



Risks Newsletter



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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 13,000 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](#).

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UNION NEWS

Workplace safety inspections now at a new low

Workplace safety inspections in the UK have plummeted to a new low, increasing the chances of workers being killed, made ill or injured by their jobs, according to new official figures released by TUC. The previously unpublished figures obtained by the TUC-backed safety journal *Hazards* from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) show that in the three years from 2002/03, visits to firms by safety inspectors dropped by over a quarter, down from over 74,000 a year to barely 55,000 in 2004/05. The *Hazards* report says UK employers are now less likely to be inspected, less likely to be prosecuted, less likely to be convicted of safety crimes, and less likely to receive a notice from an HSE inspector demanding safety improvements. And it says the shift away from more dangerous blue collar to safer white collar jobs is masking a serious official failure to make significant inroads into the numbers of deaths and serious injuries at work, with recent evidence suggesting the rate of decline in deaths and major injuries is actually less than might be expected. Commenting on the figures, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "We know that inspections and prosecutions are the most effective way to stop employers from breaking the law. Whilst good employers have nothing to fear from inspections, rogue bosses have never before enjoyed such freedom to neglect safety rules. Negligent employers who risk their employees' health and safety can now do so safe in the knowledge that the HSE inspector is only likely to come calling once every 13 years." He added: "There is a real danger the UK's safety record will get worse unless the HSE devotes more resources to carrying out a greater number of more effective inspections. With visits and prosecutions at a new low, there is no incentive for employers to tighten up on safety and as a result more workers are likely to die, be made ill or injured at work." The *Hazards* report says breaking safety laws is a

crime with possible life or death consequences, adding "safety criminals should be policed, caught and prosecuted." It concludes: "However HSE dresses it up, fewer inspections amount to less justice."

- [TUC news release. Sure, we'll be safe: HSE is walking away from inspections](#), *Hazards*, Number 94, April-June 2006. [Subscribe online](#), [email](#) or call the *Hazards* subscription hotline 0114 201 4265.

Nuclear competition 'a threat to safety'

Safety standards in the nuclear industry will be put at risk by the competition culture being enforced by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), Britain's largest nuclear union has warned. Scientists and engineers from the nuclear industry, members of the union Prospect, believe the NDA is pressing ahead too fast with the clean up of Britain's civil nuclear sites. Three-year short-term contracts awarded by the NDA would have a detrimental effect on the safe and efficient running of clean-up projects, warned delegates from British Nuclear Fuels and the UK Atomic Energy Authority at the union's Scarborough conference. "Senior management and staff will be distracted by the need to win their next contract and the risk of safety breaches will increase greatly," said Ian Clark of UKAEA. Incoming American firms are likely to win contracts from the NDA but are used to operating in a different regulatory environment to that in the UK, he said. With decommissioning work set to move out of public sector control, nuclear workers fear industry standards will inevitably suffer. From BNFL, Audrey Uppington said safety had to remain paramount, but short-term contracts "have the potential to harm the workforce and the population at large." Prospect will now call on the NDA to increase the length of clean-up contracts and for health, safety and environmental standards to be put at the top of competition criteria for NDA work.

- [Prospect news release.](#)

Rail union defends fire safety measures

Rail union RMT has urged the new transport secretary Doug Alexander to ensure that essential fire safety regulations for sub-surface railway stations are not abolished. The change is included in a government Fire Safety Order, due to come into force later this year ([Risks 250](#)). RMT general secretary Bob Crow said “the government still intends to do away with the essential ‘Section 12’ sub-surface station regulations that were introduced after the King’s Cross Fire and to replace them with the far looser and less specific Fire Safety Order. Keeping those regulations in place is a simple step that would help prevent the cost-led downgrading of fire safety precautions that would otherwise be allowed under the Fire Safety Order.” Commenting on new proposals from transport secretary Doug Alexander for extended passenger screening equipment trials, Bob Crow renewed the union’s call for an industry-wide forum for rail security and urged the government to ensure that all stations are adequately staffed with safety trained personnel every moment they are open to the public. “Getting uniformed and properly trained staff back onto every railway station is another essential step that would help improve security, boost passenger confidence and increase rail use,” he said.

- [RMT news release. Ministerial statement on passenger screening trials from Doug Alexander, Secretary of State for Transport, 16 May 2006.](#)

and enforce existing safety consultation laws to make best use of the lifesaving role of union safety reps. Writing in the latest issue of the union health and safety journal *Hazards*, TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson welcomed the new Health and Safety Executive consultation on ‘Improving worker involvement – improving health and safety.’ The article welcomes the “modest and limited proposals” in the consultative document, which include a legal requirement on employers to consult safety reps on risk assessments and a duty on employers to respond to safety reps. TUC adds that while the new rights would be welcome, they “are only part of the package. We need proper enforcement, and we need HSE to genuinely promote the principles of the trade union model of workers involvement. The TUC will also be calling for roving safety reps and the right to issue legally binding improvement notices.” The article says safety reps should do their bit too, particularly making sure their union safety organisation is up to scratch. TUC is urging union reps to attend a series of HSE roadshow meetings intended to gauge opinion on possible changes. The consultation ends on 8 September.

- [Consultation consultation: TUC tells the government it wants new rights for safety reps](#), *Hazards*, Number 94, April-June 2006.
- [Meeting dates and locations](#): 31 May, Edinburgh, 17.30-19.30; 1 June, Edinburgh, 08.30-10.30; 6 June, Manchester, 17.30-19.30; 7 June, Manchester, 08.30-10.30; 13 June, London, 17.30-19.30; 16 June, London, 09.30-11.30.
- [Improving worker involvement - Improving health and safety](#), Consultative Document CD207, full consultative document, summary document, print-off-and-use feedback form and online feedback form. Single printed copies of the Consultative Document and summary can be obtained from [HSE Books](#), PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA. Tel: 01787 881165, Fax: 01787 313 995. Comments should be sent to arrive by 8 September 2006 to: [Zoe Woodrow](#), Worker Involvement Programme, HSE, 5th Floor, North Wing, Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge,



TUC calls for new rights for reps

The TUC is urging the government to introduce new rights

London SE1 9HS.

- [Hazards 'Organise!' poster](#). [Subscribe online, email](#) or call the *Hazards* subscription hotline 0114 201 4265.

Warning on work skin cancer risk

Rising skin cancer rates have prompted renewed union warnings about reducing work-related risks from sunlight exposure. General union GMB said Britain's 1 million outdoor workers should be protected. There are over 1,500 deaths from skin cancer in the UK every year and that number is rising. GMB said up to 90 per cent (1,350) of these deaths are preventable and many can be dealt with if diagnosed in time. The union added that as the risk is foreseeable there is a duty on employers to introduce preventive measures, including: Planning tasks to reduce those undertaken outdoors at the hottest times of the day, between 11am and 3 pm; rotation of jobs; provision of shade; provision of adequate headgear and loose clothing; and a supply of high sun protection factor (SPF) sunscreen. GMB national safety officer John McClean said: "A simple risk assessment, involving the workforce, will soon identify straightforward measures which can be introduced to reduce the risk of exposure. Workers, particularly those with a family history of skin cancer or those with moles and freckles, should be encouraged to take extra care and report any concerns they may have." Retail union Usdaw has also issued guidance to members. Cancer Research UK says there has been a rise of nearly a third in the number of cases of skin cancer in men over the past decade. Outdoor work carries a range of other significant sun-related risks, including dehydration, sunstroke and macular degeneration, progressive damage to the eye. Adequate breaks and provision of shade and a supply of fluids are crucial safety measures.

- [GMB news release](#). [Usdaw news release](#). [Cancer Research UK news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).

- [Hazards occupational cancer report](#).

Government must act now for asbestos victim justice

A House of Lords ruling which will cut millions from compensation payouts to asbestos cancer sufferers and their families has been condemned by TGWU general secretary Tony Woodley, who has called for the government to act immediately to change the law and restore compensation. The Lords ruled this month that the widows of two men who died from the asbestos cancer mesothelioma were not entitled to full compensation because their husbands had worked for more than one employer ([Risks 255](#)). The decision will deprive thousands of claimants of at least some of their compensation and will also save the British insurance industry millions of pounds, says TGWU. Tony Woodley commented: "The lives of thousands of people have been cut tragically short by working with asbestos. But not content with that, the employers are now trying to take away compensation from their families. The winners will be the insurance industry and shareholders, who could save millions through this ruling while the families of our members will face real financial hardship." He added: "I hope that the Labour government will see how outrageous this ruling is and change the law accordingly." Work and pensions secretary John Hutton this week said he would work with insurers to speed up compensation payouts, but did not identify any measures that would reinstate compensation payouts to those affected by the Lords' ruling.

- [TGWU news release](#).

OTHER NEWS

Government bid to speed up asbestos payouts

The government has said it wants to see swifter compensation settlements for mesothelioma sufferers and their families. Work and pensions secretary John Hutton said: “Mesothelioma is a particularly unpleasant disease and the time between diagnosis and death is often tragically short. No amount of money will ever compensate individuals and families for the suffering and loss caused by mesothelioma, but it is doubly important that the process for claiming compensation does not add to the distress experienced by individuals and their families.” The minister said his department will work with the Association of British Insurers, the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers and the Department for Constitutional Affairs to urgently identify ways to speed up the settlement of claims for the asbestos-related cancer. Up to 2,000 individuals a year die from mesothelioma. The number of deaths is expected to rise to 2,500 when it peaks in 2015. The minister said he would report back on progress before the end of the parliamentary session. He added problems to be addressed included difficulties establishing exposure and employment history, collecting supporting evidence, identifying and locating the defendants (employers and insurers), tracking the existence of insurance, including tracing records and valuing and settling claims. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber welcomed the proposal to speed up claims, adding: “Unions and asbestos support groups must be involved in the proposed scheme talks that are due to take place with the Association of British Insurers and the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers. More importantly, any such scheme must have the needs of victims and their families at its heart.” He added: “Asbestos victims don't have time on their side, so for any scheme to work, it must be able to make quick, efficient decisions on compensation payouts.” The numbers that could benefit from a souped up system, however, may have dropped as a result of this month’s House of Lords ruling ([Risks 255](#)). For many, swifter payouts would still be much smaller payouts. And the measure will not affect payouts for asbestos related lung cancers, which match or exceed the number of mesothelioma cases but are rarely compensated either by the courts or the government’s industrial injury benefits scheme.

- [DWP news release](#). [TUC news release](#).
- [Hazards asbestos news and resources](#).

Scots campaigners win asbestos argument

Hugh Henry, Scotland’s deputy justice minister, has promised to look at the country’s compensation laws to ensure victims of asbestos-related cancer and their families are getting fair treatment. Many victims of the terminal condition mesothelioma, which is caused by asbestos, delay applying for compensation while they are alive for fear this will deprive their families of payouts after they are dead. Campaigners say this leads to them suffering an even more painful death from the disease, and they are demanding a change in the law. A change in legislation could also protect Scots claimants from cuts in compensation resulting from this month’s House of Lords ruling ([Risks 255](#)). Harry McCluskey of Clydeside Action on Asbestos said: “Currently, many families of victims are being denied their compensation because the law states that if cases settle before the death of the victim, their families, who are also victims are denied their individual compensation claims. This is absolutely abhorrent and we are demanding the Executive support our proposals to amend the Damages (Scotland) Act 1976 to remedy this situation”. After a meeting this week with victims and asbestos campaigners, Mr Henry agreed to consider the case for new legislation in order to achieve “an equitable solution.” He said: “These people have suffered a death sentence. Why should they then have to make a further moral or financial judgment about an early settlement that would disadvantage their families?” He added: “I will go back to my ministerial colleagues, I will reflect to them the very powerful arguments made on behalf of those facing certain death.” But he warned there could be a lengthy delay due to a problem finding time in the Scottish Parliament to enact new legislation. A change in the law might allow a victim to claim and then let their dependants make a claim after their death – although in

practice it is thought insurers might then settle a claim in one package.

- [The Scotsman](#). [Daily Record](#). [The Herald](#). [Evening Times](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Sick leave levels 'dropping'

Working days lost through sickness absence are at their lowest level in 20 years, a new CBI report suggests. The business leaders' group said the figure fell last year by four million days to 164 million days. But the CBI claims too much absenteeism remains in many workplaces and that 13 per cent of sick days are "non-genuine." The cost of lost days to the economy was £13bn, the report said. Commenting on the CBI survey, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "The survey shows that sickness absence is now the lowest for well over a decade and smashes the myth that Britain is a nation of shirkers. In fact the reverse is true and many people still struggle into work when they are far too ill to do so." He added: "Public sector workers have less short term but more long term absence rates than the private sector. Public sector workers report long term sickness more for two reasons. First many companies don't allow long term sick leave - you get the sack. Second some public sector workers are more likely to be attacked or suffer stress because of their jobs." The TUC leader concluded: "Only lazy employers think that the solution to excess sick leave is to emphasise the stick. The best way is to work with staff with effective risk assessments, flexible working and positive sickness management programmes." He rubbished CBI claims that droves of workers would be pulling football-induced "sickies" during next month's World Cup, saying most games are in the evening. He called on firms to allow flexible working and to install temporary screens at work. "Trusting staff and treating them like grown ups is the best way to help reduce absenteeism at work," he said.

- [CBI news release](#). [TUC news release](#). [BBC](#)

[News Online](#). [FT.com](#). [Western Mail](#). [The Scotsman](#).

- [Hazards work sickness news and resources](#).

Occupational health pays off

Investing in occupational health helps cut absence rates, a study by the manufacturers' organisation EEF has concluded. Its survey of 600 firms employing over 120,000 workers found a "clear link" between addressing sickness absence and improving business performance. Benefits included reduced short and long-term absence rates as well as improved employee welfare. The survey found where there is either internal or external support, 39 per cent of companies saw a reduction in short-term absence and, 28 per cent saw a reduction in long-term absence. Among those with no occupational health provision, only 22 per cent saw a drop in short-term absence and 19 per cent in long-term absence. EEF said the figures are a clear vindication that committing resources to tackling sickness absence and placing an emphasis on rehabilitation and getting people back to work can benefit both employers and employees. EEF chief medical adviser, Professor Sayeed Khan, said: "These figures demonstrate a clear link between addressing sickness absence and improved business performance. Those companies who still put this issue in the 'too difficult' tray would do well to sit up and take note of the very real benefits they would reap from tackling the problem." EEF said the government must address the training of health professionals and GPs to raise their awareness of sickness absence and rehabilitation issues.

- [EEF news release](#).
- [Hazards work and health webpages](#).

HSE to get free and easy with publications

The Health and Safety Executive has made an “in principle” decision to make almost all its priced publications available free online from spring 2007. TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson said: “Unions have been campaigning for this for some time, and it is great news for those safety reps with internet access.” He added: “At last representatives will have access to the official approved codes of practice (ACoPs) and guidance they need to enable them to do their job properly. We will be talking to the HSE about ways of ensuring those safety reps who do not have access to the web can get copies. Nevertheless this news will be welcomed by the trade unions. The HSE has now joined the ranks of most other government regulators in giving the public access to the regulations and guidance directly relevant to their work.” The accident book and health and safety law poster will remain as priced publications.

- [HSE publications.](#)

Lidl fined £50k for safety offences

Lidl supermarket has been fined £50,000 after two workers were seriously injured. The firm was charged with two breaches of the Health and Safety at Work Act which left two delivery drivers unable to work. One suffered permanent brain damage. He is still off work nearly two years after the accident. The company pleaded guilty at Gloucester Crown Court to two offences arising from the same faulty lift at its Bishop's Cleeve store. Judge Martin Picton said: “It's a matter of genuine surprise that a company of this size should have failed in its response to the serious incidents that occurred.” He added: “I have to settle on a penalty that recognises culpability which is of sufficient size to send a message to managers, shareholders and other employers in this field that this won't be tolerated and when it happens there will be a sufficient punishment.” He fined Lidl £25,000 for each offence. It also has to pay Tewkesbury Borough Council costs of £10,531.50. Undisclosed compensation has been awarded to the drivers. Driver Terrence Hooper, of haulage

firm R &R Transport, was hit on the head by the arm of the loading lift as he worked in the warehouse on 30 August 2004, sustaining serious injuries. And HGV driver, Michael Lee, who was employed by Newport haulage firm ATL, was hit over the head by the lift arm on 16 September 2004. The court heard that Mr Lee escaped with a lesser injury but needed stitches and three weeks off work. The court was told of a similar offence in 2002, when Lidl was found guilty of twice breaching health and safety laws after two HGV drivers were struck on the head by a faulty arm on another scissor lift. Retail union Usdaw has criticised a self-regulation Retail Enforcement Pilot introduced by the Department of Trade and Industry in the sector, saying recent prosecutions of firms including Asda, IKEA, Sainsbury's and Tesco show the need for “more resources to be given to inspection and enforcement of health and safety in stores” ([Risks 237](#)).

- [Gloucestershire Echo.](#)

Inquest verdict sparks investigation review

Authorities have said they are to reconsider evidence into the death of two workers in a factory fire, following an inquest jury's open verdict. The families of Chris Mead and Martin Butler were disappointed that no prosecutions had been made following the devastating fire at the Anvil Alloys International factory in Whittlesey. The jury returned an open verdict following a five-day inquest last week, which revealed there were no fire safety procedures and only two out of five fire doors actually worked in the factory. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Cambridgeshire police had previously decided not to pursue prosecutions. In light of the inquest verdict, CPS has now said it will revisit the case. A spokesperson for the HSE said it will also review the investigation it carried out with the police and fire service in order to decide whether legal proceedings would be appropriate under health and safety legislation. He added:

“With regards to fire safety procedures and any prosecution relating to that, it would be up to the fire and rescue service. But the HSE will look at the legislation that it enforces in relation to the circumstances of this incident. If legal proceedings are appropriate, we will take them.” A statement from the fire service read: "Prior to the inquest, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service had taken a decision not to pursue a prosecution against Anvil Alloys, following advice from a lawyer who specialises in fire prosecutions... We will now be seeking further guidance to see if the outcome of the inquest changes this advice in any way." The government is proposing eliminating juries from many inquests where HSE and other official bodies have conducted investigations. Campaigners argue that cases like this illustrate why inquest juries provide an essential independent check on decisions whether or not to prosecute. A draft Bill spelling out the planned coroners' reforms is due next month.

- Peterborough Today on [the inquest verdict](#) and [the families' disappointment with the failure to prosecute](#).

Firms fined £350k after worker is crushed

Two construction companies have been fined a total of £350,000 after a worker was crushed to death at a development of luxury flats in London. Foreman Jack Tangney, 29, had been guiding a crane operator as he lifted a huge wooden shutter into place, even though he was unqualified for the job, the Old Bailey heard. He was killed instantly in the August 2002 incident, when one of the 3m pieces of timber struck a wall, broke in two and crashed down on top of him. John Doyle Construction and main contractor Exterior International admitted health and safety breaches over the death. Judge Richard Hone fined John Doyle Construction a total of £250,000 and Exterior £100,000. He said: “This dreadful accident which caused the death of Jack Tangney was avoidable. Everybody knew or should have perceived the increased danger. The legislation is there to protect people

like him from taking on jobs for which they are not qualified.” The judge told Mr Tangney's widow Anna Saunders: “I hope it will be accepted that the court has done its best to educate responsible corporations with substantial financial penalties.” Ms Saunders said: “I'm not sure what to think about the fine. It doesn't bring a person back and it doesn't necessarily make someone change what they do.” Speaking after the case, investigating Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector Emma Davies said: “This avoidable incident is an example of how badly things can go wrong when lifting operations are not planned or supervised properly. When carrying out lifting operations on site, three key elements must be in place to ensure the safety of the lift - a competent person is involved in planning the lift - the lift is adequately supervised - and the lift is carried out in a safe manner.”

- [HSE news release](#). [South London Press](#).

Balfour Beatty appeals record Hatfield fine

A £10m fine imposed on engineering firm Balfour Beatty over the Hatfield rail crash for one of the “worst examples” of safety negligence was “excessive”, defence lawyers have argued in the Court of Appeal. The company admitted breaching the Health and Safety at Work Act after the disaster in October 2000, in which four people died and 102 were injured. Jonathan Caplan QC argued this week the company should have received a discount on the fine for its guilty plea. Balfour Beatty is challenging the fine following a trial in October last year ([Risks 228](#)). Mr Caplan told the Court of Appeal the company in pleading guilty “recognised that it had failed in its duty and publicly apologised.” Old Bailey judge Mr Justice Mackay said at the October trial the company's failure to abide by safety rules was “one of the worst examples of sustained industrial negligence in a high risk industry I have ever seen.” It was revealed last month that six months after its conviction, Balfour Beatty had not paid the record fine ([Risks 254](#)). The company was also criticised by

rail union RMT for paying massive bonuses to company directors in 2005, the same year it was convicted on safety charges relating to the deaths ([Risks 253](#)). RMT general secretary Bob Crow accused company bosses of “dancing on the graves of the dead.”

- [BBC News Online](#).

Builder fails in bid to get out of jail

A builder will have to serve a jail term after an employee plunged 30ft to his death from a crane, a court has ruled. Appeal court judges upheld the manslaughter conviction handed to Wayne Davies. The 36-year-old was jailed for 18 months in January on charges relating to the death in 2004 of Mark Jones ([Risks 241](#)). Davies was also convicted of health and safety breaches after the faulty crane Mr Jones and another employee were using toppled over. Detective inspector Bob Titley, from Staffordshire Police's major investigation department, accused Davies at the time of the original trial of a “total contempt” for his employees’ safety. Judge Sir Michael Wright this week dismissed Davies' challenge at London's Criminal Appeal Court, and described the machinery as “lethal and dangerous.” Sir Michael, sitting with Lord Justice Auld and Mr Justice Gibbs, said the machine had a “plethora of faults.” The court also heard that the widow of 40-year-old Mr Jones, from Ludlow, Shropshire, was unlikely to receive any compensation as Davies had not possessed the legally-required employers' liability insurance. Sir Michael said: “His total disregard for the safety of his workmen calls for punishment of an exemplary nature.”

- [Shropshire Star](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Work conditions raise risk of having a small baby

Exposure to range of workplace risks in pregnancy can increase the likelihood of having an under-sized infant, according to a new report. Researchers reporting in the American Journal of Public Health identify irregular or shiftwork schedules as key problems. They say eliminating these factors before the 24th week of pregnancy can bring the odds down to those of unexposed women. “Small-for-gestational” (SGA) infants are at increased risk for a number of problems, including low levels of oxygen and blood sugar at birth. Dr Agathe Croteau, from Université Laval, Québec, Canada, and colleagues assessed the impact of occupational conditions on the risk of having an SGA infant by analysing data from 1,536 mothers with SGA babies and 4,441 mothers with normal babies. Factors that had a cumulative effect on risk included working night hours, irregular or shiftwork schedule, standing ([Risks 221](#)), lifting loads, noise, and high psychological demand coupled with low social support. Compared with the complete absence of these conditions, the risk of having an SGA infant ranged from 8 to 129 per cent when one to all six of these conditions was present. Preventive measures before the 24th week such as reassignment to a safer job or withdrawal from work largely eliminated the increased risk.

- Agathe Croteau, Sylvie Marcoux, and Chantal Brisson. Work activity in pregnancy, preventive measures, and the risk of delivering a small-for-gestational-age infant, American Journal of Public Health, volume 96, pages 846-855, 2006 [[abstract](#)]. [Reuters Health](#).
- [TUC gender webpages](#). [Hazards women and work hazards webpages](#).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australia: “Serious” concerns at building tumour link

A union has said there is a “serious problem” with an Australian university building that had to have its top floors evacuated after a cluster of

brain tumours were discovered. University union NTEU has called on RMIT University in Melbourne to ensure the health and safety of its staff following reports that seven staff members working in the tower block have been diagnosed with brain tumours over the last seven years. It is believed one worker has died and another is terminally ill. “This would appear to be much more than co-incidence, and RMIT has a responsibility to leave no stone unturned in seeking the cause,” NTEU Victorian division secretary Matthew McGowan said. After an approach by NTEU representatives, university management agreed last week that the building’s top two floors should be immediately evacuated. “RMIT has done the right thing in evacuating staff from the top two floors of the building, which is where the affected staff members work,” he said. “No-one should return to working on those floors until the university is absolutely certain that it is safe.” Mr McGowan said that while it was not yet known whether there is a common link between the different cases, the floors’ proximity to the building roof, where telecommunications towers are erected, is a serious concern. Five of the seven affected workers worked on the top floor. “RMIT has to examine all possibilities, however remote, to deal with this serious problem, Mr McGowan said. “We are happy to provide whatever assistance we can. Meanwhile, we will continue to talk with and support affected members during this difficult time.”

- [NTEU news release](#). [The Age](#). [Herald Sun](#). [The Australian](#).

Global: Union says social compliance is “cosmetic”

Garment workers around the world are worse off than they were a decade ago despite 10 years of intense activity in the name of corporate social responsibility, the global union federation for the sector had said. Neil Kearney, general secretary of ITGLWF, told the Association of Suppliers to the British Clothing Industry’s conference this week that great reliance has been placed on the

social auditing profession, but that intermittent visits from under-qualified auditors are not capable of bringing about real progress. “Everywhere the story is similar: Long hours of work, low wages, workers cheated of benefits and denied fundamental rights.” He added: “Too many of the brands and retailers are suffering from a split personality, on the one hand they claim they want their code of conduct respected, on the other they engage in purchasing practices which make this impossible, paying pitiful prices and demanding unrealistic delivery schedules. Buyers are rewarded for squeezing every extra penny out of the supplier rather than on the social compliance of the supplier concerned.” He said auditors had described as ‘a good factory’ the Spectrum Garments premises in Bangladesh “which collapsed killing 64 workers and which had been breaking every law in the book” ([Risks 252](#)). He concluded: “Brands and retailers today have a choice, it is a choice between RP and PR - real pressure on suppliers rather than public relations in the marketplace.”

- [ITGLWF news release](#) and [full text of Neil Kearney’s speech](#).

India: Bhopal victims slam biased committee

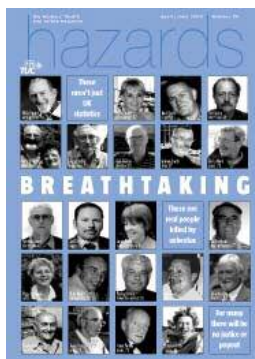
The victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas tragedy have condemned the composition of a coordination committee set up to deal with the health and social consequences, which they say is dominated by government officials and includes a former medical adviser to Union Carbide. The committee was convened by the government after last month’s high profile protest march from the now-defunct Union Carbide pesticide plant to Delhi, demanding the prime minister’s intervention to secure “justice and a life of dignity for themselves and their ilk” ([Risks 253](#)). However, despite the committee being a concession to the campaigners, they have since been excluded from the committee, which is charged with planning and implementing schemes for medical, economic and social rehabilitation of the people poisoned in the 3 December 1984 catastrophe. Leaders of the

victims' organisations, including Rachna Dhingra and Satinath Sarangi of the Bhopal Group for Information and Action, condemned the failure of the government to include victims' representatives in the committee. "It is a travesty that none of their representatives have yet been incorporated into the coordination committee," Rachna said at a press conference. She added that they have written to the prime minister requesting his personal intervention to ensure a more balanced committee. Satinath Sarangi said the groups also objected to the inclusion of NP Mishra, a former medical adviser to Union Carbide, on the committee. "One of the nine members of the committee, Madhumita Dutta from New Delhi, has already tendered her resignation to protest against the imbalance in the committee, the inclusion of Dr Mishra and the exclusion of survivors' representatives," Satinath Sarangi said.

- [Times of India. International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal news release.](#)
- [International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal.](#)

RESOURCES

Get organised and get *Hazards*



Hazards magazine, the premier safety source for union health and safety reps, is out now. The latest issue of the TUC-supported quarterly magazine reveals the real human cost of asbestos disease, exposes the Health and Safety Executive's failure to adequately police

safety laws, and is packed with news and resources. A photofile give a disturbing insight into the deadly price paid for job hazards in Gujarat, India – but highlights the effective and highly creative campaigns which are tackling hazards in the most difficult circumstances. And

a special 'Organise!' poster to pin up at work advises union reps how to "give your workplace a safety organisation health check". And a feature from TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson spells out the union response to the government's workers' involvement consultation. There are enormous discounts for union subscriptions so there is no better or cheaper way to keep on top of health and safety news and policy. Recommended by unions, feared by negligent employers, and supported entirely by you. Make sure you subscribe.

- [Hazards magazine. Hazards subscription details and special union bulk discounts](#), and online subscription form.

New guide on work with dangerous pathogens

The government's Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP) has published new health and safety guidance on how to control the risks posed from dangerous infections at work. 'Biological agents: The principles, design and operation of containment level 4 facilities' is aimed at those responsible for working with the highest hazard pathogens. The guidance, which has been developed in partnership with experts from ACDP, the biotechnology industry, HSE and other government departments, is intended for all laboratories in which high hazard human pathogens may be handled. Professor George Griffin, chair of ACDP, said: "This guidance is aimed at providing employers, users and designers of containment level 4 facilities with the information needed to assess, understand and control the infection risks to their staff arising from work with high hazard pathogens."

- [HSE news release](#). Biological agents: The principles, design and operation of containment level 4 facilities, free online [[pdf](#)]. [HSE infections webpages](#).

EVENTS AND COURSES

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR APRIL TO JULY 2006

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

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