



Risks Newsletter



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

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SPECIAL FEATURE: Catching corporate criminals

Reforms to corporate manslaughter bill agreed

The government has agreed to make it easier to prosecute companies accused of corporate manslaughter. A statement this week from home office minister, Fiona Mactaggart put the government's response to the joint report on the draft manslaughter corporate bill, published by the Home Affairs and Work and Pensions Committee on 20 December ([Risks 238](#)), before parliament. "This is a key step towards getting the bill into parliament and an offence on the statute book," she said. She said the government had accepted a number of the 57 recommendations made by the pre-legislative scrutiny panel following the publication of the draft bill. In a written statement, she said: "The committee made a number of recommendations that the government accepts, in particular a reframing of the test for management failure." However, ministers refused to adopt a further committee recommendation to extend this to individual directors whose negligence contributed to death, claiming this was already covered under criminal law. "The criminal law already covers those who grossly negligently cause death and those who contribute to health and safety breaches", Ms Mactaggart said. John Denham, the chair of the home affairs select committee, welcomed the move to lower the bar for corporate prosecutions by removing the "senior manager test", but said he regretted the decision not to introduce a secondary offence for individual directors or managers complicit in corporate manslaughter. "The suggestion in the document that corporate manslaughter finding against a company might be followed by the disqualification of some directors would at least

go some way to make sure that they were held accountable as well as companies," he said. Under existing criminal law, no director of a large or medium-sized UK company has ever been jailed for health and safety offences, despite a series of high profile disasters and hundreds of workplace deaths each year.

- [The Guardian](#). [Financial Times](#).
- [Hazards deadly business webpages](#). [Centre for Corporate Accountability](#).

Welcome for corporate killing progress

Unions and campaigners have welcomed progress this week on the government's corporate manslaughter bill. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "We are pleased that ministers have listened to concerns over the way that the original Bill focused overly on failures by senior managers and will instead now look for ways of broadening the basis for liability within an organisation." He added: "The Health and Safety Commission is currently working on new safety duties for directors, and the combination of these and the Bill could help make a real difference to the health and safety of UK workers [[Risks 237](#)]. All responsible employers would welcome the changes, as would the relatives of those killed as a result of corporate negligence." He added: "The TUC is calling on the government to introduce the Bill as soon as possible, and definitely during the current parliamentary session." Maggie Robbins, UK director of the Centre for Corporate Accountability, said "we support the government's agreement to reconsider the 'senior manager' test and replace it with a test that considers the failures at both a 'supervisory and strategic' level within the organisation." But transport union TGWU said the government must go further and take measures to ensure company directors are made accountable. TGWU general secretary Tony Woodley said "without a duty on directors this corporate manslaughter bill will fail to make them properly accountable and so will lose much of its

effectiveness. As such there is a real danger of more missed opportunities.” He added: “It is not organisations that kill people. It is those who own, direct and manage them who through negligence, incompetence or sheer disregard for the law do so. That is why a duty must be placed on directors to take all measures to ensure safe workplaces. Law abiding, safety-conscious directors have nothing to fear, and should acknowledge that safety in the workplace depends on responsibility in the boardroom.”

- [TUC news release. CCA commentary on the main issues.](#) [TGWU news release.](#)

Law must give bad employers no hiding place

A new report has warned that dangerous employers will continue to evade punishment unless fundamental changes are made to the government’s corporate manslaughter bill. The Hazards magazine report was published ahead of this week’s government response to the Select Committee report on the draft bill. Report author Dave Whyte, a criminologist at Stirling University, urged the government to discount claims by employers’ groups that beefing up our safety laws would see many companies packing up their bags and departing from our shores. He said neither the Canadian or Australian economies were affected after they introduced tough, new corporate killing laws. The report points out 10 “fatal flaws” in the draft bill, including a failure to deal with non-fatal injuries and chronic, deadly industrial disease caused by criminal employer negligence, neither of which have been addressed in the latest government statement. Dave Whyte said: “Companies and their directors continue to kill hundreds of their employees and members of the public each year with impunity.” One key criticism – that only companies and not culpable bosses would be in the frame – was recognised this year by the Health and Safety Commission, which has recommended alternative ways to deal it dangerous directors. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: “We welcome the decision by the Health and safety Commission to look at

ways of increasing the responsibility of individual senior managers for safety crimes [[Risks 237](#)]. If that were coupled with significant new resources to allow the Health and Safety Executive to properly investigate every death at work, it would really make reckless bosses sit up and listen.”

- [TUC news release. Taking offence: Why it is wrong to be kind to killer bosses, Hazards magazine](#), number 93, pages 8-9, 2006.
- [TUC/Hazards deadly business campaign.](#)

UNION NEWS

Employers told to take heed of noise warning

Firms have been warned that they could face a barrage of compensation claims from staff if they fail to heed improved measures to protect workers' hearing. Hearing charity RNID and the TUC are warning employers and employees to take hearing damage more seriously in preparation for the new Control of Noise at Work Regulations coming into effect on 6 April 2006. The tighter Noise at Work regulations will provide improved protection for workers from one of Britain's most serious occupational diseases. The groups say they are concerned that noise is still one of the most underestimated workplace risks. Official figures show excessive noise in the workplace has caused an estimated half a million people living in Great Britain today to suffer deafness or other ear difficulties. TUC safety officer Hugh Robertson said: “If properly implemented these regulations will save the hearing of literally hundreds of thousands of people. If they are ignored or implemented half-heartedly employers could face a wave of compensation claims from staff. Better to rigorously enforce safe noise levels to prevent hearing damage, in industry but also entertainment and construction, than leave employees to go through the courts for compensation after their hearing has already been harmed.” The new rules set lower noise

levels at which employers must take action, requiring employers to make hearing protection available at 80dB(A) and to require its use if noise levels reach 85dB(A), with these measures ensuring noise levels reaching a worker's ears are never above 87dB(A).

- [TUC news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- [RNID Information Line](#): Telephone: 0808 808 0123, Textphone: 0808 808 9000. [TUC noise webpage](#).

Bosses aren't safe if they sack the sick

Firing or discriminating against sick workers can be a costly mistake for employers, recent cases suggest. Amicus member Brian Murphy, a paint shop team leader at Nissan in Sunderland for 16 years who was off sick with work-related stress, was fired after company snoops found him doing odd jobs on the side ([Risks 237](#)). An employment tribunal in Newcastle upon Tyne said Nissan should pay him £65,000 compensation for unfair dismissal because company rules did not explicitly forbid staff taking temporary paid work when ill. Amicus member Gillian Lynas, a school nursing sister, received a "substantial" settlement and the partial reimbursement of legal costs from Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust. The employer had failed to provide adequate toilet facilities for her to manage her condition, which requires her to wear an ileostomy bag, despite her raising the issue with Trust bosses. GMB secured £7,100 compensation at a Manchester employment tribunal for ASDA worker Paul Turner, who had worked nights for 10 years at ASDA's Trafford Park store and warehouse. He was sacked in May 2005 for taking seven minutes to administer his epilepsy medication, a condition he had suffered since childhood and which ASDA had been aware of throughout his time working for the company. Tube worker Douglas Woulds, 62, who was sacked after developing a back problem, was unfairly dismissed, a tribunal ruled. He was sacked on medical grounds in March 2005 after 27 years

with London Underground (LU). The employment tribunal at Stratford in east London accepted Mr Woulds' claim for unfair dismissal and will discuss compensation at a hearing in May.

- [Amicus news release](#). [GMB news release](#). [The Guardian](#). [Manchester Evening News](#). [BBC News Online](#).

£138,000 payout over stress case

A tax office worker whose job overload led to severe stress and depression is to receive £138,000 in compensation. PCS member Stephen Mellor, 58, from Malvern, took several months off from his post as a senior manager at a VAT office in Droitwich suffering from stress. However he said his responsibilities increased significantly on his return. Mr Mellor said he had asked for compulsory early retirement, but this was refused and instead was given further responsibilities. Mr Mellor is now medically retired. HM Customs & Excise agreed to pay the out-of-court settlement for the injuries he suffered and the loss of income. His solicitor, Adam Wilson from law firm Russell Jones & Walker, said: "He has suffered significant financial loss as a result. Instead of earning a good salary, Mr Mellor now finds himself dependant on a medical pension, which is simply not enough to sustain him." In a statement, Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC) said: "HMRC wishes to give as much support as possible to our staff and we review the circumstances leading to claims against the organisation to ensure we learn from them and where appropriate, change our policies and processes to reflect good employment practice."

- [Russell Jones and Walker news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- TUC [compensation](#) and [stress](#) webpages. [Hazards compensation news and resources](#).

Fire crews 'need more protection'

The Fire Brigades Union has welcomed cross-party backing for a new law to make it an offence to obstruct or hinder emergency workers such as firefighters. The Emergency Workers Protection Bill received its second reading in the House of Commons last week. The Private Members Bill from Labour MP Alan Williams seeks to make it a specific offence to obstruct or hinder emergency workers such as firefighters. The FBU recently published research showing that attacks on UK fire crews was running at 40 a week with the problem getting worse. The research, the first of its kind in the UK, found that under-reporting suggested the figure could be as high as 120 attacks a week. FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: “We welcome government and cross-party support for this Bill. The number and ferocity of the attacks has been getting worse and there have been several attacks this week.” He added: “If we can’t do our job because of violent assaults then it is our communities which are being put at risk. We are the targets, but it is our communities that are deprived of an emergency response that are the victims. The Bill needs to be part of a package of measures aimed at tackling some of the underlying problems. Central to this package is the need for a range of educational measures to try and stop these attacks happening.”

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

Relief as Royal Mail stops first aid folly

Royal Mail has confirmed it has abandoned plans to outsource all workplace first aid training. The policy reverse came after postal union CWU challenged the move, which it said was “barmy” and would be a costly mistake ([Risks 237](#)). CWU national safety officer Dave Joyce said: “I’m delighted with the decision as I’m sure all our first aiders, trainers and assessors will be. The outsourcing plan would have added over a £1 million to the annual cost of meeting the businesses obligation under the First Aid

Regulations. When those involved sat down and did the sums, the only person in favour was the person who's crazy idea it was in the first place.” He added: “First Aid is a precious, fundamental safety net provision, invisible most of the time and taken for granted by many but it's important to remember that accidents can and do happen at any time and also people fall ill. Our first aiders deal with life threatening conditions and injuries each year. First aid provision has to be available at all times people are at work and is something that could mean the difference between life and death to those whom our unsung heroes come to assist in their hour of need.”

- [CWU news release](#).

OTHER NEWS

New attempt to rob dying asbestos victims

Bereaved relatives from around the UK, who have seen family members die from the asbestos cancer mesothelioma, are to protest outside the House of Lords on Monday 13 March. The protest marks the start of a legal challenge brought by asbestos industry giant Saint Gobain Pipelines plc in a bid to drastically reduce its asbestos compensation liabilities. If successful, it would set a precedent which could result in hundreds of mesothelioma sufferers each year losing some or all of their compensation. The test case will see Saint Gobain try to clawback some of a £152,000 court award made to Sylvia Barker, whose husband Vernon died of the disease. It will also consider the case of another asbestos widow, Mary Murray. The company hopes to overturn existing law by arguing that the cost of compensating mesothelioma sufferers should be apportioned between companies if a worker was exposed at more than one workplace. At present, full damages can be claimed against any company where there has been exposure and there is more than one defendant company, including when some of the companies had vanished or were uninsured, or

when the affected person had been at some stage self-employed. John Pickering and Partners solicitor James Thompson, acting for Mrs Barker, said: “The House of Lords is being asked to make new law so that guilty employers and their insurers can save money. If these appeals succeed mesothelioma sufferers and their families could be deprived of 50 per cent or more of their compensation. Severe financial hardship would result from awards being slashed in many cases by tens of thousands of pounds.” Ian McFall, of Thompsons Solicitors, acting for Mrs Murray, who lost her husband John to the disease, said: “What we will be asking the Law Lords to do is simple - uphold the law which requires negligent employers and their insurers to pay full compensation to mesothelioma sufferers and their families. Anything less will be an injustice.” Tony Whitston of Greater Manchester Asbestos Victims Support Group, added: “This shabby attempt to deny compensation will be watched carefully by those with an interest in limiting their liability to pay compensation, and could badly hit families devastated by mesothelioma.” The bereaved relatives will carry photographs of those who have died from mesothelioma.

- [GMAVSG news release](#). [Thompsons Solicitors/John Pickering and Partners news release](#). [Daily Post](#). [The Observer](#).
- PROTEST: Monday 13 March, House of Lords (Old Palace Yard), 2pm-4pm, followed by a lobby of MPs. Further information from the Greater Manchester Asbestos Victims Support Group, contact [Tony Whitston](#) on 0161 636 7555.

Scientific hush mars voice loss investigation

An investigation into the risks of occupational voice loss has been hampered by a lack of good quality studies. The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC), the independent body which advises the government on which conditions should be added to the list of prescribed diseases for which state industrial injuries benefits are payable, reached the conclusion in a March

paper. IIAC concluded “there is currently insufficient good quality epidemiological evidence of an association between voice loss and particular occupations.” It added, however: “The Council recognises that this is an emerging area of research and intends to keep the subject under review.” Commenting on the decision, TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson, who is a member of IIAC, said: “TUC raised this issue at IIAC because there is clear evidence that badly designed jobs and workplaces genuinely cause career-threatening voice loss. A number of unions have taken and won compensation cases for affected workers.” He added: “While there has to date been too little serious study of the issue, TUC believes it is an important emerging occupational health condition which should be kept under review and which must be taken seriously by employers.” A November 2004 report in the TUC-backed *Hazards* magazine warned that occupational voice loss was an increasing problem as more workers were now reliant on their voice to make a living ([Risks 183](#)).

- [DWP news release](#). IIAC position paper on occupational voice loss, Position paper No.16, March 2006 [[pdf](#)].
- [Hazards occupational voice loss guide](#).

Waste industry wastes yet more workers

Nine fatalities in eight weeks have prompted the Health and Safety Executive to issue a safety alert to the waste and recycling industry. Commenting on the figures, Paul Harvey, principal inspector of HSE’s waste and recycling section, said: “The tragedy of these incidents must act as a stimulus for the industry to review its procedures, making sure that vehicle risks are properly controlled.” Seven of the deaths involved workplace vehicles. Paul Harvey added: “Using reversing aids such as mirrors, CCTV, detectors and beacons do reduce the risks. In most public access areas you will usually need to provide reversing assistants, their job being to help the driver and prevent or warn pedestrians

entering manoeuvring areas when the risks cannot be controlled adequately by other means.” The nine deaths, which have occurred since 21 December 2005, are being investigated by HSE. An HSE report in 2004 noted fatality rates in the waste industry were over 10 times the national average ([Risks 162](#)). The report also found accident rates were four times that for all jobs. In July 2004, HSE witnessed the signing of an 'accident reduction charter', a voluntary measure by the waste industry trade group, the Environmental Services Association. Responding in 2004 to the fatalities report, Paul Harvey indicated the watchdog's support for these voluntary approaches. He said: “HSE are committed to being good partners... we will continue working with the industry to promote better standards via intermediaries and industry trade associations and will specifically be looking at manual handling and transport risks.” The recent spate of deaths could be clear evidence that HSE's support for a self-regulatory voluntary approach, increasingly preferred to inspection and enforcement, has been a dangerous flop.

- [HSE news release](#). [HSE June 2004 news release](#). [HSE waste webpage](#). [HSE transport webpages](#). HSE has developed specific guidance on transport risks in the sector, with the Waste Industry Safety and Health (WISH) Forum [[pdf](#)].

Inquiry after four hurt in factory blast

An investigation has been launched after four workers were injured in an explosion at a pharmaceuticals factory last week - the second to hit the site in seven years. The men were injured at the GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) plant in Irvine, North Ayrshire. Part of the factory has been shut down and will not reopen until the cause of the blast has been discovered. Two of the workers were severely burned. Jim Hunter, of the union TGWU, said: “They are in a bad way and we feel for them and their families. I understand they will require skin grafts, which gives an indication of the extent of their burns.” The

company was fined £20,000 in September 1999 by the HSE after an explosion in another section of the factory. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which made about six routine visits to the factory last year, has launched an investigation into the latest incident. MSPs have demanded that the HSE report into the explosion be made public as a matter of urgency. Rosemary Byrne, the Scottish Socialist Party MSP for the area, said: “The fact that there have been two explosions at this plant in just seven years is cause for great concern.” SmithKline Beecham, which formed part of the merged company GSK, was fined £10,000 at Kilmarnock Sheriff Court in September 1999 for safety offences related to the earlier blast. The company was also in the courts in December 2005 ([Risks 238](#)). It was fined £15,000 at East Berkshire Magistrates Court after a worker's thumb was partially severed by machinery at its Maidenhead factory. GlaxoSmithKline reported a before tax profit of £6.1 billion in 2004.

- [The Scotsman](#). [Daily Record](#).

Payouts to sick miners pass £3 billion

Compensation payments to sick miners have topped £3bn, new figures show. The government pays out about £2m every weekday to compensate for respiratory and vibration-related injuries. Energy minister Malcolm Wicks said: “I am very pleased to announce that this compensation - a debt of honour - now totals £3bn. In real terms this means payments have been made to over 417,369 sick miners or the families of the deceased. By the time the scheme winds up, we expect to have paid out in the region of £5bn in compensation.” ‘A job to die for’, a November 2005 report from Hazards magazine ([Risks 232](#)), revealed the coal health compensation scheme makes a nonsense of official Health and Safety Executive (HSE) occupational disease estimates. So far among miners alone over 300,000 claims for obstructive respiratory diseases have been settled as well as over 120,000 vibration white finger claims, with many more claims outstanding. Latest Labour

Force Survey obstructive respiratory disease figures for all occupations published by HSE miss over 120,000 of these cases. Vibration white finger does not even register in the HSE figures. If comparable figures for other dusty, manual trades like construction and steelworker were included, it would suggest HSE figures recognise only a tiny fraction of the true toll from these conditions. The coal health compensation schemes came about as a result of legal challenges from mining unions. In 1997 and 1998, British Coal was found negligent in the High Court in relation to vibration white finger and respiratory damage respectively. Its liabilities passed to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) following the break-up of British Coal.

- [DTI news release](#). [DTI Scotland news release](#). [Updated DTI coal health statistics](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- [Hazards work and health webpages](#).

Government working on mental health problems

A new drive to help people with mental health problems get back into work has been launched by the government. It says the new guidance is for commissioners of services designed to better re-integrate into society people that have suffered with mental health problems. Part of the new strategy covers vocational services, providing commissioners of mental health services with a framework to provide services enabling people with mental health problems to gain employment. The new guidance on vocational services recognises that being in employment improves mental health outcomes, prevents suicide and reduces reliance on mental health services, the government says. It adds that the approach refocuses guidance on helping people back to work as a key part of their recovery and rehabilitation. The Labour Force Survey in 2003 showed that just 24 per cent of people with mental health problems were in employment, with the figure dropping to just 8 per cent for

those with severe mental health problems. The vocational services guidance outlines measures to place people in employment settings consistent with their abilities and interests. Commenting on the new guidance, TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson said: "While the key to dealing with work related stress illnesses is prevention, cases will still happen and people need support and help. At the moment the level of services accessible to people at work who suffer mental health problems is very poor." He added: "We hope that this initiative will lead, not just in changes in the way that services are delivered but also to an increase in the range and level of services. We know what works. It is now up to the health service, and employers, to deliver."

- [DH news release](#). [Department of Health mental health webpages](#).

High levels of stress in NHS Wales

Nearly 40 per cent of NHS staff in Wales suffer from work-related stress, according to a survey. A majority of the 33,000 staff who took part also said they do not have enough time to complete their work. Half regularly work unpaid overtime, while 39 per cent highlighted problems with workplace stress. The staff survey was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly government, employers and unions and conducted between September and December 2005. It also found that 16 per cent of those who responded have experienced physical violence in the workplace. Almost 60 per cent said that did not have enough time to carry out all their work. The 90,000-strong NHS Wales workforce was asked to complete the survey and 33,000 responded. Welsh health minister Brian Gibbons said it was important to hear the views of frontline staff. "The fact that 39 per cent of staff have reported suffering work-related stress is a major concern and the Welsh Partnership Forum is undertaking work to help deal with this," he said. "I am also concerned that 16 per cent of staff have faced the prospect of physical violence while at work. This is unacceptable and must not be tolerated. Work continues across

Wales to ensure that staff have the support needed to reduce the risk of this happening and make hospitals and other health care establishments safe places to work.” He added that “if incidents happen, action must be taken.” UNISON head of health in Wales Dave Galligan commented: “The challenge to NHS Wales and the Welsh government is to accept the criticisms as well as the plaudits and to work in partnership with unions to find answers.”

- [Welsh Assembly news release](#). [UNISON news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Bangladesh: Factory deaths ‘nothing short of murder’

There must be an urgent independent enquiry into the tragedies that have engulfed Bangladesh’s textile and clothing industry ([Risks 246](#)) as well as immediate action to protect the safety of workers in the sector, a global union federation has demanded. Neil Kearney, general secretary of the Brussels-based federation ITGLWF, which represents workers in the sector, has written to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia demanding an urgent enquiry into disasters in order to establish who was responsible – ministers, government officials, factory owners and managers – and to bring them to justice. The letter says: “These tragedies were totally avoidable. The industry has been repeatedly warned that such disasters were staring it in the face, but unfortunately these warnings were ignored.” The ITGLWF letter adds: “Legislation exists but is generally ignored. No effort appears to be made to give even the appearance of implementation. Instead, some vain hope appears to exist that the industry will regulate itself. Such inaction, uninterest and negligence renders these recent deaths in Chittagong and Dhaka nothing short of murder.” He added that the families of those killed and injured “must be paid exemplary damages and the best possible medical care and rehabilitation must be made

available to the injured”. The union is calling for a 10-point programme to ensure structural and fire safety in the sector. Mr Kearney concluded: “A total review of existing legislation on structural safety, fire safety, health and safety and general labour rights and its implementation must be undertaken urgently before more lives are lost”. Three more workers died this week in a fire at the Saiem Fashion Ltd garment factory in the country’s Gazipur district, the National Garment Workers Federation of Bangladesh said.

- [ITGLWF news release](#). [Labour News Network](#).

China: New five year plan for safer workplaces

China’s authorities want to see the country’s lamentable workplace accident rate fall by a third by 2010. A draft five year plan submitted to the country’s legislature for examination and approval commits the country to make greater efforts to promote workplace safety in the next five years. Highlighting China’s deplorable production safety record, Premier Wen Jiabao said in his work report to the National People’s Congress on 5 March that the central government would invest 3 billion yuan (£214m) from the sale of treasury bonds this year to seek technical solutions to gas explosions in coal mines. Premier Wen attributed the mainland’s poor safety record to “the economy’s huge demand for coal, the poor implementation of safety measures, lax controls by local authorities, and rampant corruption among officials and mine owners.” Official figures say workplace accidents result in an annual economic loss of 25 billion yuan (almost £1.8bn) in China, accounting for 2 per cent of its annual GDP. In 2005, the country reported four coal mine disasters with a death toll above 100. Nearly 6,000 miners were killed in accidents in the year.

- [China Labour Bulletin](#). [Xinhua](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Europe: Safety week highlights young workers

European health and safety week 2006 will highlight the need to ensure young people have a safe and healthy start to their working lives. The ‘Safe Start!’ campaign, coordinated by the Bilbao-based European Agency, has been prompted by research showing young workers run a 50 per cent higher risk of work accidents than any other age category. The European Week, 23-27 October 2006, will promote risk awareness and risk prevention in companies, schools and colleges across Europe. A competition for young film makers will invite young people to express their views on workplace safety. TUC will be promoting activities on young workers and health and safety as part of its contribution to the 2006 event.

- [European Week 2006. Good Practice Awards 2006. Details of the video competition.](#)

Global: Asbestos trade renews its scare tactics

The growing pressure for a global asbestos ban is spurring a renewed public relations push by the industry in a desperate attempt to rehabilitate the deadly fibre. In Indonesia, asbestos cement producers are claiming a ban will be bad for the economy. “The European Union has banned the use of chrysotile (white asbestos), and we're afraid that there will be pressure from Europe to ban the use of this material here too,” said PT Siam-Indo Concrete Products vice president Chandra Alifen. He was speaking to reporters at a workshop on chrysotile in Jakarta. Indonesia imports 70,000 tons of chrysotile annually, mainly from Brazil, Canada and Russia. Chandra said that according to a recent industry-sponsored study, chrysotile posed no risks to health. “The latest scientific study shows that chrysotile asbestos is safe,” he said, adding that the process of manufacturing it was also free of risk. Sjahrul M Nasri, a health and safety

specialist at the University of Indonesia's Public Health Department, agreed. His evidence, however, came from a study by the Chrysotile Institute (CI), the Canada-based global asbestos industry’s main marketing arm. At the same time in Zimbabwe, John Jere, managing director of asbestos firm Turnall Holdings, told a parliamentary committee that a proposed ban in South Africa would see Zimbabwe losing billions of Zimbabwean dollars in exports. An article in the December 2005 edition of the African Newsletter on Occupational Health and Safety has been criticised by occupational health experts who say the content and references suggest the “article appears to have been written by the Quebec Asbestos Mining Association (AMA), the Asbestos Industry Association (AIA), or some other representative of the chrysotile industry.” Exposure figures cited in the article were provided by the companies and almost all of the references cited are from asbestos industry organisations.

- [Jakarta Post. People’s Daily.](#) Chrysotile fibre levels in asbestos-cement manufacturing in Zimbabwe. African Newsletter on Occupational Health and Safety, volume 15, number 3, pages 66-68, December, 2005 [[pdf](#)].
- [International Ban Asbestos Secretariat. Hazards asbestos news.](#)

Global: Asian silicosis victims to hit Europe

Two jewellery workers from China and two gem polishers from India will travel to Basel, Switzerland, late this month to raise awareness of the deadly side effects of their jobs, particularly silicosis. The workers will attend a jewellery fair from 30 March to 4 April, and hope to have talks with a large number of organisations, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Global union federation ICEM, which includes among its affiliates gem trade unions, said in statement that it had “deep concern over the increasing news of numerous cases of silicosis among jewellery migrant

workers in China and India, who are slowly dying of an illness that they contracted through a poor working environment, compounded by a failure to provide adequate medical care.” It added: “ICEM urges all employers in the jewellery industries, as well as the competent authorities in China, to pay immediate attention to the serious health and safety problems in the industry, to eliminate present dangerous conditions, and to urgently improve both medical care and the social security system. ICEM believes that only effective and genuine trade union representation of jewellery workers in China can lead to an adequate improvement of working conditions as well as contribute to meaningful industrial relations and social dialogue.”

- [ICEM news release](#) and [statement](#).
- [Hazards China factsheet](#).

Mexico: Mine kills, government attacks union

Mexico’s government has responded to a union charge that the deaths of 65 miners was “industrial homicide” ([Risks 246](#)) by replacing the leader of the national miners’ union and freezing the union’s assets. The move has been condemned by union organisations worldwide. The US-based United Steelworkers (USW) international executive board this week condemned unanimously Vincente Fox’s government for replacing Napoleon Gomez Urrutia as president of Los Mineros, the National Miners and Metallurgical Union. USW labelled Fox’s actions “naked aggression” and demanding that he reinstate immediately Gomez and restore his personal assets and those of the union, all of which were frozen by the government. “The USW views your actions as naked aggression against Los Mineros,” Steelworkers president Leo W Gerard wrote in a letter to Mexican president Vincente Fox. The letter condemned the Mexican government’s actions as “a blatant attempt to stifle the voice of workers and all progressive unions in Mexico,” in the run up to Mexican elections. Gomez has

been a leading voice in opposing changes to Mexican law sought by the Fox regime that would outlaw strikes. The government action came on the heels of a two day strike by Los Mineros which shut down most of the nation’s mines. The union protest was spurred by the government’s decision to seal the mine owned by Grupo Mexico and prematurely end rescue efforts to reach the 65 miners trapped as a result of the 19 February underground gas explosion. A 7 March demonstration saw more than 20,000 union workers march through downtown Mexico City, accusing the government of meddling in the affairs of the national miners’ union by seeking to oust its leader.

- [USW news release](#). [ICEM news release](#). [IMF news release](#). [El Universal](#).

RESOURCES

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Hazards magazine, the biggest and best source in print produced especially for union health and safety reps, is out now. The latest issue of the TUC-supported quarterly magazine highlights dangerous safety policy developments in the UK, the shortcomings of the government’s corporate manslaughter proposals for England and Wales, and is packed with news and resources. A photofile give a revealing insight into work and hazards in China. And a special ‘Futile exercise’ factsheet advises union reps how to deal with an “invasion of the buttie snatchers”, likely to accompany the government’s workplace health strategy. There’s also a cut-out-and-pin up Workers’ Memorial Day poster. There are enormous discounts for union subscriptions so there is no better or

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EVENTS AND COURSES

Asbestos group support meetings, March, Newcastle

Tyne and Wear Asbestos Support Group has organised two Newcastle meetings. A seminar on 16 March will deal with compensation issues. A public meeting on 31 March will concentrate on efforts to eradicate the health hazards posed by asbestos.

- [Seminar](#) on the Workers Compensation Act (WCA 1979) and Industrial Disablement Benefit (IIDB), 16 March from 1.00pm, GMB Offices, 1 Mosley Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1YE. [Public meeting](#), 31 March from 1.00pm, Newcastle Labour Club, 45 Leazes Park Road, Newcastle. For further information on either event, contact John Kelly or Kevin Flynn, Tyne & Wear Asbestos Support Group, 4 The Cloth Market, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1EE, telephone 0191 232 4606.

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2006

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COURSES FOR APRIL TO JULY 2006

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

USEFUL LINKS

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- **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