



Risks Newsletter



Number 246 – 4 March 2006



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

• UNION NEWS

- Asbestos campaigners press for action
- Firefighter crews boycott Buncefield party
- Union campaign staff working overtime
- Worker gets £33,750 for bouncy castle injury
- Violence and disruption is a core school activity
- Renewed call for action on robbery risks

• OTHER NEWS

- HSE work health scheme goes live
- Farm injury exposes child labour risk
- Pilot scheme allows families to tell court of their suffering

- Temp work 'harms women's health'
- NHS staff abusers "face big fine"
- Work stress linked to constable's suicide
- Insurers accused of abandoning asbestos victims
- Bosses ignoring driving dangers at work
- MoD acts on journalists' safety
- **INTERNATIONAL NEWS**
- Bangladesh: Factory deaths spur angry protests
- Canada: Action call on strain injuries scourge
- Global: Union protests to target asbestos trade
- Mexico: Mine rescue abandoned, 65 presumed dead
- USA: Groups challenge deadly chrome standard
- **EVENTS AND COURSES**
- TUC courses for safety reps
- **USEFUL LINKS**

UNION NEWS

Asbestos campaigners press for action



A massive campaign effort by asbestos campaigners and trades unions has highlighted the plight of asbestos disease victims ([Risks 245](#)). A Clydebank Asbestos Group conference in Glasgow on Action Mesothelioma Day, 27 February, attracted top

international speakers, with 350 in attendance. In Manchester, 250 attended an event and protest organised by Greater Manchester Asbestos Victims Support Group. And in Liverpool 150 turned out for a Merseyside Asbestos Victims Support Group seminar. Events were held nationwide, with the activities to highlight rising deaths from the deadly asbestos cancer supported by the TUC and UK unions. Bob Blackman, TGWU national secretary for construction, said the asbestos death toll “indicates the long-term nature of the problem we're grappling with. That's why we are supporting days of action, like today, to raise awareness in every workplace of the need to treat asbestos as a killer.” GMB national safety officer John McClean said: “Part of this campaign is to ensure the management of the disease in its final stages including the use of new palliative drugs which help ease this suffering and ensuring that they are available to all by right and not subject to selection by postcode lottery.” Speaking ahead of Glasgow event, STUC safety officer Ian Tasker said: “The Clydebank Asbestos Group must be congratulated on organising such a high level international conference. The conference will discuss the effect of asbestos which manifests as occupational illnesses which have blighted many Scottish workers and their families in addition to the many thousands of other cases throughout the world and the support they require.”

- [GMB news release](#), [TGWU news release](#), STUC news release [[pdf](#)], [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#), [Irwin Mitchell Solicitors news release](#), [TUC news release](#).

- [BBC News Online](#), [Sunday Herald](#), [Leicester Mercury](#), [The Courier](#), [North West Evening Mail](#), [Newcastle Evening Chronicle](#).
- TUC [mesothelioma day webpages](#), asbestos poster [[pdf](#)] and [asbestos webpages](#), [Hazards Campaign listing of Mesothelioma Day events](#), 27 February and [local groups list](#).
- Hazards [asbestos](#) and [cancer](#) webpages, [International Ban Asbestos Secretariat](#).
- [HSE asbestos duty to manage campaign](#).

Firefighter crews boycott Buncefield party

Firefighters who brought the fire at Buncefield oil depot under control have protested outside a Downing Street reception they were to attend. Firefighters’ union FBU is fighting plans to cut 50 Hertfordshire jobs and close two fire stations with the loss of specialist rescue equipment. Speaking ahead of the 1 March event at 10 Downing St, county FBU vice chair Tony Smith said “we take exception to politicians basking in the success of our hard work one minute and sacking us the next.” The December blaze - the largest in peacetime Europe – took days to bring under control and was tackled by 600 firefighters. Mr Smith said: “Buncefield was the fourth major incident in Hertfordshire in recent years. We had previously dealt with three major rail crashes at Watford Junction, Potters Bar and Hatfield and the level of other emergency incidents has not diminished.” He added: “Firefighters at Buncefield knew stations were ear-marked for closure and that jobs were under threat, but we did our duty. We are not prepared to quietly stand in line to be told well done only to be stabbed in the back days later. There is nothing to celebrate in Downing Street when the shadow of significant cuts hangs over our fire service. We don't want public money spent on drinks and canapés when our communities are seeing their fire service cut to save money.” Bovingdon and Radlett fire stations have been slated for closure. Both were heavily involved in fighting the Buncefield fire. Cover at two other fire stations is being downgraded.

- [FBU news release. 10 Downing St news release. Cambridge Evening News. The Scotsman. BBC News Online.](#)

Union campaign staff working overtime

TUC’s Work Your Better Hours Day activities last week not only commanded the airwaves, they caught the imagination of union campaign staff. The high profile campaign saw TUC “clockheads” wandering through the capital. And organisers with Community, the union that represents betting shop workers, toured round London bookmakers on a motorised double bed to inform bookmakers’ staff of their right to work their proper hours and take their legally entitled breaks. The union’s survey showed over three quarters of betting shop staff were concerned about long hours and lack of breaks. A bowler hatted, cigar wielding “city gent” from private sector union Amicus, meanwhile, turned up outside the London Stock Exchange, complete with a barrow-load of cash. The union said Britain's best known financial institutions are raking in over half a billion pounds worth of unpaid overtime from their staff. Amicus called on the financial services sector to pay staff fairly and to remove the unnecessary pressure staff are put under to work over and above their contracted hours. TUC’s Work Your Proper Hours Day campaign won a top PR industry award in 2005, the MORI Award from PR Week magazine.

- [Community news release. Amicus news release. TUC Work Your Proper Hours Day webpage.](#)

Worker gets £33,750 for bouncy castle injury

A youth centre worker accused by his employer of faking a back injury has been awarded £33,000 in compensation in a union-backed case. UNISON member Dean Gibbon, 51,

received the payout from Durham County Council after being injured putting away a deflated bouncy castle. The Judge at Newcastle Crown Court found his employer was in breach of Manual Handling Regulations and was negligent because it had failed to adopt a safe system, outlined in an earlier memo, which stated that the job should never be done single-handed. This instruction was also supported by a risk assessment. Dean Gibbon claimed that on the day in question he was working alone, there was no-one available to help him and that the bouncy castle was normally put away by one person. His case was supported by his girlfriend and a former employee who stated that they had seen other workers at the centre put away the bouncy castle alone and that this was the accepted practice. The defendants - Durham County Council – claimed that the accident either did not happen or did not happen in the way that Mr Gibbon described. Michael Bray from union solicitors Thompsons said: “Employers can't expect to expose employees to unacceptable risks at work and then refuse to support them when injuries occur.” Gill Hale, UNISON's regional secretary, added: “Employers need to be aware that wherever the health and safety of workers is put at risk, UNISON will pursue claims for members and their families.”

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Violence and disruption is a core school activity

New research by teaching union NASUWT shows the appalling pupil behaviour many teachers have to face every day. The research, based on the experience of Sheffield teachers, is described by the union as a snapshot of general school behaviour in the UK. In a single Sheffield school day the members of the union saw 34 assaults by pupils on staff, 97 violent incidents between pupils and witnessed a host of other cases of unacceptable behaviour. Paul Desgranges, NASUWT national executive member for South Yorkshire, said: “Parents have a right to expect that their children's learning

will occur in a safe, orderly environment free from the disruption of a small core of unruly students. Teachers also have a right to go to a workplace which is safe and enables them to focus upon their core activity, which is teaching and learning.” While the latest research was based on the experience of Sheffield teachers, the union believes it reflects the experience of teachers nationwide. Last year Calderdale Council in West Yorkshire published a report showing teachers had reported 33 incidents of violent or aggressive behaviour towards staff over four months.

- [Yorkshire Post. Teaching Times.](#)

Renewed call for action on robbery risks

Violent attacks on security staff are becoming increasingly commonplace and their prevention must be pushed up the political agenda, security workers’ union GMB has said. Speaking after the record £53m armed raid on a Securitas depot in Tonbridge, GMB acting general secretary Paul Kenny said: “Criminal possession of firearms is rising, particularly in London and other urban areas.” He added: “Since 2000 the number of armed robberies on public highways, including attacks on security vans and street robberies continues to increase. In over two-thirds of all reported armed robberies the weapon used was a handgun.” GMB national organiser Gary Smith, said: “GMB wants to see this type of crime pushed up the political agenda.” He said the union wants the government to reclassify cash-in-transit (CIT) crime so it becomes a higher priority for the police. “It is treated as a business crime, but in fact it is a human crime, committed on the couriers who risk their lives on a daily basis to make sure we have cash in our pockets,” he said. “This isn’t helped by planning laws which ban the CIT vans from town centres, parking restrictions, and the lack of safe areas and procedures for transfer of cash in banks and retail outlets.” GMB and the British Security Industry Association (BSIA) met Home Office Minister Hazel Blears earlier this year to discuss the “scourge” of violent attacks ([Risks 243](#)).

- [GMB news release.](#)

OTHER NEWS

HSE work health scheme goes live

A £20 million government financed Health and Safety Executive (HSE) scheme to provide free occupational health advice to small firms is now in operation. Safety minister Lord Hunt launched Workplace Health Connect this week. He said: “This new confidential advisory service for small businesses offers cost-effective and simple solutions to help cut workplace injuries and ill-health. It is simply unacceptable that UK small businesses incur major costs because they are unaware of effective and efficient solutions to manage health and safety.” HSE chief executive Geoffrey Podger said “workplace ill-health is costing small businesses up to 10 per cent of their total payroll costs, which can put real downward pressure on their bottom line. We therefore want to help small business stop workers becoming ill at work and help them to get back to work as soon as possible, if they do, which is ultimately why we have launched Workplace Health Connect.” Although financed entirely by the government and launched by and “delivered in partnership” with HSE, the service “is provided entirely by private contractors” a Workplace Health Connect spokesperson told Risks, adding “but HSE does provide a framework and quality assurance.” A report from the Hazards Campaign last month criticised Workplace Health Connect, calling it a “pilot privatisation” of core HSE functions and said while HSE inspections and enforcement had been curtailed dramatically, the government was instead financing a private agency to undertake 5,700 enforcement-free visits over two years. The visits are limited to five pilot areas - London, the North East, the North West, South Wales and the West Midlands, where privately run regional “Pathfinders” are in operation. The advice line, operated by private company National Britannia, is available across England and Wales.

- [HSE news release. Workplace Health Connect.](#) Small businesses in England and Wales can access the service via an advice line, 0845 609 6006.
- ‘Total suck up’, Hazards Campaign, February 2006, [news release](#) and [full report](#).

Farm injury exposes child labour risk

A boy has had to have part of his leg amputated after his friend ran over it with a ploughing machine. The 16-year-old had been attempting to get into a tractor being driven by his 14-year-old pal, when he slipped and fell under the vehicles rear wheels. The spikes of a power harrow also went through his right leg. The incident happened on Robert Beesley's farm, in the Market Harborough area, on September 1 last year. Neither boy can be identified for legal reasons. At Leicester Magistrates' Court, Beesley admitted breaching the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) code of practice. The court heard that under the rules, Beesley should not have let the 14-year-old carry passengers on the tractor, and should not have let him drive it at all with a power machine attached. Claire Hodges, prosecuting for HSE, said the driver did work for Beesley on his farm. She said Beesley was charged under the section of the Health and Safety at Work Act which requires employers to ensure employees work safely, and added the accident was “entirely preventable”. Phil Cookson, defending, said since the incident Beesley had limited the type of jobs the 14-year-old could do on the farm. District Judge Richard Holland said the incident would have been prevented if there had been compliance with HSE's guidelines. He fined Beesley £5,000 and ordered him to pay £1,199 HSE costs. Rural workers' union TGWU has campaigned for years for a change in the law which currently allows children as young as 13 to drive tractors ([Risks 91](#)) and has called for a ban on child labour on farms ([Risks 137](#)).

- [Leicester Mercury. TGWU child labour](#)

[campaign.](#)

Pilot scheme allows families to tell court of their suffering

The families of murder and manslaughter victims will be allowed to speak out in court for the first time about the impact of the death on their lives under a pilot scheme which gets under way in April in five crown courts in England and Wales. Those who prefer not to speak in person will be able to ask a victim's advocate to speak on their behalf after the killer's conviction, but before sentencing. This could be the crown prosecutor handling the case or an independent lawyer or lay person, such as a family liaison officer attached to the police. The move, expected to affect about 400 cases a year, follows a consultation paper last year outlining proposals for victims' advocates, which were strongly supported by groups representing families of homicide victims. Lawyers who appear as victims' advocates will be paid by the Department for Constitutional Affairs as part of the £1m one-year pilot scheme at the Old Bailey in London, and crown courts in Birmingham, Winchester, Manchester and Cardiff. The Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer, said: “This is a ground-breaking way of supporting victims and their families. The consultation showed that there was firm support for piloting victims' advocates. The government believes the proposals should now be tried out in practice.” Commenting on the pilot scheme, TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson said: “It is crucial that relatives bereaved by workplace tragedies are included in this new scheme and get a right to address the court. Manslaughter in the workplace should not be considered the single 'acceptable' form of killing.” The government has admitted there is no time to progress its corporate manslaughter proposals in the current parliamentary session.

- [DCA news release. The Guardian. BBC News Online.](#)

Temp work 'harms women's health'

Women in temp jobs are more likely than men in similar posts to have their employment terminated if they are often off sick, a study has found. Researchers from the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health looked at data from a public health study in the country which compared the work records of hospital and council workers. Their findings, published in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, are based on employment data for 60,600 people aged 16 to 54 during 1996, a third of whom worked as temps. The research team, led by Dr Marianna Virtanen, concluded: “Temporary employment involves a significantly increased risk of unemployment. High absence among young temporary women puts them at an even greater risk of job loss and consequent unemployment.” They cite other research which has suggested that people who end up in poorer paid or temporary jobs are more likely to have other health or social disadvantages. This puts them into a 'catch 22' situation as poor health affects their job prospects, which in turn affects their health. The Finnish researchers believe more should be done to safeguard the health of temporary employees. Mike Clinton, an occupational psychologist at King's College London, who has studied the well-being of temp workers, said: “Temporary work is inherently more insecure, particularly when contracts are short or coming to an end and the risks for employee health seem to increase when workers do not choose to be temps. The findings that women in this study were particularly vulnerable is a concern.”

- M Virtanen, M Kivimäki, J Vahtera and others. Sickness absence as a risk factor for job termination, unemployment, and disability pension among temporary and permanent employees, *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, volume 63, pages 212-217, 2006 [[abstract](#)]. [BBC News Online](#).
- [TUC gender webpages](#). [Hazards women and hazards webpages](#).

NHS staff abusers “face big fine”

People who abuse or threaten nurses and doctors in England will face fines of up to £1,000, health secretary Patricia Hewitt has told a union conference. She told the GMB’s health conference there would be a “zero tolerance” approach, adding that the government wanted to “send a clear message” threats will not be tolerated.” Since the establishment of the NHS Security Management Service in 2003 there has been a 15-fold increase in the number of people prosecuted for attacking NHS staff. A Department of Health spokesperson said: “It is a sad fact around one in four of our nurses and doctors have suffered verbal abuse and been threatened by patients or relatives that they are trying to help. We want to send a clear message to the public that this will not be tolerated and anyone who threatens or verbally abuses our staff will be removed from the premises and could face a fine of up to £1,000.” However, health service union UNISON said the changes did not go far enough. “UNISON welcomes this zero tolerance approach as abusive language and threatening behaviour often escalates into violence,” said the union’s health of health, Karen Jennings. “However, we are also calling for a tougher approach to those who are assaulting. We would like a new offence introduced into law - the assault on a public worker - which would be treated the same as an assault on a police officer.” Survey findings published this week by the Royal College of Nursing said violence against nursing staff is increasing, with 80 per cent of A&E nurses reporting harassment or an assault in the past year, and a quarter of the 3,000 nurses surveyed saying they had been physically attacked.

- [Daily Mail](#). [The Scotsman](#). [BBC News Online](#). [UNISON news release](#). [RCN news release](#).

Work stress linked to constable’s suicide

Workplace stress was a contributory factor in the suicide of a Merseyside police officer, a coroner has ruled. Pc Paula Tomlinson, 35, who was a member of a police firearms squad, was found hanged at her home in January 2004. She had recently been dismissed from the firearms department for failing several proficiency tests. Sefton coroner Christopher Sumner heard she felt victimised and uncomfortable in the gun squad's "macho environment". Ms Tomlinson was one of just two women in the 90-strong unit and one of the first female snipers in the country. The coroner was told she felt she had got on the wrong side of an influential clique of officers after complaining that some of her colleagues had watched a pornographic video during a residential course. Mr Sumner said he had concluded "that Paula Tomlinson killed herself at a time that she was suffering from stress, a contributory factor of which was work related." Following the inquest, the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) said it had found insufficient evidence to support any misconduct hearings in relation to allegations of bullying and intimidation within Merseyside Police's firearms unit. It said it had however found evidence of inequitable treatment, a failure by managers to address Pc Tomlinson's situation and an "in crowd" culture within the firearms department. The case is the latest in a series where workplace factors have been linked to suicides ([Risks 244](#)).

- [BBC News Online](#). [IPCC news release](#).
- *Hazards* magazine on [work-related suicide](#).

Insurers accused of abandoning asbestos victims

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has been accused of washing its hands of pleural plaques victims. Asbestos disease victims' lawyers say they are "extremely disappointed" ABI has refused to support moves to put plaques cases on hold until legal appeals have been heard in the House of Lords. Lawyers are calling for a waiver of limitation laws – which mean most

cases must normally be heard within three years of diagnosis - so that cases already in progress do not run out of time before the appeals are heard. In January, the Court of Appeal overturned earlier court judgments and decided by a two-to-one verdict that pleural plaques should not be compensated ([Risks 242](#)). It is this decision that is being appealed. Denise Kitchener, chief executive of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) said: "The ABI has made it clear that it will not be encouraging its members to show goodwill and offer limitation waivers. We were told that it was up to individual insurers to 'make their own commercial decisions.'" She added she was "extremely disappointed" that ABI has "refused to provide some leadership on such a straightforward matter."

- APIL news release [[pdf](#)].

Bosses ignoring driving dangers at work

More than half of all employees (53 per cent) who drive as part of their job say they have never received any information or training from their employer about risks behind the wheel. The survey of 1,000 drivers for the Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM) found seven out of 10 workers say their employers neither offer nor require medical check-ups (70 per cent), a driver risk assessment or training (75 per cent), or training on basic vehicle safety checks (75 per cent). And more than six out of 10 (64 per cent) say their employers have not offered or required even a basic eyesight test. According to the survey, only one in four checks that a private car is insured for business use (24 per cent) or, if it is over three years old, that it has a valid MOT (27 per cent). Commenting on the survey findings Christopher Bullock, IAM chief executive, said: "Too many employers think their responsibility for employees when they're at work ends at the front door or the factory gate. Employers who fail to look after staff who are out on the road risk accidents that can result in employees being killed." He added: "We want to work with the government to tackle this important issue." IAM

has raised its concerns in a letter to transport minister Stephen Ladyman.

- IAM news release [[pdf](#)].

MoD acts on journalists' safety

The Ministry of Defence has formally stated for the first time that the British military will never deliberately target journalists in conflict zones, but has admitted that mistakes do happen. After mounting pressure as the media death toll in Iraq climbs - including approaches from UK journalists' union NUJ ([Risks 241](#)) and its global equivalent IFJ ([Risks 239](#)) - the MoD has officially recognised the issue of safety for journalists. The MoD's "green book", which outlines arrangements with the media, now contains a chapter on journalists' safety. Addressing the protection of journalists who are not embedded with troops, the new edition of the green book says that reporters should be free to move around conflict zones. "The MoD recognises that correspondents are free to look for information in the area of operations and to communicate it back to the public," states the book, written for the guidance of military personnel and the news media. And it pledges that "UK forces on operations will never deliberately target either individual correspondents or civil media facilities." The new entries in the green book also follow lobbying from the International News Safety Institute, which is supported by journalists' unions and major media outlets and which promotes the provision of safety training and assistance to media workers.

- [INSI news release](#). [The Guardian](#).
- [International News Safety Institute](#).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Bangladesh: Factory deaths spur angry

protests

Safety strikes and protests in Bangladesh have been prompted by two new tragedies in the country's deadly garment sector. Last week two incidents claimed at least 73 lives, with at least 150 others injured. The Bangladesh Garment Workers Trade Union Centre (BGWTUC) organised the 2 March strike action. The union body announced the action at a rally after the "killings" of at least 55 in a 23 February fire at the KTS Textiles and Garments factory in Chittagong and further deaths in the collapse of the Phoenix garment factory in the capital Dhaka on 25 February. Union leaders demanded the sacking of industries minister Motiur Rahman Nizami for failing to halt the tragedies. Addressing the rally, BGWTUC president Idris Ali said: "For the well-being of the garment factories throughout the country industries minister Motiur Rahman Nizami has to resign." He demanded immediate compensation for the victims' families, new safety laws and implementation of International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions. The government's factory inspection division has been accused of being woefully under-resourced. Reports say there are only 20 inspectors to inspect around 50,000 registered factories in the country. "Our manpower is too limited to cover all factories and take proper steps but we are doing our best," said chief inspector of factories Dr Md Serajuddin. Global textiles and garment unions' federation ITGLWF warned in January that neglect of safety was so commonplace, it seemed the sector in Bangladesh had a "death wish" ([Risks 241](#)).

- [The Daily Star](#). [Bangladesh Independent](#). [Reuters](#). [Globe and Mail](#). [ABC News](#). [BBC News Online](#). Also see Daily Star articles on [the union protest in Chittagong](#), [low levels of inspection](#), [the call for inspections and compensation](#), [the deadly safety record of the country's textile industry](#) and [the prime minister's call for compliance with safety standards](#).

Canada: Action call on strain injuries scourge

The Canadian government must follow through with promised new regulations to prevent the scourge of workplace strain injuries, the nation’s union federation has said. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) said official figures show one of every 10 Canadian adults reported they were affected by a repetitive strain injury (RSI) serious enough to limit their normal activities, with most of these injuries caused by work-related activity. “Canadian workers are suffering from repetitive strain injuries in epidemic proportions,” said CLC executive vice-president Marie Clarke Walker, speaking ahead of RSI awareness day on 28 February. “RSIs impact workers, their families and the economy. We cannot ignore such a debilitating yet preventable workplace hazard any longer.” According to Clarke Walker, a working group with representatives from unions, federal employers, and the federal Department of Labour spent almost two years working out a plan for new regulations which, if implemented, would mark a major leap forward in the prevention of workplace repetitive strain injury (RSI). She added that the provinces of British Columbia and Saskatchewan already have RSI prevention regulations. “Keeping the promise to bring in new rules at the federal level will encourage other provincial and territorial governments to act so people no longer have to work and live with preventable pain and suffering,” she said. UK physios’ union CSP issued an RSI day warning on the dangers of text messaging, saying that while the thumb is good for gripping, it is not a very dextrous digit and is particularly prone to injury.

- [CLC news release](#). [CUPE news release](#). [CSP news release](#).
- [TUC RSI webpages](#) and guide, [RSI - the basics](#).
- [Hazards guide to bodymapping](#) and other workplace safety tools.

Global: Union protests to target asbestos trade

A global union federation is to target the asbestos trade with international protests, in a bid to end a “global health calamity”. The Building and Wood Workers International (BWI), a federation of construction unions representing 12m workers worldwide, says on 28 April there will be peaceful demonstrations and petitions at Canadian embassies and consulates to convince the Canadian government to call a halt to its aggressive marketing and promotion of asbestos in developing countries such as India, Zimbabwe and Brazil. Canada is one of the world’s major asbestos producers, although almost all its production is for export. BWI general secretary, Anita Normark, is appealing to all trade unions to join the effort to help convince the Canadian government to recognise that asbestos is the world’s biggest industrial killer and that it should be banned in all countries. She said: “Today’s exposures guarantee an epidemic lasting at least another generation, with the asbestos graveyards shifting from the developed to the developing world.” She added: “At the moment, there is at least one death every 5 minutes, and some jobs are effectively a death sentence. There is no safe level of exposure, so there is no acceptable level of exposure. This is the preventable industrial health calamity of the modern era.” The BWI activities are scheduled for 28 April, International Workers Memorial Day, which this year is highlighting the case for a global asbestos ban.

- [BWI news release](#). [Workers’ Memorial Day](#). [Workers’ Memorial Day poster 2006](#) from Hazards.

Mexico: Mine rescue abandoned, 65 presumed dead

There is no chance of survival for 65 miners trapped underground in northern Mexico since a Sunday 19 February explosion, the coal mine owners admitted this week. Grupo Mexico said tests of air in the mine showed there was not enough oxygen for anyone to survive. The men

were trapped when a methane explosion brought down debris and cut them off. Ten men who were underground escaped safely, and another 12 were rescued, suffering from burns and broken bones. Relatives are angry at what they see as deception and raising of false hopes by the mine's management. Union leaders have alleged that Grupo Mexico ignored safety concerns, and Labour Minister Francisco Salazar has said an investigation is to be carried out. Grupo Mexico says it will pay compensation of about £70,000 for each of the dead miners. Jorge Campos, regional organiser with the global union federation IMF, visited the mine, accompanied by workers, their families and union leaders, and said that "the IMF will discuss with the National Union of Miners and Steel Workers what international action to take after the investigation of this terrible event." A statement from the mining union said: "What happened at mine 8 was industrial homicide and should be investigated and denounced as such. Grupo Mexico shareholders and directors and whoever is responsible for this crime, caused by greed, repression and insensitivity should be charged and punished accordingly."

- [Grupo Mexico news release](#). [IMF news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).

USA: Groups challenge deadly chrome standard

US government safety watchdog OSHA, under pressure from the courts to issue a health standard for a deadly workplace substance, has published a limit so lax "that workers will die," health campaigners have warned. OSHA issued the standard to reduce workers' exposure to cancer-causing hexavalent chromium only after it was sued by the steelworkers' union and campaign group Public Citizen ([Risks 179](#)). However, the reluctant rulemaker is now facing further legal action by Public Citizen after it introduced what it believes to be a dangerously lax limit. The standard represents a major victory for industry as the new level of 5 micrograms of chromium per cubic metre of air,

is five times higher than the 1 microgram limit originally proposed in 2004, it said. The new standard comes less than a week after it was revealed that scientists working for the chromium industry withheld data showing that even very low level chromium exposures cause cancer. Public Citizen said the new regulation was "seriously inadequate" and announced that it would file a lawsuit challenging the new limit. It says the standard should be just 0.25 micrograms. OSHA itself estimates 10 to 45 lung cancer deaths per 1,000 workers over a lifetime at the 5 micrograms per cubic metre level. Mike Wright, director of health, safety and environment for the United Steelworkers, accused the industry of "playing fast and loose with the data on risk" and said "many dedicated public servants" at OSHA were increasingly being overruled by political appointees beholden to business. "The consequence of OSHA's decision," Wright said, "will be that workers will die."

- [Public Citizen news release](#) and [chromium investigation](#). [OSHA news release](#). [Confined Space](#), plus [earlier report](#). [Washington Post](#).
- David Michaels, Celeste Monforton and Peter Lurie. Selected science: an industry campaign to undermine an OSHA hexavalent chromium standard, *Environmental Health: A global access science source* 2006, 5:5, doi:10.1186/1476-069X-5-5 [[pdf](#)].

EVENTS AND COURSES

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2006

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

COURSES FOR APRIL TO JULY 2006

- [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