPs has published a devastating criticism of the asbestos industry and its continuing promotion of the worldwide asbestos trade. ‘Asbestos: The human cost of corporate greed’ was launched by the European United Left/Nordic Green Left Group (GUE/NGL) ahead of Workers’ Memorial Day, at a 27 April press conference in the European Parliament in Brussels. MEP Bairbre de Brun said: “Asbestos remains a silent killer right across the European Union. The eradication of this substance must be a priority for both member states and the European Commission and Parliament. Buildings such as schools and other public amenities must be an immediate priority. It is clear that much work still needs to be done if we are able to tackle the issue of asbestos effectively and safely.”

- This 40 page publication can be accessed free-of-charge on the [GUE/NGL website](#). It is available in English [\[pdf\]](#), Spanish, Italian, French, Greek and Dutch.

ILO releases new safety posters

A series of eight new safety posters from the International Labour Office pushing the case for countries ratifying key occupational safety and health conventions. The posters cover ILO international rules on safety in mines, agriculture and construction, asbestos and chemical safety and more general conventions on official safety inspections, occupational health and safety and provision of occupational health services. The posters are for the moment only available online. Printed copies will be available for the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June 2006.

- [Occupational Health and Safety - Ratify the Conventions!](#), ILO.

EVENTS AND COURSES

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR APRIL TO JULY 2006

- [North West](#), [South East](#), [Yorkshire and the Humber](#), [South West](#), [Midlands](#), [Scotland](#)

USEFUL LINKS

- **Visit** the TUC http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/ website pages on health and safety. See what's on offer from [TUC Publications](#) and [What's On in health and safety](#).
- **Subscribe** to [Hazards](#) magazine, supported by the TUC as a key source of information for union safety reps.
- **What's new** in the [HSC/E](#) and the [European Agency](#).
- [HSE Books](#), PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA. Tel: 01787 881165; fax: 01787 313995