

Risks

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HAZARDS
MAGAZINE

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Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 11,000 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](#).

UNION NEWS

Britain's workers stand for Victorian conditions



Up to 11 million UK workers could face serious health problems from prolonged standing at work, and they are offered less protection than employees from the Victorian era, according to a new report in the TUC-backed *Hazards* magazine. It says despite medical calls in the 1870s for an end to prolonged standing at work, more workers in more jobs are now required to stand and deliver. Every year over 2 million sick days are lost due to lower limb disorders, with nearly 200,000 people reporting lower limb ailments caused or made worse by their job. Workers who spend most of the working day on their feet are at risk of work-related varicose veins, poor circulation and swelling in the feet and legs, foot problems, joint damage, heart and circulatory problems and pregnancy difficulties. The report says some of the problems can be fatal. For some circulatory conditions, for example atherosclerosis which is a risk factor for heart attack and stroke, prolonged standing could be as risky as smoking. And prolonged standing at work could cause a hike in blood pressure equivalent to 20 years of ageing. In pregnancy, both the mother and the fetus can face unacceptable and avoidable risks. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "There really isn't any need for the excessive standing on the job that this report highlights. Most jobs don't need people to be on their feet all day and bosses need to get over the fact that someone sat down is protecting their health, not being lazy." He added: "Simple adjustments to the way millions of people work will save countless sick days each year and stop British workers from, in some cases, dying on their feet."

- [TUC news release](#). [ITN News](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Channel 4 News](#). [Daily Mail](#). [The Guardian](#). [Reuters](#). [The Independent](#). [Yorkshire Evening Post](#). [The Scotsman](#). [Politics.co.uk](#). [Personnel Today](#).
- "[Standing problem: Humans are not made just to stand and work](#)", *Hazards* magazine, number 91, 2005. [More about Hazards](#).

Safety is back on the union agenda

Health and safety motions, covering issues from stress and working hours to lone working and work at sea, will be heard at the TUC's 2005 Congress, to take place in Brighton from 12-15 September. A motion from specialists' union Prospect, which includes HSE inspectors in its membership, calls for workers to have more control over the design and content of their jobs to help prevent workplace stress and for stress to become a reportable work-related health condition under the RIDDOR regulations. It adds that "regulation and enforcement actions are the principal reasons why employers take measures to improve their health and safety practices and procedures" and calls for TUC "to press for regulations and an Approved Code of Practice on stress, to be backed by a funded programme of HSE enforcement." A Musicians' Union motion says the government's planned workplace smoking ban must have no exceptions. And a motion from ship officers' union NUMAST calls for action to prevent fatigue related hazards at sea. Shopworkers' union Usdaw calls on TUC to continue its high profile campaign against the UK's opt-out from the Working Time Directive's 48-hour working week ceiling. Transport union URTU calls for a review of the dangerous shortcomings of these regulations as they are applied in the sector. Community nurses' union CDNA says there should be "safer systems of working" for lone workers. A motion from firefighters' union FBU calls for the reintroduction of a maximum emergency response time, underpinned by proper staffing levels.

- [TUC news release](#). **TUC Congress 2005 [webpage](#) and final agenda [[pdf](#)]**.

GMB welcomes jail term for guard shooting

The union GMB has welcomed a 15 year jail sentence handed down on a bank robber who shot a security guard during a raid. Walsall father of four Colin Baker has been in agony since the top of his right leg was blown away in the raid, as he refilled a Nationwide bank cashpoint with notes almost 12 months ago. He has been left with one leg two inches shorter than the other and faces micro-surgery to repair the nerve damage. He says he is still suffering flashbacks and adds he has felt suicidal since being blasted at point blank range. GMB is seeking compensation for Colin Baker from his employer, Securicor, the bank and the BP garage where the raid took place. GMB has been concerned by a recent spate of attacks on security guards in the West Midlands ([Risks 218](#)). GMB senior organiser Martin Hird commented:

"Unfortunately there have been more security workers shot since the

attack on Mr Baker." He added that the union would "continue to work with security companies, the police and the banks to try to stop the continuing attacks at all levels of ferocity on our members. Villains and employers can rest assured that GMB will prosecute anyone who injures GMB members at work." Leon Allen, 25, who admitted robbery, wounding Colin Baker with intent and possession of a firearm, was sentenced at Wolverhampton Crown Court to a 15 year jail term.

- [GMB news release. Walsall Observer.](#)
- [GMB health and safety guide for security workers.](#)

ASLEF boss suggests Tube marshals

The authorities should consider the use of armed undercover marshals on London's Underground to foil future bombers, the head of train driver union ASLEF has said. Keith Norman said the marshals could deter terrorists, reassure commuters and could back-up drivers after an attack. The ASLEF general secretary, who says the idea is worth debating, stressed the marshals would have to be properly trained, and also suggested there should be a direct communications link between train drivers and the emergency services. Mr Norman told the BBC News website: "I would want to see people on there trained in security and possibly trained in the use of firearms so if they see someone who is possibly suspicious they can actually deal with that." He added: "Ideally I'd like them to be able to help the train driver with carrying out procedures if anything does happen. The mayor of London certainly likes the idea of more people on the trains in a different capacity. You could call them Tube marshals or something like that."

- [BBC News Online. Personnel Today.](#)

Rail guards needed to reduce violent crime

Rail union RMT has renewed its call for the return of guards to all trains and for more uniformed staff on stations as British Transport Police (BTP) reveals another rise in violent crime on Britain's rail and Tube networks. "It is deeply disturbing that violence on the railways is still on the increase," said RMT general secretary Bob Crow. "Our members have to bear the brunt of aggressive, drunken behaviour, particularly at night and particularly when working alone. Just as our members want to be able to work in safety, members of the public, particularly women travelling alone, should not have to run the gauntlet on deserted stations late at night or worry about being attacked in a train

carriage." He added: "The simple fact is that adequately staffed, well lit stations are safer than dark, deserted ones. We need adequate staff on every station all the time they are open and a guard on every train, including on the Tube." Violent crime on the UK's rail network rose by nearly 12 per cent last year, much of it fuelled by alcohol, police say. There were 9,748 cases of violent crime on the UK's railways in the year to March - up from 8,727 - while violence rose 14 per cent on the London Underground. The BTP annual report notes: "With an average of six assaults on rail staff every day, it is a significant problem for the industry and BTP. In response, a national campaign against assaults on rail staff was launched at the end of November. The thrust of the campaign is a series of station posters produced by the cross-industry Rail Personal Security Group (RPSG), which runs the campaign."

- [RMT news release](#). [BTP news release](#) and [annual report \[pdf\]](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Sky News](#).

OTHER NEWS

Plea to drivers over roadwork deaths

Drivers approaching roadworks are being urged to take extra care after a sharp rise in roadworker deaths on England's roads this year. Road maintenance companies say dangerous driving is on the increase, and they are installing special speed cameras to monitor the problem. Four workers have died in the first half of 2005 - compared with just one death in the whole of 2004. Recently released Health and Safety Executive (HSE) figures for roadworker deaths across Great Britain show a similar trend. In 2004 the HSE investigated only 4 incidents, compared with 4 so far in 2005 in the seven months since January. Highways Agency traffic operations director Derek Turner called workers on motorways and major 'A' roads a "vulnerable group." He said: "Everyone is entitled to a safe workplace, yet roadworkers risk death and injury at work every day [and night] making sure our roads remain safe and in good condition. We appeal to drivers to slow down when approaching roadworks and obey the signs and speed limits which are there to ensure the safety of workers and drivers." Concerned contractors are installing the latest speed cameras to monitor average speeds over a whole section of motorway rather than at individual locations. The Highways Agency says staff are trained to work on the roads - but motorists need to train themselves to take more care through roadworks. Unions in Australia introduced their own speed limits at roadworks, to reduce to danger after a worker was killed ([Risks 122](#)). Last November, officials in the Australian state of

Victoria followed the union lead and introduced a 25 km/hour speed limit at a major roadworks site ([Risks 181](#)).

- [Highways Agency news release](#) and [Safety at roadworks campaign](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- **Highways Agency leaflet, 'Driving through roadworks', available from Highways Agency Publications, telephone: 0870 1226 236, quoting reference number HA113/04.**

HSE warns employers of work transport risks

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has warned companies to ensure that adequate precautions are being taken to prevent transport-related accidents at work after two companies in the same street were prosecuted. In June, Beaver 84 Limited was fined £7,000 after Ben Huckaby suffered a broken foot after he was run over by a forklift. And on 8 August, Mereway Ltd was fined £4,000 after David Smith suffered an injured ankle when he was struck by a reversing forklift as he was unloading pallets from his lorry. Prosecuting HSE inspector Jenny Skeldon said: "Companies need to ensure that appropriate safety measures are implemented to prevent injuries such as these and to provide a safe working environment. Those managing and working with forklift trucks need to be competent - this means having the appropriate level of training and experience - to ensure that safety measures are implemented, and once implemented, that they are maintained appropriately." She added that transport is the second biggest cause of work-related deaths after falls from height. Every year, around 70 people are killed in transport-related accidents in the workplace, more than 1 in 10 involving forklifts.

- [HSE news release](#).

Overwhelming support for a total smoking ban

The majority of people in England and Wales back a complete ban on smoking in workplaces, a new survey has suggested. Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) and Cancer Research UK said 73 per cent of the 1,000 people they surveyed said a ban should be applied without exception. The poll comes ahead of the Health Improvement and Protection Bill, due before Parliament in November. In the Bill's anti-smoking provisions, the government has proposed exempting private clubs and pubs not serving prepared food from the legislation,

a move that has been opposed by public health groups, TUC and unions. ASH director Deborah Arnott said: "The public wants action to end secondhand smoke at work." She added: "The pointless and damaging exemptions for pubs and clubs must be dropped from the final Bill. Smokefree legislation must be comprehensive if it is to be successful." Cancer Research UK's chief executive Professor Alex Markham said: "The vast majority of people say they would still visit pubs if they were smokefree. This is supported by the experiences of places such as Ireland and New York, where there is clear evidence that going smokefree does not damage profits." UNISON health and safety officer Hope Daley commented: "We want them to put their money where their mouth is and remove these restrictions as this would save lives and reduce the work-related ill health caused by public smoking."

- [ASH news release](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Sky News](#). [UNISON news release](#).
- [TUC "Ban bar smoke" webpage](#). [Hazards smoking news and resources](#).

UK review as BP could face crime unit probe

As UK oil multinational BP faces rumours of a probe by a criminal investigations unit in the US after a highly critical report of its safety practices, *Risks* can reveal the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is keeping a close eye on developments. A report last week by the US government chemical safety watchdog CSB highlighted BP's failure to fully investigate and correct known defects in refinery equipment linked to the disastrous Texas City explosion on 23 March that killed 15 ([Risks 220](#)). A former high-ranking Department of Justice official told the *Houston Chronicle* this week that the case is likely to be referred to federal prosecutors. Possible penalties available to prosecutors include stiff fines or even imprisonment — up to one year for negligent endangerment and up to 15 years for knowing endangerment. Now Kevin Allars, head of the chemical industries division in the HSE's hazardous installations directorate has told *Risks*, HSE "has discussed directly, both with the US Chemical Safety Board and with BP, the ongoing investigation work since the Texas incident, and was aware of, and welcomed, the independent investigation board signalled by the CSB in its urgent recommendation issued on 17 August." He added "HSE's ongoing discussions with the UK industry will continue to reflect on the US initiative, and to consider if anything further needs to be done in the UK. HSE will also follow the progress of the various

investigations into the Texas incident, and will continue to review the need for further work in the UK." The CSB report called on the BP global board of directors, headed by Lord John Browne at the company's London HQ, to institute an urgent independent enquiry into BP's safety culture.

- [Houston Chronicle. Confined Space.](#)
- [Hazards BP webpage. BP explosions webpage.](#)

Horse care charity poisons workers

A horse sanctuary in East Anglia has been hit with fines and costs topping £45,000 after its "cavalier attitude" to lethal chemicals led to three of its workers being poisoned and suffering physical and mental injuries that could affect them for life. Redwings Horse Sanctuary - a charity with a yearly income of £6m - could be dealt a further serious financial blow as the victims prepare to launch civil actions against it for what could be six-figure compensation sums. Norwich Magistrates' Court heard this week that the three workers suffered severe symptoms after inhaling fumes from rat poison tablets when they went into a barn to stack hay. No one had told them the poison had been used in the area. They were also left to make their own way to hospital immediately after the incident. All three workers are now on anti-depressants and have faced dire personal as well as health consequences. One was fired without reason, another is having marriage problems because of his violent mood swings and the third faces a repossession order on his home. Along with two of its managers, Redwings was prosecuted in a case brought by the Health and Safety Executive for contravening health and safety regulations on the use of the poison Phostoxin. Sentencing the charity, Deputy District Judge Frazer Morrison criticised its "slapdash approach" and said "the company took no steps to safeguard the safety of employees and visitors to the premises. Proper practices could have prevented the consequences."

- [Eastern Daily Press. Norwich Evening News.](#)

Bakery fined over accident cover-up

A bakery has been fined after lying to cover up a serious accident. C Geary & Sons wrote to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to say its employee Alan McKenzie had broken his wrist in a fall from his bike when arriving for work. Hinckley Magistrates' Court heard however

that in reality he was injured by a rotating blade in a piece of equipment at the factory in Ratby. The company, which supplies retailers including Asda, was fined £3,000 for falsifying the report, and a further £1,000 for failing to prevent access to a dangerous machine. It was also ordered to pay £1,182.50 in costs. HSE discovered the truth about the original July 2004 incident after Mr Mckenzie suffered a second, almost identical, accident the following October, when his hand was cut. When interviewed by HSE he told them he had not fallen off his bike in the first accident. Prosecutor Munera Sidat said the second accident probably would not have happened if the first had been reported. She said: "The company has admitted falsifying the first accident report - this is reprehensible behaviour that clearly warrants prosecution. And the fact the firm failed to act after the first accident meant that the second accident was allowed to happen."

- [Leicester Mercury](#).

Jobs linked to deadly brain diseases

New evidence suggests a wide range of jobs could carry a heightened risk of degenerative brain diseases, including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. A study of more than 2.6 million US death records has linked certain jobs to a significantly increased risk of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, early-onset dementia and motor neuron disease. The findings echo those of earlier studies, suggesting exposures to the chemicals used by farmers, welders and hairdressers could be implicated in disease development. Other findings, however, such as the elevated disease risks among teachers, clergy and bank tellers, are not easily explained, according to the researchers, led by Robert Park of the US government's occupational health research body NIOSH. The researchers found that bank tellers, clergy, aircraft mechanics and hairdressers had highest odds of dying from Alzheimer's disease. For Parkinson's disease, the highest risks were among biological scientists, teachers, clergy members and other religious workers. The findings, based on death records from 22 states for the years 1992 to 1998, are published in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*. Farmers exposed to pesticides have been shown in some studies to have a higher-than-average risk of Parkinson's disease ([Risks 209](#), [Risks 211](#)), as have welders exposed to fumes containing the metal manganese ([Risks 194](#)). Both of these occupations were associated with Parkinson's in the current study. British companies BOC and Charter are among the defendants in a major test case on Parkinson's and welders, to start in the US next week ([Risks 220](#)).

- **Robert M Park and others. Potential occupational risks for neurodegenerative diseases, *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, volume 48, issue 1, pages 63–77, 2005 [[abstract](#)]. [Reuters Health](#).**

Workplace asthma can be more severe

Occupational exposure to substances that trigger asthma can make attacks more severe, according to new research. A French study published this month in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, analysed data from 148 adults with asthma and from 228 unaffected “control” subjects to assess the impact of occupational exposures on asthma severity. Dr Nicole Le Moual and colleagues found exposure to any occupational asthmogen was tied to an increased risk of severe asthma - with the increase in risk ranging from 3.7-fold to 7.5-fold. In a related editorial, Dr Jean-Luc Malo concludes: “Occupational asthma should be excluded in every subject with recent onset of adult asthma... There is indeed a possibility of curing asthma in this instance.” A series of recent journal reports have warned that occupational asthma appears to be on the increase ([Risks 212](#)).

- [Reuters Health](#). **Nicole Le Moual and others. Asthma severity and exposure to occupational asthmogens, *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, volume 172, pages 440-445, August 2005 [[abstract](#)].**
- **Jean-Luc Malo. Asthma may be more severe if it is work-related, *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, volume 172, pages 406-407, August 2005.**

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

China: Worker involvement is “best” way to avoid tragedies

The solution to China’s appalling work safety record is greater worker involvement, a Hong Kong-based workers’ rights organisation has said. China Labour Bulletin, commenting after 123 miners were trapped, presumed dead, in a mine flooding in Guangdong Province ([Risks 220](#)), said the State Administration of Coalmine Safety reports coal production has climbed to 940 million tons in the first six months of the year, a 9.7 per cent increase compared with the same period in

2004. The website also shows that from January to July this year, there have been six severe accidents – those killing at least 30 - resulting in 485 deaths. Compared with the same period last year, the number of serious accidents and the related death toll have increased by 100 per cent and 357.5 per cent respectively. China Labour Bulletin says it “has been actively involved in promoting the protection of labour rights and standards in mainland China” and adds “the on-going violations of basic occupational health and safety in the workplace in order to facilitate China's economic boom has become one of our main concerns.” It concludes: “For the past 10 years, CLB has promoted the set up of workers' own health and safety committees and independent trade unions. We believe it is the best and only possible way to end avoidable workplace disasters.” After the latest tragedy, officials shutdown and destroyed 32 unlicensed private mines.

- [China Labour Bulletin](#) and [related article on mine closures](#).

France: Workers exposed to mutagens or reprotoxins

Hundreds of thousands of French workers are exposed either to workplace chemicals that can cause genetic changes (mutagens) or substances that are reproductive hazards (reprotoxins). A survey by the French employment ministry's research and statistics department DARES found about 186,000 French workers are exposed to mutagens and 180,000 are exposed to reprotoxins – about 1 per cent of the workforce for each. The most commonly encountered mutagens are chromium and its derivatives (58 per cent of cases) and benzene (25 per cent). Workers in production and maintenance jobs are the most likely to be exposed. Men are three times more likely to be exposed to reprotoxins than women. Lead tops the list of reprotoxins, accounting for two-thirds of all exposures. Production and maintenance jobs carry the greatest exposure risk, followed by research posts. The findings come from a workplace survey conducted between June 2002 and the end of 2003, based on a sample of nearly 50,000 French workers and around 1,800 occupational doctors. DARES also found that more than one in every eight French workers is exposed to cancer causing substances at work ([Risks 219](#)).

- [REHS news release](#).

Global: Greenpeace slams toxic tech industry

Workers in China and India employed in the recycling of mostly western electronic devices are being exposed to potentially hazardous toxic substances, a new report has warned. The Greenpeace report claims quantities of toxic heavy metals can be released into the workplace and the surrounding environment at all stages of the processing of electrical and electronic waste. The authors of 'Recycling of electrical wastes in China and India: Workplace and environmental contamination' say large amounts of electrical waste and electronic goods are shipped, often illegally, to poor or developing countries to be recycled by local inhabitants who are usually ill-equipped to handle hazardous waste and ignorant of the potential health effects. According to the report, the e-waste recycling sector in many parts of Asia remains largely unregulated and "is also poorly studied with regard to its impacts on the environment and on the health of recycling workers and surrounding communities." Dr Kevin Brigden, a scientist at Greenpeace International who worked on the investigation, said: "The report provides a compelling case for immediate action in both countries to address workplace health and safety issues, as well as waste management practices." He added: "The data reinforces the need for the electronics industry to eliminate the use of harmful substances in their products at the design stage and take responsibility for their products at the end of their lifecycle."

- **'Recycling of electrical wastes in China and India: Workplace and environmental contamination', Greenpeace [full report](#) and [report summary](#). [Silicon.com](#). [Green Consumer Guide](#). [China Labour Bulletin](#).**
- **[Greenpeace International's high tech waste campaign webpages](#).**

Sweden: Stressed women stop working earlier

Stress at work is a more common reason for women taking early retirement than illness according to new research. The study, conducted on 300 women in Stockholm by the public health institute at the Karolinska Institute, found that less than half of healthy working women actually work up to the age of 65. At the start of the study 10 years ago, all the women were healthy. Ten years later, of the 158 women who had turned 65, only 43.7 per cent had worked right up to the retirement age of 65. The study found 46 per cent had taken early retirement, whilst a third had been retired early due to illness. Over the 10 year period, women who claimed to suffer from stress were

four times as likely to be put on sick leave. The study also showed that women with a poor education were at greater risk of premature death or early retirement, whilst well educated women were more likely to be put on long-term sick leave. Researchers believe that well educated women opt to stop working early in order to avoid potentially fatal illness.

- [The Local.](#)

USA/China: Disney probes China labour claims

US media giant Walt Disney has said it will investigate claims that staff at factories in China making books for the firm are working in unsafe conditions. New York-based campaign group the National Labor Committee (NLC) said factory staff in China's Shenzhen province worked up to 13-hour days for less than the minimum wage. It said workers at the Hung Hing printing factory struggled in stifling and dangerous conditions. In response, Disney said it had asked Verite, a non-profit social auditing and research group, to begin an investigation. NLC said workers at the factory in Shenzhen often fainted from heat exhaustion, while female staff were denied maternity rights. The Reuters news agency reported that one print factory producing books for Disney has been the scene of regular industrial accidents, including amputations. "Disney has its own code of conduct but these manufacturers may not be telling the truth," said Billy Hung, coordinator of the Hong Kong-based campaign group Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehaviour (SACOM), which provided video and other evidence to NLC. "These practices must stop, especially the industrial accidents."

- [NLC news release including links for reports and video clips.](#) [BBC News Online.](#)
- [SACOM website.](#)

RESOURCES



Be good for you

The brand spanking new issue of *Hazards* magazine, the award-winning TUC backed health and safety quarterly, should now be in the welcoming mitts of every safety rep in the country. So if it isn't in yours, you can order your copy now and find out why standing at work is something you shouldn't stand for,

standing at work is something you shouldn't stand for, why the government's attack on "red tape" could be very dangerous for workers, and how a top union body in Australia has taken its safety message into the workplace and on to the streets. And in the latest issue, TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson argues that any workplace smoking ban must protect all workers. As well as being packed with 36 pages of news and features, there's also "The Killers", the latest in the successful series of *Hazards'* workplace safety posters. There are massive union discounts, and they get even bigger the more copies you buy – from just £3.75 an issue for a single copy (£15 a year) down to less than 50p an issue for the largest bulk orders.

- [Hazards magazine. Subscribe online.](#) **If you want to find out about subscription rates or place an order, [email](#) or call the *Hazards* subscription hotline on 0114 201 4265. Print-off-and-send online subscription form [[pdf](#)].**

Safety law guide

Health and safety law 2005 from the Labour Research Department (LRD) is an updated guide to safety law. Among the developments covered are new regulations on vibration at work, hazardous substances and work at height, as well as changes to the control of major accidents and hazards and amendments to the working time regulations affecting transport workers.

- [LRD publication notice.](#) **Price £8.50 per copy.**

EVENTS AND COURSES

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