

Risks

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**HAZARDS
MAGAZINE**



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CONTENTS

- [Union news: Workers “reduced to robots” by tags](#) * [RMT to ballot customer hosts over train safety](#) * [£140,000 payout to plasterer’s widow](#) * [Esso pays dying man £90,000](#) * [Overworked lecturers feel the strain](#)
- [Other news: Bad bosses should be named and shamed](#) * [Firm pays £7,000 after worker is paralysed](#) * [HSE posts warning to Royal Mail delivery offices](#) * [Dull work increases heart attack risk](#) * [Majority say pub workers need passive smoke protection](#) * [Millions of days lost to workplace back pain](#) * [Sacked cancer sufferer gets £17k payout](#) * [School union welcomes new law on violent crime](#)
- [Resources: Summertime and making a living ain’t easy](#) * [Top Oz “OHS Reps” website just got better](#) * [Construction safety online resource](#)
- [International news: Australia: Mining giant BHP faces safety probes](#) * [Global: Carrefour slammed for Bangladesh fire inaction](#) * [Global: Unions demand an end to the asbestos carnage](#) * [New Zealand: Meat company films naked workers](#) * [USA: Union fumes at mine diesel exhaust increase](#)

Risks is the TUC’s weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 11,500 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](#).

UNION NEWS

Workers “reduced to robots” by tags

Employees are being “dehumanised” by having to wear electronic tags while working, general union GMB has said. An increasing number working in retail distribution centres, which supply goods to supermarkets, are having to wear tags, usually on their wrists, to help speed up orders, said GMB. New US satellite- and radio-based computer technology is turning some workplaces into “battery farms,” according to a report for the union by Michael Blakemore, professor of geography at Durham University. He warned the technology could lead to a new series of industrial injuries, especially as workers had to hold their arms at a certain angle to read information. The technology, introduced six months ago, is spreading rapidly, with up to 10,000 employees using it to supply household names such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Boots and Marks & Spencer. GMB complained the tags are also being used to monitor breaks and even trips to the toilet. GMB national officer Paul Campbell said many are not prepared to co-operate and are resigning, some within hours of being told to wear tags. Staff turnover is more than 300 per cent in some workplaces, said Mr Campbell. “We are receiving daily reports of people just walking away from the job. The idea is to track work all the time and, although it brings efficiencies, it does not take into account human needs,” he said. Paul Kenny, the union's acting general secretary, said: “The use of this technology needs to be redesigned to be an aid to the worker rather than making the worker its slave.” He added that firms must “humanise” the work and “do so quickly, otherwise the GMB will ensure that the shelves do not get filled.” TUC warned last year that electronic snooping was bad for productivity and bad for workers’ health ([Risks 147](#)).

[GMB news release](#) including link to the report. [Daily Mail](#). [The Guardian](#). [Silicon.com](#). [BBC News Online](#).

[Hazards guide to health and safety and electronic monitoring](#). [Hazards toilet breaks webpage](#).

RMT to ballot customer hosts over train safety

More than 160 customer hosts at Midland Mainline are to be balloted for strike action in an escalation of the dispute over the safe operation of multiple-unit trains. Around 150 RMT guards at the company are already in dispute ([Risks 207](#)) and started a third 24 hour strike on Friday following the company's continued refusal to negotiate a settlement. "Our guard members have already held two solid days of strike action in a dispute that is about safety and nothing else," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said ahead of the Friday action. He added: "Our on-board customer hosts, who are not trained in emergency train protection, have made it clear to the union that they feel that their own safety is being compromised. In a multiple-unit train a customer host will often be the only member of staff available in the portion of a train cut off from that covered by a guard. There is no effective means of communication should an incident occur in the unguarded portion of a train, there is no means of self-protection and the customer hosts have no power to terminate a service should something go wrong." Bob Crow added: "I hope that members of the travelling public will understand that we are taking action to stop safety standards being subordinated to cost-cutting and join with us in calling on the company to talk."

[RMT news release.](#)

£140,000 payout to plasterer's widow

A woman who watched her husband "suffer terribly" before his death four years ago from an asbestos cancer, has received a £140,000 payout. Catherine Brown's husband, Robert, died aged 57 in May 2001 from mesothelioma after being exposed to asbestos dust whilst working as a plasterer for Corby Borough Council. The award was made following a case taken by his union, Community. The council denied liability but conceded Robert Brown was exposed to asbestos dust and, just days before the planned trial, agreed to the £140,000 payout. Mrs Brown said: "Without Community's support we could never have taken this case forward and the union has been a great help throughout this long process." She added: "I hope this leads other families to claim against companies. I want more people to be aware of the cancer and how many people it is affecting." Community deputy general secretary Paul Gates said: "Community offers free legal cover to all members and their families and it was only because of this that

Robert Brown's family were able to get any compensation for the tragic loss of a husband and a father. I think that this is a lesson for all workers: if they suffer an injury or worse, it is only by being a member of a union such as Community that they will be get the full support that they need." Richard Langton of law firm Russell, Jones and Walker, said: "Robert Brown and his workmates should have been provided with breathing masks, dust extraction equipment and instructions, or assistance, to remove asbestos safely. The council provided none of these."

[Community news release](#). [Corby Today](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Esso pays dying man £90,000

A man dying of an asbestos cancer has been awarded a £90,000 payout. Gerald Read, 80, worked as a scaffolder at the Esso oil refinery at Fawley from 1968 until he retired in 1981 and is now suffering the fatal asbestos-related cancer mesothelioma. The settlement is believed to be the first of its kind from Esso and could open the floodgates for other claimants exposed to the deadly material at the site. Mr Read first had difficulty breathing in September 2003 and was diagnosed with mesothelioma in April 2004. He said: "My job involved preparing the scaffolding and boards that ladders used when replacing old asbestos. The equipment was covered in white asbestos dust when it came back to the refinery scaffolding yard." Esso made the out-of-court settlement without admission of liability after Mr Read launched a TGWU-backed High Court bid for damages for personal injury with an element for pain, suffering and loss of amenity. Paul Meehan, an industrial disease specialist at Pattinson & Brewer Solicitors, said: "Mr Read's concentrated exposure makes me fearful for many other people who worked in these conditions at refineries and similar plants up and down the country." A spokesperson for TGWU said: "This demonstrates that all companies have a responsibility to their employees, past and present, to make sure that they are working in a safe environment."

[Daily Echo](#).

Overworked lecturers feel the strain

Unpaid overtime worked by lecturers is affecting their personal lives and health, a union survey has found. The online survey of 1,138 college and university lecturers, commissioned by the further education union NATFHE and the Teacher Support Network, found 69 per cent of respondents worked an average of 11 unpaid hours a week. The union said nearly threequarters (69.1 per cent) of survey respondents said their manager did not bother to monitor their hours to ensure they complied with working time regulations that set a safe weekly limit of 48 hours. Respondents reported the strain of their workload took a heavy toll - a whopping 94 per cent said it had affected their personal lives while 87 per cent said it had affected their health. Paul Mackney, general secretary of NATFHE, said: "The goodwill and dedication of these professionals is propping up our universities and colleges but is taking its toll on them in a way that no job should." He added: "This situation is not tenable in the long-term. University and college management must take note of these results and others like them to ensure their staff are not landed with workloads that are grossly out of proportion to their contracted hours."

[NATFHE news release.](#)

OTHER NEWS

Bad bosses should be named and shamed

Company bosses who ignore health and safety rules should be named and shamed, a leading safety organisation has said. The Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) said employers may think twice about breaching safety rules if it means their companies' reputation could be publicly tarnished. APIL president Allan Gore QC said companies with good health and safety records should in turn be rewarded, and said a publicly available 'name and praise' list would give credit to employers who put workers' safety high on their agenda. Gore said safety-conscious bosses should also be rewarded with cheaper insurance premiums. "APIL firmly believes that employers with good health and safety records - those who genuinely take care and invest in the well-

being of their staff – should be rewarded with lower insurance premiums. Why can't premiums be linked to health and safety records? That way, decent employers reap the benefits whereas those who consistently push health and safety to the bottom of the agenda are made to pay, both financially and with their reputation." He added: "What we want to see in this country is a safety culture – a society which does not tolerate people being injured through someone else's negligence." APIL is also calling for more resources for official safety watchdog HSE. "Inspection and enforcement are crucial and should continue to be the primary method used by the HSE to police workplaces," said Gore. He said that without these resources "careless bosses will continue to injure their workers and get away with it."

APRIL news release [[pdf](#)].

Firm pays £7,000 after worker is paralysed

A Derbyshire company has been fined £7,000 after a worker fell from unsafe scaffolding and was paralysed. Kieran Mullin Developments admitted a charge of having failed to take steps to prevent any employees falling from the scaffold. The firm also admitted failing to have the scaffolding inspected by a competent person. John Maphin, 44, from Derby suffered spinal injuries when he fell from a building in Littleover last September and is now paralysed from the waist down. David Gould, representing the Health and Safety Executive which brought the prosecution, said the timber platforms on the scaffold should have had supports at every 1.2m, but the platform which gave way under Mr Maphin spanned 2.5m. "The company should have ensured that the boards supporting the platforms were thick enough," Mr Gould said. "Thicker ones or more supports should have been used. Had the company had an effective regime in place where they were inspected by a competent person, no doubt the defects would have been identified and should have been rectified. It's quite possible an employee will not walk again." Magistrates fined the company £7,000 and ordered it to pay prosecution costs of £1,788.99. The court heard that Mr Maphin had made a damages claim.

[Derby Evening Telegraph](#). [BBC News Online](#).

HSE posts warning to Royal Mail delivery offices

The biggest ever Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspection programme in Royal Mail "couldn't have come at a better time," says communications union CWU. A nationwide team of HSE inspectors supported by local authority inspectors is to visit 20 delivery offices in the Leeds, Bradford, York and Darlington areas in the first stage of the initiative, with HSE saying further inspections may be added on an "unannounced and random" basis. CWU national safety officer Dave Joyce said eventually "we could be looking at around 200 plus delivery offices being hit by the enforcing authority inspectors." He added: "Bear in mind Royal Mail operational management's interests seem to be on everything other than our delivery member's safety and health, these inspections couldn't have come at a better time." He said safety inspectors were "far from pleased" when they checked on the company's response to earlier recommendations, so "a number of legally enforced 'improvement notices' were served on delivery office managers across London and the north west of England." He added: "In instructions sent out to participating HSE inspectors prior to the 2005 programme launch, they were told to 'consider taking a more robust line on enforcement of matters brought to Royal Mail's attention during the 2004 inspections and not actioned by them'." Joyce concluded: "I recently received a letter from the union's solicitors Simpson Millar indicating a worrying trend of an increasing incidence of accidents related to the introduction of the single daily delivery. That just about says it all. How many more victims will there be before Royal Mail clean up their act?"

[CWU news release.](#)

Dull work increases heart attack risk

Having a dull job may increase your risk of a heart attack, researchers have found. Dull, steady, unexciting work is associated with a faster and less variable heart rate, which, in turn, is linked to heart disease, said a team from University College London. They found that men with "low-grade jobs", meaning they had little control over daily tasks, and men in low social positions had faster and less-variable heart rates. "This finding helps explain why men with low-paying jobs and less education have a higher risk for heart disease, a trend that has been evident for the last 30 years," said Dr Harry Hemingway of University

College London Medical School, who led the study. "The heart doesn't, or shouldn't, beat like a metronome," Hemingway said, because a healthy heart rate varies. His team studied 2,197 men aged 45 to 68 who worked for the British government ([Risks 189](#)), and talked to them about friends and family, education and lifestyle. Writing in the journal *Circulation*, Hemingway and colleagues said the research, a part of the ongoing the "Whitehall II" study, found that heart rates of men in low-level positions were on average 3.2 beats per minute faster than men in top-level positions. It may be possible to help prevent heart disease by changing workplace conditions, Hemingway said, adding: "We hope this information provides insight into the mechanisms at work so that there is a possibility for interventions that will change this outcome."

[CNN.com](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Harry Hemingway and others. Does autonomic function link social position to coronary risk? The Whitehall II study, *Circulation*, 2005: published online before print June 6, 2005, DOI: 10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.104.497347 [[abstract](#)].

Background information: Work, stress, health: The Whitehall II Study [[pdf](#)]. [Hazards "worked to death" webpages](#).

Majority say pub workers need passive smoke protection

Seven out of 10 people believe the health of pub staff should be protected from secondhand smoke at work, according to a survey by MORI for the British Medical Association (BMA). The survey was carried out earlier this year and all respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with this statement: "It is more important to protect the health of staff working in pubs and bars by having them completely smoke-free than to allow smoking in such places." It found 36 per cent "strongly agree" and 32 per cent "tend to agree" that worker protection is more important. Only 12 per cent said they "tend to disagree" and just 1 in 20 (5 per cent) said they "strongly disagree." Commenting on the findings, BMA chair James Johnson said: "It is clear that the majority of the public believe that the right to work in a healthy environment is more important than the right to smoke. As doctors we see the deadly effects of secondhand smoke every day. This is why we urge the new health secretary, Patricia Hewitt, to ban smoking in all enclosed public places now and protect the rights of

employees to work in an environment that does not damage their health." When asked whether the government was acting too slowly to reduce smoking in public places, 54 per cent of respondents said they agreed and 27 per cent disagreed.

[BMA news release.](#)

Millions of days lost to workplace back pain

British business loses an estimated 4.9 million days to employee absenteeism through work-related back conditions each year, according to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). It said each affected employee take an average of 19 days off work, according to the latest figures from the 2003/4 Labour Force Survey. HSE said a new 'Better backs' campaign will offer concise, practical tips on how to avoid back-related injuries in the workplace to both businesses and employees via a dedicated web microsite. Commenting on the initiative, health and safety minister Lord Hunt said: "Occupational ill health and injury accounts for 40 million working days lost with back pain alone accounting for 4.9 million. The effects on those businesses and individuals is almost incalculable. It's not only impacting on businesses' profits, it's affecting productivity and stopping employees' enjoying their social life." He added: "The financial impact of back pain is enormous so our message to everyone is clear - A bad back could cost you more than you think. There is a misconception that preventative health and safety initiatives are costly and difficult to implement, but in fact many are extremely cost effective and will save businesses from losing revenue through staff absenteeism, as well as increasing productivity." The HSE guidance says: "The first point to make about manual handling is, wherever possible, DON'T do it" - use handling aids instead.

[HSE news release.](#) [HSE better backs microsite.](#)

Sacked cancer sufferer gets £17k payout

A cancer patient who lost her job after taking time off for treatment has been awarded more than £17,000 for unfair dismissal. Jocelyn Herath, 48, had worked as a deputy town council clerk for Newent Town Council before being diagnosed with breast cancer. A town council spokesperson said he was "disappointed by the level of

compensation" Mrs Herath had received and added: "We believe that the redundancy was a fair one and the evidence put forward to support that was not accepted by the tribunal. We have apologised for any stress that has been caused to Mrs Herath and we are sorry that all this had to come about in this way." Mrs Herath returned to her £14,456 job in January 2004 after extensive cancer treatment but developed complications two months afterwards and had to take further time off work. She planned to return to her position on 17 June 2004 but said she was shocked to be told by her former colleagues that the post no longer existed and she had been made redundant. Representing herself, she won the case for unfair dismissal and breach of contract after proving she lost her job because her bosses did not like the disruption caused by her illness. "Cancer knocks your confidence and it felt like they were treating me like a piece of worthless garbage they could just throw out," she said.

[BBC News Online. Hazards news and resources on sickness absence.](#)

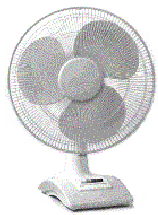
School union welcomes new law on violent crime

Teaching union NASUWT has welcomed the government's Violent Crime Reduction Bill, which began its passage through parliament this week. NASUWT general secretary Chris Keates said: "NASUWT welcomes the provisions of the Bill which are designed to give more support to teachers and headteachers in maintaining good order and discipline." She added that new powers for headteachers to search for offensive weapons and the introduction of tougher sentences for those who attack teachers "followed the NASUWT's call, in response to the growing weapon carrying culture among young people on the streets, for random airport-style security checks in schools to deter and detect weapon-carrying." The union warned, however, that heads should not be required to carry out the searches themselves. "Such an expectation would be counterproductive," Keates said. "Not only are there risk factors involved but it could have an adverse effect on the nature of a teacher's relationship with pupils." She added: "The proposal in the Bill for stiffer penalties for those who attack teachers will be warmly welcomed. It will be a powerful warning to would-be assailants." Schools minister Jacqui Smith said "there are a few who ignore the fact that it is against the law to have a knife in school. This is unacceptable, and we want to ensure that headteachers have the necessary powers to enforce good discipline in the classroom."

[Home Office news release](#). [NASUWT news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).

RESOURCES

Summertime and making a living ain't easy



look into the fan.
you are feeling cooler...
you are feeling cooler...

A belated break in the clouds has sent UK temperatures soaring, leaving overheated workers sizzling in the 70s. If you intend to work and not to fry, there are a number of commonsense guides you can consult. *Risks* has selected three of the best, just so you don't have to get all hot and bothered.

Summer heat guides from [TUC Worksmart](#), [Canadian autoworkers' union CAW](#) and Australian union body [VTHC](#).

Worksmart postcards: [Send a sweltering worker a TUC cool work reminder](#).

Top Oz "OHS Reps" website just got better

If you think your union has the whizziest safety webpages around, you could be in for a shock. Australian union body Victorian Trades Hall Council has revamped its "OHS Reps" website and it knocks spots off the competition. The redesigned site, www.ohsrep.org.au, is just for union safety activists and has the best design around – and it is not just good looking, it is packed with safety and campaign information. As well as the usual safety guides, reps can sign up for safety and training news and can fire in queries to web wizard Renata. You can even have your say on safety issues. Union reps deserve good resources on safety, and this is a great example of how good it can get.

[OHS Reps](#).

Construction safety online resource

The union-backed US construction safety research group the Center to Protect Workers' Rights (CPWR) has relaunched its website. The new look site provides useful hazards alerts in English and Spanish and details of a quite extensive research programme. The site complements a CPWR-maintained electronic library on construction health and safety, eLCOSH.

[CPWR website](#). [eLCOSH](#).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australia: Mining giant BHP faces safety probes

A multinational mining company that used union-busting individual contracts to boost production is to face courtroom showdowns with safety authorities and two bereaved women. Western Australian authorities have confirmed they are to lay four charges against BHP Billiton over the death of James Wadley in a horrific gas explosion. The fiancée of AMWU delegate, Corey Bentley, killed at BHP's Nelson Point iron ore facility ([Risks 158](#)), has also filed papers suing the company for negligence, and Jasmine Rose Bailey has launched a damages claim arising from the death of apprentice, Ross McKinnon. Bailey has filed papers on behalf of her four-month-old daughter, Cheree, against contractor, Westrac, who operated at a BHP facility. It is understood Bailey was pregnant when McKinnon lost his life. An official safety report in December 2004 found the union-busting firm's aggressive use of individual contracts had contributed to serious health and safety shortcomings ([Risks 186](#)). This came in a year BHP Billiton reported record profits and a runaway death rate ([Risks 171](#)).

- [Workers Online](#).

Global: Carrefour slammed for Bangladesh fire inaction

The world's second largest retailer, Carrefour, has been accused of failing to take adequate steps to ensure worker safety in the wake of

the April 2005 Spectrum Sweaters factory disaster in Savar, Bangladesh that left 83 workers dead and well over 100 workers still missing ([Risks 202](#)). Neil Kearney, general secretary of the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) said the company received a large Carrefour order late last year and added: "Spectrum is part of the Shahriyar Group, a regular Carrefour supplier which was audited in 2002 and was given a 'good' rating. Carrefour has been unable to explain how it could possibly consider that conditions at Spectrum were satisfactory." He explained: "It wasn't just that the company built a four-storey building on a swamp and then added another five floors without bothering to seek planning permission. There were many other issues, too. The company's record on health and safety and working hours was appalling. One worker had died and another had been seriously injured in recent workplace accidents." Kearney, who this week participated in a special social compliance mission to Bangladesh, where last year Carrefour sourced 39 million textile units, said it was "a country notorious for factory disasters which have killed hundreds in the past five years. Yet in the wake of the Savar disaster it hasn't bothered to see for itself what needs to be done for the victims, nor to ensure that adequate steps are taken throughout its supply chain to prevent future disasters."

[ITGLWF news release.](#)

Global: Unions demand an end to the asbestos carnage

Unions worldwide have embarked on a global campaign to end "the asbestos carnage". Guy Ryder, general secretary of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), told an 8 June Geneva event to coincide with the International Labour Organisation's annual conference that asbestos continues to kill over 100,000 people per year throughout the world. He said every government attending the ILO conference was given a letter asking them to become involved in the push to stop the production, marketing and use of asbestos worldwide. "We believe the evidence showing the dangers of asbestos to be irrefutable", Ryder told governments. Trade unions met last week to plan campaign activities, with the aim of securing within a year an ILO-backed agreement for an all-out asbestos ban combined with "employment transition" measures for workers in the industry. In a parallel move, global building unions' federation IFBWW handed a statement to the ILO director general Juan Somavia demanding ILO

takes a clear health-based position in favour of the elimination of the use of all forms of asbestos and asbestos containing materials. "This would have a tremendous impact on health and safety for our workers," said IFBWW general secretary, Anita Normark. The campaign is backed by global union federations in other industrial sectors ([Risks 208](#)).

[ICFTU news release](#). [IFBWW news release](#). [IFBWW/Hazards asbestos webpages](#). [IMF asbestos webpages](#).

New Zealand: Meat company films naked workers

A New Zealand meat company is defending its use of covert filming in staff changing rooms, claiming it is the only way to catch employees taking drugs. Affco says drugs have become so widespread it had to take action for the safety of others. The move has dismayed union members. Graham Cooke from the Meat Union of Aotearoa said "if they had of come to us, maybe we could have talked it through and looked at ways of trying to work it through." The union believes cameras were aimed at the showers. "It is an invasion of privacy and I think it's pretty terrible that a company puts a camera and aims it exactly at the shower area where men are walking in and out after having a shower," said Cooke. Privacy lawyer John Edwards commented: "I think any employer would have to have a very good justification to conduct that level of intrusiveness and if that is in an area where people were routinely undressing, I think it is very hard to justify that and I don't think you could justify that by reference to a workplace drug policy." Affco defended its decision to use secret surveillance saying that health and safety was at risk in the works where sharp knives and heavy machinery are commonplace. However, studies have shown member assistance programmes, run by unions and providing support rather than disciplinary measures, are the most effective way to deal with substance abuse problems in the workplace.

[One News](#). *Hazards* news and resources on [workplace privacy](#) and on [drugs and alcohol policies at work](#).

USA: Union fumes at mine diesel exhaust increase

The US government' Department of Labor has increased the allowable worker exposure to diesel exhaust fume in thousands of mines. The move, which weakens a 2001 Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) standard for non-coal mines, has angered USW, the union representing miners in the metal, mineral and stone sectors. "Diesel fumes cause cancer and lung disease," said USW president Leo Gerard. "Without good controls, working in an underground mine can be like working in the tailpipe of a bus. We thought we were making progress under the 2001 standard. But this revision threatens the health of miners." The union says it is "especially angry" that the new standard expands situations under which mine operators are allowed to use respirators, instead of engineering controls. Under the weaker rules, mine operators are not required to undertake medical tests to ensure that a miner can safely wear a respirator. Breathing through respirators puts an extra burden on the heart and lungs, and wearing a respirator can be deadly for workers with undiagnosed heart conditions. The new standard is the first in the US not to require these tests before workers wear respirators. USW safety director Mike Wright said a miner who was tested and found unable to safely wear a respirator, would be entitled to a job transfer at full pay. "That's why the Department of Labor doesn't want medical testing," he said. "It's just a gift to their supporters in the mining industry. It's entirely political, and I suspect the decision was made over the objections of the MSHA health staff, who certainly know better." The USW said it will challenge the respirator revisions in court.

[USW news release. Confined Space.](#)

EVENTS AND COURSES

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR APRIL TO JULY 2005

[Midlands](#), [North](#), [North West](#), [Scotland](#), [South East](#), [South West](#), [Wales](#), [Yorkshire and Humberside](#)

COURSES FOR SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2005

[South East](#)

USEFUL LINKS

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