



Risks Newsletter



Number 233 - 19 November 2005



Editor: [Rory O'Neill](#) of [Hazards](#) magazine. Comments to the TUC at healthandsafety@tuc.org.uk

Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 12,000 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](#).

In this issue

• ACTION

- What would you do to dangerous bosses?

• UNION NEWS

- Accidents plummet in paper firm
- RMT calls for real safety and security not spin
- Scots slam shameful safety stats

• OTHER NEWS

- Past asbestos exposures killing thousands
- Asbestos crimes leave a new generation at risk
- Insurers bid to stop asbestos payouts
- Workplace asbestos exposure linked to

colon cancer

- Norwich Union sued by injured employee
- Football club fined £4,000 over death of trainee player
- Firm fined £40,000 over worker death
- The road is Britain's most dangerous workplace
- Concern over workplace violence

• RESOURCES

- You may slip up without Hazards at Work
- Worker safety under siege
- New epidemics at work

• INTERNATIONAL NEWS

- Australia: Asbestos giant Hardie faces boycott threat
- Canada: Healthcare unions push for safety needles law
- China: Chemical plant explosion kills at least five
- Global: Deadly industrial blasts remain a daily occurrence
- Global: Note to UK - workplace smoking bans work
- USA: Cheap masks won't offer flu protections

• **EVENTS AND COURSES**

- TUC courses for safety reps
- **USEFUL LINKS**

ACTION

What would you do to dangerous bosses?

The Health and Safety Executive wants your views on new approaches to workplace safety enforcement and penalties. A consultation is asking whether alternative penalties, such as administrative fines, restorative justice, conditional cautioning and enforceable undertakings, could have a role to play. The online consultation briefing includes what HSE describes as “a snapshot of the alternative sanctions” but adds “this list is not exhaustive, and we would welcome your views on these or any other penalties.” TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson said: “We welcome this consultation. It is important that the armoury available to inspectors is increased, however we must ensure that new alternative penalties are not used to justify a reduction in prosecutions of criminal employers. The TUC also hopes that unions will highlight the role that safety reps play in ensuring compliance – a role that would be greatly enhanced were they to be given greater rights.”

- Have your say. [Alternative penalties for health and safety offences](#) – details of the consultation and summary of some possible alternative penalties. Comments before the end of 2005 to [Keith Pritchard](#), Enforcement Policy Unit, HSE, 5NW Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge, London SE1 9HS.

UNION NEWS

Accidents plummet in paper firm

A paper company working with print union Amicus has achieved a massive cut in workplace

accidents. Amicus convenor Gary Seager and safety rep Peter Goatham, both from St Regis Paper in Kent, told a Health and Safety Commission open meeting earlier this month that an effective employer and trade union partnership had reduced accident rates by 63 per cent and improved health and safety at the company. Amicus official Bud Hudspith commented: “By working together Amicus and St Regis management have made the company a safer place to work. We would like to see other companies adopt this approach to health and safety.” The union’s health and safety partnership agreement with St Regis covers six UK paper mills. Two meetings a year bring together Amicus safety reps and shop stewards, along with supervisors and managers, to discuss and implement a company-wide health and safety strategy. The partnership has the full support and involvement of St Regis and Amicus at a national level.

- [Amicus news release](#).

RMT calls for real safety and security not spin

Rail union RMT says genuine transport safety measures must match up to the government’s rhetoric. The call came this week after Transport secretary Alistair Darling suggested x-ray screening and body scanners could be introduced at some rail stations. RMT said in contrast to the “government spin”, the transport system faced a threat to axe fire safety regulations, cuts in frontline safety-critical staff and resistance by privatised employers to discuss security with transport unions. “The secretary of state has acknowledged that it would be impossible to have a completely closed security system on Britain’s commuter transport networks,” RMT general secretary Bob Crow said. “What we can do is make sure that we have in place the best possible measures to cope with any future emergencies and give people the best possible chance to survive. Instead, we are still fighting to get the government to drop once and for all its plans to scrap essential fire safety regulations for sub-surface stations that were put in place after

the King's Cross fire that claimed 31 lives." He added: "Since the July 7 bombings we have been trying to get the train operating companies to meet the rail unions to discuss what can be done by the rail industry, and we have asked the government to facilitate such a gathering – but we are still waiting." The union leader said: "Talk of installing scanners at stations is all well and good, but nearly half of Britain's rail stations are already completely unstaffed."

- [RMT news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Scots slam shameful safety stats

Scotland's unions have reacted with dismay to new official figures showing the country has Great Britain's highest work fatality rate. Health and Safety Executive statistics released earlier this month showed fatalities in Scotland rose from 15 in 2003/4 to 36 in 2004/5, an increase of 140 per cent. STUC assistant secretary, Dave Moxham, said the rise was unacceptable and added: "It is a matter of national shame and concern that Scotland now has the highest workplace fatality rate of any British reporting region. This isn't a one-year statistical blip. From 2001 to 2005 the number of fatal injuries to workers in Scotland increased by 29 per cent compared to a decrease of 12 per cent in Great Britain for the same period." He added that HSE enforcement figures show there are fewer convictions, lower fines, and fewer enforcement notices issued in Scotland. "The STUC are disappointed that Scotland continues to have a significantly lower record of health and safety prosecutions than England and Wales and that fines for those convicted are totally inadequate to provide any meaningful deterrent," he said. "We call on employers to ensure they provide safer workplaces and more power for health and safety representatives, including the right to issue Provisional Improvement Notices (PINs) and inspect workplaces where unions have members irrespective of if there is a collective agreement in place. The safest workplaces continue to be unionised workplaces."

- [STUC news release](#). More on the [union safety effect](#) and [PINs](#).
- [HSE statistics](#) and [Scotland](#) webpages.

OTHER NEWS

Past asbestos exposures killing thousands

Britain's biggest industrial killer is still claiming thousands of lives every year – and the toll is still rising. An inquest earlier this month heard that Bruce Ernest Barnard died in August aged 71 from the asbestos cancer mesothelioma, over 50 years after he was exposed in the gun turret of a Royal Navy ship. Gordon Maule died aged 71 in June, an inquest this week heard. He had worked as an electrician at Airtech in Abingdon more than 50 years ago, where he was exposed to asbestos. Robert Earl died last week of mesothelioma, aged 64. He had worked as a fitter-labourer at Carlisle's County Garage, where he was exposed fixing and changing asbestos brake shoes. Despite its notoriety as a workplace mass killer, it is still difficult to get the best medical treatment for mesothelioma. Dying shipyard worker Stan Easton, 69, has been forced to launch legal proceedings against his former bosses so he can pay for the cancer drug Alimta, which studies show can slow the progress of the disease. The drug is available on the NHS in Scotland and in Liverpool, but can only be obtained privately in most other areas, at a cost estimated at about £24,000. Coroners' inquests too can fail to accept that asbestos-related diseases are caused by work. An inquest this week into the death of Ronald Buckley, who died in January aged 76, ruled his death was due to asbestos exposure. However, coroner Peter Ashworth said: "I cannot return a verdict of death from industrial disease," after the pathologist who found Mr Buckley's lungs were heavily scarred by asbestos said there was "no occupational history of asbestos exposure." The

dead man had worked as a tile layer and had worked with and would have cut asbestos tiles. Tile layers are also commonly exposed to asbestos from general building work and from removing damaged tiles or asbestos containing floor coverings, including old lino.

- [Lancashire Evening Telegraph](#). [Oxford Mail](#). [Cumberland News](#). [Newcastle Evening Chronicle](#). [Derbyshire Evening Telegraph](#).

Asbestos crimes leave a new generation at risk

Criminal neglect of safety laws is placing a new generation of workers at risk of asbestos disease. Great Yarmouth firm Omni-Pac (Risks 141) pleaded guilty last week to health and safety charges relating to the discovery of large quantities of blue asbestos on the site more than two years ago (Risks 133). The factory later closed its doors, with the loss of more than 200 jobs. At a hearing at Great Yarmouth Magistrates Court, the company admitted health and safety offences. It will be sentenced at Norwich Crown Court after magistrates referred the case. The asbestos was first discovered in October 2003, after routine tests carried out by an independent analyst, and then confirmed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Jonathan Cooper, prosecuting for HSE, said: "Omni-Pac failed to manage the risk associated with asbestos. They failed to adhere to their own procedures and consequently people were exposed to risk of asbestos over a period of time." In a second case last week, chartered surveyor Christopher Grove, who exposed Plymouth dockyard workers to asbestos fibres, was ordered by magistrates to pay £750 in fines and £150 costs. He had used a power saw to cut through two asbestos-lagged pipes in a dockyard building which was being refurbished, sending deadly fibres into the air.

- [Eastern Daily Press](#). [Advertiser](#). [Plymouth Evening Herald](#).

Insurers bid to stop asbestos payouts

Thousands of people who were exposed to asbestos at work could lose the right to compensation if three senior judges overturn a ruling in a test case before the appeal court this week. At stake is more than £1bn in compensation over the next few decades which insurers argue they should not be obliged to pay. The case concerns six men in their 50s and 60s with "pleural plaques" - patches of thickening on the lining of the lungs, which are visible on x-ray and are caused by asbestos exposure. Those exposed to asbestos dust may go on to develop life-threatening diseases including lung cancer and mesothelioma. Tens of thousands of claimants have been compensated for pleural plaques since three high court rulings in the mid-80s, which established that the condition gave rise to a right to compensation. The insurers' argument that the plaques are symptomless and not harmful was rejected by Mr Justice Holland in the high court in February 2005, but the judge cut the levels of compensation payouts (Risks 195). Norwich Union is appealing against the ruling that the plaques, along with the anxiety they cause about possible future disease, count as an injury deserving compensation. Ian McFall of Thompsons Solicitors, responded: "For over 20 years the courts have accepted that pleural plaques together with the increased risk of future disease and related anxiety constitutes an injury and should therefore be compensated. The majority of people who develop any type of asbestos-related disease, including pleural plaques, do so because their employers were negligent in failing to protect them from exposure to asbestos." Amicus estimates that the appeal court's ruling will affect around 14,000 cases a year.

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#). [John Pickering Solicitors news release](#). [Irwin Mitchell Solicitors news release](#). [The Guardian](#). [The Observer](#). [Daily Telegraph](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Yorkshire Post](#).

Workplace asbestos exposure linked to colon cancer

Men who've been exposed to asbestos run a greater risk of developing colorectal cancer, according to US researchers. Dr Mark Cullen from Yale University School of Medicine and colleagues used data from a cancer prevention trial to investigate the risk of colorectal cancer among nearly 4,000 men. They compared a non-asbestos-exposed heavy-smoker subgroup of participants with an asbestos-exposed "smoker-eligible" subgroup. Writing in the American Journal of Epidemiology, they say men in the asbestos-exposed group were 36 per cent more likely to develop colorectal cancer than were men in the heavy-smoker but not asbestos-exposed cohort. Participants with 21 to 30 years of exposure had a 74 per cent increased risk of colorectal cancer compared with those with less than 10 years of exposure. Colorectal cancer screening "should be aggressively pursued in view of their higher risk," Cullen said. "Heavily exposed men get preventable as well as, sadly, unpreventable cancers," he added. "This is one disease we can do something about; hence, this should be one focus of care for these men." The presence of pleural plaques was associated with an increased risk of colon cancer of over 50 per cent, the study found.

- Oluremi A Aliyu, Mark R Cullen and others. Evidence for excess colorectal cancer incidence among asbestos-exposed men in the beta-carotene and retinol efficacy trial, American Journal of Epidemiology, Volume 162, Number 9, pages 868-878, 2005 [[abstract](#)]. [PlanetArk](#).

Norwich Union sued by injured employee

An insurance worker is suing her own company for compensation - after she tripped and fell over a file stuffed with accident claims. Norwich Union insurance underwriter Linda Riley is claiming £5,000 in damages from parent company Aviva plc. She claims the

company was at fault for her tripping over a pile of files and sustaining an injury at its Perth office. She has now lodged a claim against the company at Perth Sheriff Court and the case is expected to be heard some time next year. Papers say she was left with pain in her left ankle, lower leg and foot, and needed a course of physiotherapy. She was absent from work for a period and lost wages as a result, as well as still suffering from pain three years after the accident. Her writ states: "The accident was caused through the fault of Aviva. It was their duty to take reasonable care for the safety of their employees and to avoid exposing them to unnecessary risk of injury." Aviva denies liability.

- [The Scotsman](#).

Football club fined £4,000 over death of trainee player

Falkirk Football Club has been fined £4,000 following the death of an apprentice player, who was electrocuted when training equipment he was carrying touched an overhead power cable. Craig Gowans, 17, died on 8 July at the Scottish Premier League club's training ground in Grangemouth, while setting up equipment for senior players arriving for pre-season training. The club was fined for failing to ensure the safety of the young central defender, who was only two weeks into a two-year contract with Falkirk. John Hughes, the club's manager, and George Craig, the managing director, appeared at Falkirk Sheriff Court, having admitted the charge. A club statement said: "Falkirk Football Club fully accepts the ruling of the court." Craig said the accident had led to a major shake-up in the way Falkirk FC handled the health and safety of its employees. "We have employed the services of a health and safety consultant and we have risk assessments carried out at all the locations where Falkirk FC employees are working," he said.

- [The Scotsman](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Firm fined £40,000 over worker death

A company has been fined £40,000 and ordered to pay £10,000 costs for breaching health and safety regulations after a worker died when he was crushed by a car transporter. Paul Turner, 30, had been repairing the hydraulics on the vehicle at Belle Car Transporters and Specialist Services when the incident happened on 15 January 2004. Judge Roderick Newton, sitting at Chelmsford Crown Court, said it was a “most appalling tragedy” and added: “This company pleaded guilty to serious breaches of health and safety legislation falling far below what I, and anyone, expect from a company that is at the forefront of its field.” He said: “I have no doubt had the breaches been attended to, it would have prevented the death of Mr Turner, who leaves a young family bereft.” Adrian Parker, managing director of the company, was in court to confirm it had admitted the charges at a previous hearing. The company was prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive for failing to record suitable risk assessments. The company said it had set up a trust fund for the education of Mr Turner's two young children and now holds an annual golf day, with the proceeds going to the family.

- [East Anglian Daily Times](#).

The road is Britain’s most dangerous workplace

Britain’s roads are the country’s most dangerous workplace as under-pressure workers, struggling to meet deadlines and suffering fatigue from long hours, become a danger to themselves and others. New research suggests millions of Britons who drive regularly for their work are “crash magnets” who are much more likely than other road users to cause accidents. Employees who spend long hours driving to meet colleagues or clients are involved in an estimated 1,000 road

traffic fatalities each year, almost a third of the UK's annual road deaths. The findings emerged from a survey of a range of workers in Strathclyde, including drivers, sales staff, engineers, managers and directors. It was led by Steve Stradling, professor of transport psychology in the Transport Research Institute at Edinburgh's Napier University. The study found 30 per cent of work drivers questioned had been involved in one or more accidents in the previous three years and 56 per cent of their crashes occurred while they were driving for work. Stradling blamed deadlines, work-related stress, fatigue, use of mobile phones at the wheel and a lack of driver training. Sean Emery, 36, received a four-year sentence last week for causing the death by dangerous driving of police officer John Needham. The driver, who was employed by FDS Future Driving Services, had worked 41 of the previous 57 hours for three different clients, breaching working hours laws. Former DFS boss Brian Alcock, 38, pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was jailed for three years and banned from being a company director for seven years.

- [The Observer](#). [Nottingham Evening Post](#).

Concern over workplace violence

Almost half of all young Scottish workers who deal with the public have been exposed to violence, according to new research. The study was part of a Scottish Executive ‘Bang out of order’ campaign urging people to know their rights in the workplace. It also revealed 31 per cent had been verbally or physically attacked, threatened, sworn or spat at by a member of the public in the last 12 months. Workers - who are being encouraged to speak out - typically keep quiet, with 48 per cent of those who experience abuse viewing it as “part of the job”. Fears are greatest among female workers, with one in five worried about dealing with violence at work. Public service reform minister Tom McCabe commented: “Every worker in Scotland, of every age, should be able to go about their work without fear of physical or verbal abuse.” The Scottish Executive is now urging employers to

review their policy on violence and put a robust reporting structure in place to help eliminate or control any risk of violence at work. Andy Brady, chair of the Scottish Trades Union Congress' youth committee, urged workers to report violence. "Any worker who has encountered an abusive incident should immediately inform their employer and refuse to do something if they believe it endangers them or a fellow worker," he said.

- [BBC News Online. Bang out of order campaign.](#)

RESOURCES

You may slip up without Hazards at Work



The TUC's newly relaunched guide, 'Hazards at work: Organising for safe and healthy workplaces', is now available. This new edition of the popular loose-leaf manual has been completely revised, updated and republished as an A4 book. The book deals

with the importance of an organised workforce to encourage good health and safety practice, and provides information on all the major hazards in the workplace, complete with extracts from relevant health and safety law. All in all, it is an indispensable guide for union reps and safety practitioners.

- Hazards at work: Organising for safe and healthy workplaces. £18 TUC member organisations; £30 educational/voluntary not-for-profit organisations; £45 others. Discounts for bulk orders. Safety reps on TUC-approved course who get an order form endorsed by their course tutor can obtain a copy for £10 plus post and packing. [TUC publication notice](#) and print-off-and-post order form [[pdf](#)]. [Order online from TUC Publications](#)

Worker safety under siege

If you thought financial risks to shareholders seemed these days to be a bigger concern worldwide than safety risks to workers, you'd be right. 'Worker safety under siege: Labor, capital, and the politics of workplace safety in a deregulated world', a new US book, shows how the important safety laws and preventive approaches developing in the 1970s are now under threat worldwide. The book is organised around three thematic issues, mostly concentrating on the US experience but with application elsewhere. First, modern industrial economies have shifted from an industrial base to a white collar/service base, with a different workforce – more women, more migrant workers and more insecure workers. Second, free market ideology and globalisation have served to undermine worker safety and health laws. And finally, the "war on terror" in the US has exacerbated the trend toward weakening workers' rights and safety standards in the name of national security. The lessons all apply in the UK as much as in the US, and this is essential reading for any student of the politics of occupational health and safety policy and practice.

- Worker safety under siege: Labor, capital, and the politics of workplace safety in a deregulated world, edited by Vernon Mogensen, published by [ME Sharpe Inc](#), USA. Cloth ISBN: 0-7656-1448-0; Paper ISBN: 0-7656-1449-9. [Price and purchase details.](#)

New epidemics at work

A retreat from regulation and enforcement, combined with the impact of globalisation, is leading to new problems and new epidemics, according to a new book. 'Occupational health and safety: International influences and the "new" epidemics', a collection a papers by leading health and safety academics worldwide, exposes how hard won regulations are being undermined by deregulation and how the export

of hazardous work is creating a new degeneration of workplace disease victims in developing nations. In developed nations, the shift from blue collar to service sector work and new forms of more precarious employment are reducing union power and creating more workplaces where safety is more difficult to enforce. The editors' note: "As work intensification has increased in the past decade – associated with the pressures of globalisation – it appears that managerial willingness to accept responsibility for the consequences of poor occupational health and safety has diminished." This book is not a light read, but it is a key source for any serious student keen to investigate the pressures that are making work more hazardous today and laying the groundwork for the occupational ill-health epidemics of tomorrow.

- Occupational health and safety: International influences and the "new" epidemics, edited by Chris L Peterson and Claire Mayhew. ISBN 0-89503-303-8. Contact Baywood Publishing Company by [email](#) or phone, tel: 00 1 631 691 1270. [Further information, price and purchase details.](#)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australia: Asbestos giant Hardie faces boycott threat

Australian unions have warned James Hardie, the company that prompted a damaging global campaign after it tried to evade compensation payouts, it will face another round of boycotts if it doesn't deliver on its promises to dying Australians. AMWU assistant secretary, Tim Ayres, delivered the ultimatum as the former industrial blue chip announced a half-year net profit of Aus\$141 million (£60m) this month. "If this is not settled, and James Hardie walks away from negotiations, there will be an unrelenting community campaign," Ayres promised. Sixteen months ago, the company's chair Meredith Hellicar announced an agreement with the ACTU and NSW government that would see it pay billions of dollars from profits

to people whose lives had been wrecked by contact with its products ([Risks 213](#)). A draft agreement, estimated to cost the company more than \$4.5 billion (£1.9m) over the next 40 years, was signed in December 2004. Trade unions lifted boycotts and bans as a result, but a year later James Hardie is still to formalise the arrangement. Asbestos Disease Foundation of Australia representative, Barry Robson, who joined a protest outside the company at the Sydney profit announcement, said members had died while the company dragged out final negotiations. "We don't mind them making a profit but we want them to put some of it into that fund for victims," Robson said. "James Hardie keep hoping we will go away and the victims will disappear. I am here to say that is not going to happen."

- [Workers Online. ABC News.](#)
- [Hazards asbestos news and resources. International Ban Asbestos Secretariat.](#)

Canada: Healthcare unions push for safety needles law

Healthcare workers in Ontario, Canada, have launched a province-wide print, radio and outdoor advertising campaign to push the Ontario government to make safety-engineered medical sharps mandatory. The Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA), the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) want a law making the use of safety needles mandatory in all workplaces where workers are exposed to blood-borne pathogens. They say this would prevent 33,000 injuries a year in Ontario and save millions of dollars. "The government must show it is serious about protecting the health of Ontario's nurses by making the use of safety-engineered devices mandatory," said ONA president Linda Haslam-Stroud, adding "a law is the only way to ensure hospitals and other employers provide the safest equipment available to prevent workers from being exposed to serious diseases, like hepatitis and HIV, through

needlestick injuries.” Provincial governments in Manitoba (Risks 185) and Saskatchewan (Risks 182) have laws taking effect in 2006 to protect their workers. Research cited by the unions shows in facilities where safety needles are in use, up to 90 per cent of sharps injuries are prevented.

- [OPSEU news release](#) and [Safer Needles webpage](#).
- [Hazards needlesticks news and resources](#).

China: Chemical plant explosion kills at least five

Five people died and one person remained missing earlier this week after seven explosions rocked a chemical plant in north-east China's Jilin province on 13 November. The state-run Xinhua news agency said a day after the blast the chances of finding the missing worker alive were “very slim”. The Jilin Province Work Safety Bureau said another 21 people with less serious injuries remained in hospital. The explosions injured more than 70 people at the benzene-producing No.101 chemical plant of the CNPC Jilin Petrochemical Company in Jilin city. Xinhua reported that authorities feared toxic air contamination and evacuated more than 10,000 people, including local university students. Reports said initial investigations had shown that a fuel tower in one of the factories had collapsed and improper handling in the clearing of the wreckage had caused the explosion. The tower was used to process benzene, a flammable liquid and a workplace carcinogen and highly toxic industrial solvent.

- [ABC News. China Labour Bulletin](#).

Global: Deadly industrial blasts remain a daily occurrence

Hazardous industrial plants continue to pose a

deadly explosion danger worldwide. Blasts in China, India and Russia followed on consecutive days from 12 to 14 November. Two workers were killed and seven others injured on 12 November at DVS Alloy and Steel Company in Ghaziabad, India, while scrap was being dumped into a furnace for melting exploded. The following day, a chemical plant exploded in China, killing at least 5 (see above). And on 14 November one man was killed and two injured in an explosion that shook a chemical firm in the Chelyabinsk region in the Urals, the emergency situations ministry's local office said. Officials said the incident occurred at the Signal-Polimer factory based in the town of Yemanzhelinsk, where filling agents for fireworks were made. The lax standards also extend to some of the world's richest nations. Earlier this year a BP plant in Texas City exploded, killing 15 ([Risks 231](#)).

- [Times of India. Russian news agency](#).

Global: Note to UK - workplace smoking bans work

Bans on smoking in public places have been highly successful in Ireland and New Zealand, according to reports in the 12 November issue of the British Medical Journal. The Irish research involved testing the saliva of bar staff for levels of cotinine, a metabolite of nicotine, in the period before and up to a year after the ban. It found an 80 per cent drop, suggesting a massive reduction in passive smoking. Workers also reported “significantly fewer” respiratory symptoms. The authors conclude: “The smoke-free workplace law in the Republic of Ireland has provided protection for one of the most heavily exposed occupational groups by reducing their exposure to secondhand smoke both in and out of the workplace. The reduced exposure has led to a decline in respiratory and sensory symptoms in non-smokers. The increase in support for the law in the Republic since its introduction, even among smokers, underpins its effectiveness.” They add: “These findings have implications for policy makers and legislators in other countries

currently considering the nature and extent of their smoke-free workplace legislation.” In a letter in the same issue, Nick Wilson, a senior lecturer in public health at the Wellington School of Medicine in New Zealand, writes that the complete ban in his country since December 2004 has been well accepted by the public, and smoking cessation services became busier when the ban was introduced. Commenting on the UK’s approach on this issue, he said: “Having only a partial ban on smoking in public places is seriously inadequate in terms of protecting the public health from secondhand smoke.”

- Shane Allwright and others. [Legislation for smoke-free workplaces and health of bar workers in Ireland: before and after study](#), volume 331, Number 7525, page 1117, 2005.
- Nick Wright. [Total smoking ban is accepted in New Zealand](#), BMJ, volume 331, number 7525, page 1145, 2005.
- [Hazards smoking news and resources](#).

USA: Cheap masks won’t offer flu protections

A US government’s strategy to combat a flu pandemic will fail because the cheap disposable face masks recommended for health staff are not up to the job, unions and public health experts have warned. They say normal surgical masks, which cost only a few pence, lack federal approval as a shield against particles the size of viruses. Officials at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) say the masks are only a first line of defence. Critics, however, have also questioned the CDC's recommendation that, when in close contact with flu victims, health care personnel wear disposable respirators - the lowest-grade mask that the government certifies as able to filter out toxins and germs. Unions and some health experts say the risks of disease and of a panic among workers are too great to rely on inexpensive masks, especially given research suggesting virus particles can remain active in the air for hours and can penetrate disposable masks. “This is a programme that

will assure that healthcare workers either get sick or decide not to show up for work because they don't have adequate protection,” said Bill Borwegen, health and safety director for the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which represents 875,000 medical employees. Prominent public health experts have backed the union stance, and called for the use of better quality respirators.

- [Minneapolis Star Tribune. US Pandemic Influenza Plan. SEIU health and safety webpages](#).

EVENTS AND COURSES

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2005

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

COURSES FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2006

- [Northern](#), [South East](#), [Yorkshire and the Humber](#)

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