



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 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

- Ballot on Docklands Railway safety cuts
- Firefighters in eight hour safe staffing strike
- Over 300 MPs back Save our Sundays campaign

• OTHER NEWS

- Nat Semi cancer toll is "tip of the iceberg"
- Dockers can sue government on asbestos
- TV crew killed in Baghdad attack
- BNP councillor was rightly sacked
- Death gets £20,000 fine
- Firm fined £7,000 after employee loses fingers

- Firm pays £60,000 for pelvic injuries
- New criticism of workplace health advice service
- Hatfield rail firms given £21m costs
- Senior judge treated for stress
- **INTERNATIONAL NEWS**
- Australia: Bosses hide deadly evidence
- Australia: Strike threat over unsafe laws
- Cambodia/Australia: Campaign to protect "beer girls"
- Canada: Job-related cancer killed firefighter
- China: Bankers arrested over mine deaths
- Ireland: Call for action on killer bosses
- Japan: Government sued for asbestos neglect
- **RESOURCES**
- Stress updates and workshops
- **EVENTS AND COURSES**
- Union occupational health seminar, 21 June, Newcastle
- TUC courses for safety reps
- **USEFUL LINKS**

UNION NEWS

Ballot on Docklands Railway safety cuts

More than 250 RMT members at Docklands Light Railway (DLR) are being balloted for industrial action after the company failed to withdraw plans to cut safety-critical station staff jobs and slash pay by up to £5,000. The ballot will close on 13 June. RMT says the company, under the guise of “reorganisation”, plans to reduce the overall number of station staff from 42 to 34, cut the pay of station assistants by £5,000 and sack or downgrade more than half of the current station supervisors. “We made it clear to Serco that these plans were unacceptable, and they have left us with no option but to press ahead and ballot all RMT’s DLR members for industrial action,” said RMT general secretary Bob Crow. “No matter how much they try to deny it, this re-organisation means a cut in safety critical staff and fewer people on duty on a railway where most stations are already unstaffed, and it means the downgrading of the skills of those station staff that remain. For all sorts of reasons, not least today’s heightened security fears, this is a very bad idea. We need to see more safety critical staff on stations, not fewer, and it is outrageous that Serco appears to be wielding the axe to make up for their serious underbidding for the DLR contract.”

- [RMT news release. The Wharf.](#)

Firefighters in eight hour safe staffing strike

A planned 48-hour strike by firefighters fighting unsafe cuts to fire services in Hertfordshire was reduced to eight hours this week in a bid to help negotiations. Firefighters’ union FBU said it was fighting “savage” cuts which it said involved the loss of more than 40 jobs, placing public and firefighter safety at risk. The firefighters are campaigning against cutbacks across the county, including the closure of Radlett and Bovingdon Fire Stations. FBU had complained that engines

had been moved out of the two stations set for closure, but after managers promised to replace them, the union agreed to shorten the 48 hour strike to just eight hours. Graham Noakes, FBU regional secretary, said: “This window of opportunity will give both sides an opportunity to resolve the dispute.” So far no further strike action has been announced, but no date for further talks has been confirmed either. This week’s strike was the third eight-hour walk-out in recent weeks.

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

Over 300 MPs back Save our Sundays campaign

Retail union Usdaw says more than 300 MPs are backing their case against any extension of Sunday trading hours. So far 273 MPs from across the political spectrum have signed an Early Day Motion, sponsored by Brian Jenkins MP, opposing any extension to the present six hour limit that large stores can open on Sundays. The union has also received more than 30 messages of support from ministers and ministerial aides who cannot sign the EDM due to a longstanding parliamentary convention forbidding them to do so. “Britain’s 3.1 million retail workers now have the support of nearly half of all MPs and it’s good news that senior ministers are also opposed to extending the hours,” said Usdaw general secretary John Hannett. “Over half of Labour’s MPs are supporting our campaign, as well as strong support from the two main opposition parties and a number of other smaller parties. But we’re not complacent as this battle still has some way to go so we’re continuing our high profile Save Our Sundays campaign sending postcards and petitions to MPs. Thousands of concerned shopworkers have written to their MPs reminding them of the devastating impact longer hours would have on the family lives of retail staff. This level of support proves MPs do listen to their constituents.”

- [Usdaw news release.](#)

OTHER NEWS

Nat Semi cancer toll is “tip of the iceberg”

More than 70 cancer deaths at the National Semiconductor plant in Greenock, Scotland, could be the tip of the iceberg, health experts have warned. Experts have identified several types of cancer, including brain and breast tumours, which are four to five times higher than normal. Jim McCourt of Phase Two, a support group for Nat Semi workers, said: “This could be potentially the tip of the iceberg. Former employees and their survivors should be very concerned.” An open letter signed by an international team of medical experts says they are worried about proposed new research into the factory. The experts warn that the government's Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which is carrying out the investigation, is coming under “undue political pressure to obtain equivocal or negative results.” The planned follow-up study to a 2001 report is already a year behind schedule and has yet to start. Professor Andrew Watterson of the University of Stirling is one of the six international experts who signed the letter, complaining about a plan to scale down the scope of the investigation to just 200 out of thousands of potentially affected workers. He said big studies are better because they pick up any adverse health effects of chemicals. “Employees should be concerned we won't apparently see large, preferably international studies, of the industry in the foreseeable future,” he said: “Recent US studies indicate continued cause for concern about the industry and have not given it a clean bill of health. Small studies may show no problem when there may be a problem and lead to complacency or inaction.” Professor Watterson added: “We have seriously under-estimated or downplayed the contribution that work-caused and work-related health plays in Scotland. If we don't look, we won't find. If we don't look

properly, then we may miss serious occupational health problems.”

- [Greenock Telegraph.](#)

Dockers can sue government on asbestos

A retired docker who suffers from an asbestos-related illness has welcomed a High Court decision allowing him to sue the government for compensation. Robert Thompson, 65, won the right to take legal action along with docker's widow Winifred Rice. The court ruled that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) was responsible for dockers' safety in the 1950s and 1960s. But High Court Judge Mr Justice Silber also granted the DTI leave to appeal. Until 1967 dock workers were employed on a casual basis under the National Dock Labour Board scheme, set up by the government in the late 1940s to organise labour arrangements at ports. Many dockers unloaded raw asbestos from ships. “The dock labour board put us in a pen like cattle, we were picked out and sent to unload the asbestos from the ships in the docks,” said Mr Thompson. “If we refused to go on the ships we were sacked. The asbestos was floating around everywhere. The dock labour board must have known they were sending us into danger.” Mrs Rice, whose husband Edward died of the asbestos cancer mesothelioma in 2000, added: “It's so important that someone takes responsibility for what happened to him - the illness changed him from a healthy 15-stone man to a six-stone shadow of himself. All we wanted was for the dock board to hold their hands up and admit they should have protected him.” Their solicitor Kevin Johnson, of John Pickering and Partners, said the judgment could pave the way for other dockers to claim. “The judge was right to accept that the dock labour boards must bear responsibility for sending dockers to work with asbestos in unsafe conditions without warning or protecting them,” he said. “This decision will help other dockers and their families to bring claims for compensation without them having to identify individual

shipping companies, many of whom no longer exist.”

- [John Pickering and Partners news release. BBC News Online.](#)

TV crew killed in Baghdad attack

Two British TV journalists were killed by a car bomb in Iraq on 29 May. Soundman James Brolan, 42, and camera operator Paul Douglas, 48, died filming in Baghdad for US news network CBS. CBS correspondent Kimberly Dozier, 39, who holds dual US-British citizenship and previously worked for BBC World Service radio, was also injured in the attack and remains in a serious condition. Mr Brolan, from Tufnell Park, north London, and Mr Douglas, from Wootton, Bedfordshire, died when the US 4th Infantry Division unit they were based with were targeted. The attack, which also killed a US army officer and an Iraqi interpreter, was one of a wave of bombings in and around the Iraqi capital which left at least 41 dead, mainly Iraqi civilians. Former MP and BBC correspondent Martin Bell told BBC News 24 that the journalists' deaths were symptomatic of a deteriorating situation. “More journalists and journalistic support staff have died now in the three years since the war in Iraq began formally than in 10 years in the Vietnam War. I think we delude ourselves if we think it's going to get any better.” The deaths bring the number of media staff killed in the conflict since 2003 to 127, said the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). It added the number of media people killed in 2006 so far is now 22. Commented on the latest incident, IFJ general secretary Aidan White said: “This was a tragic example of how journalists embedded with occupation forces face the same perilous conditions that have affected many local reporters. Our thoughts tonight are with the friends and families of the victims and we must redouble our efforts to try to keep journalists out of the firing line.” He added: “These new deaths are tragedies that affect all media people and add to the atmosphere of terror surrounding the

work of media that makes independent news coverage of the country almost impossible.”

- [IFJ news release. CBS News. BBC News Online. National Ledger.](#)

BNP councillor was rightly sacked

The Court of Appeal has blocked a claim of race discrimination by a member of the BNP, who was sacked by a Bradford bus company on health and safety grounds ([Risks 194](#)). Arthur Redfearn was dismissed in 2004 after winning a seat on Bradford Council, when Serco said they feared the possibility of reprisal attacks. An employment tribunal upheld the sacking by transport operator Serco but was then overruled by an Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT). The appeal court has now upheld Serco's appeal, blocking Mr Redfearn's claim. Lord Justice Mummery, sitting with Lord Justice Dyson and Sir Martin Nourse, announced their decision last week, after hearing the case in March. Mr Redfearn had been employed by Serco, which runs West Yorkshire Transport Service (WYTS), from December 2003. In 2004, he announced he was to stand for the BNP in local elections and was returned to office in June. Later that month, Serco - which has a large number of Asian employees and whose clients are mainly from ethnic minorities - sacked him, claiming his presence on the workforce constituted a health and safety hazard. His bosses said he, or the vehicles he was using, might be attacked, risking injury to the disabled people being transported. Lord Justice Mummery said the EAT had not been entitled to send the matter to another employment tribunal for re-hearing. He said: “The employment tribunal's decision to reject Mr Redfearn's complaints of direct and indirect discrimination is not flawed by an error of law.” The judges refused Mr Redfearn permission to appeal to the House of Lords, but he can still petition the law lords directly to hear his case. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber welcomed the ruling, adding: “Serco were right to say that BNP activists should not hold this kind of job, and deserve credit for taking on this case that has

now established this important precedent.” The appeal court ordered Mr Redfearn, who was ousted from his council seat in last month’s local elections, to pay Serco’s costs which could total £100,000.

- [Serco news release](#). [TUC news release](#). [Yorkshire Post](#). [Telegraph and Argus](#). [The Telegraph](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Death gets £20,000 fine

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is warning companies to ensure that adequate precautions are being taken to prevent injuries from workplace transport accidents following a fatality involving a skip delivery vehicle. Hixon based manufacturer Sandmaster Ltd was fined £20,000 and costs of £4,500 at Stafford Magistrates’ Court, after pleading guilty to a breach of health and safety legislation. The case brought by HSE followed an investigation into the death of employee Ivor William Babb, a cleaner at the company who was struck by a skip delivery vehicle when he was taking rubbish into the yard on 15 October 2004. HSE investigating inspector Andrew Bowker commented: “It doesn’t take a lot of organisation or money to put measures in place which can make a difference to people’s working environment and even save lives.”

- [HSE news release](#).

Firm fined £7,000 after employee loses fingers

A Shawclough company has been fined £7,000 after a worker lost three fingers in a horrific accident. Eurofabs (UK) Ltd was also ordered to pay £1,588 costs after being prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Trafford Magistrates were told that Keith Jones lost three fingers on his left hand in November 2004 when he was carrying out a lifting operation. After the hearing, HSE inspector Christina Goddard said:

“This was a serious accident that resulted in serious injury to Mr Jones and we are pleased with the outcome of the case. We are also pleased that the company has taken on board the lessons from this incident.” She added: “The Health and Safety Executive will always prosecute in cases such as this in order to protect employees and try to reduce the number of accidents at work.”

- [Rochdale Observer](#).

Firm pays £60,000 for pelvic injuries

A construction firm has been fined £60,000 after a worker’s pelvis was shattered in a site incident, with the injury leading to constant pain and chronic health problems. London firm Byrne Brothers was also ordered to pay £12,026 costs, with Judge Richard Hone telling them he wanted to hit the shareholders as well as the company. Alan Wyatt, 44, was struck by an unsecured pipe while working in the City of London. He had been washing near the pipe when a blockage caused it to whip away, fracturing his pelvis in three places. Speaking after the hearing, Mr Wyatt said: “I am just living from day to day at the moment, but every day is worse than the last. I have recently had a catheter fitted which has to be emptied once a day and the whole process is agony. I have started a pain management programme because it gets so bad.” Jonathon Ashley-Norris, for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), told the Old Bailey that Mr Wyatt had been unable to work since the accident in June 2003.

- [icSouthLondon](#).

New criticism of workplace health advice service

The resources allocated to Workplace Health Connect (WHC) should have been devoted to local authority health and safety enforcement, a

council safety boss has told the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health's (CIEH) May conference. Geoff Makin, environmental health manager at Coventry City Council, said the number of site visits proposed by the service were a "drop in the ocean". He told delegates: "In view of the government's emphasis on efficiency and avoiding duplication, wouldn't it have been better to spend that money on local government instead?" Set up in February, Workplace Health Connect provides free telephone advice on workplace health issues and site visits to companies employing from five to 250 workers ([Risks 246](#)). It is being piloted in five regions – the North East, the North West, the West Midlands, South Wales and Greater London. It aims to cover two-thirds of small- and medium-sized businesses by 2007. Defending the service, Colleen Bowan of the WHC delivery team, said it would complement and not threaten the work of local government officers and added: "The money that we have had, you couldn't have had and, anyway, at the end of the day we are all trying to do the same thing."

- [CIEH news report](#).
- [Workplace Health Connect](#). Small businesses in England and Wales can access the service via an advice line, 0845 609 6006.
- [Hazards work and health webpages](#).

Hatfield rail firms given £21m costs

The two companies fined over the Hatfield rail crash have been handed £21 million of taxpayers' money to pay for their defence costs - £7 million more than their record penalties last year. Four people died and 102 were injured in the crash in October 2000 when a King's Cross to Leeds express derailed at 115mph. The money has been given to Balfour Beatty, the engineering company, and Network Rail [formerly Railtrack] to pay for defending themselves against manslaughter and health and safety charges - accusations on which they were cleared. The two

companies, which applied for their costs to be reimbursed, were handed record fines totalling £13.5 million in October 2005 after being convicted of other health and safety offences ([Risks 228](#)). The disclosure of the payments was made by the government following a request under the Freedom of Information Act. The Department for Constitutional Affairs said: "The cost paid from Central Funds (taxpayers' money) for the defence of the accused was £20.9 million. None of the defendants were legally aided, and the judge ordered their costs to be paid from central funds. This was, however, only in relation to the manslaughter and health and safety charges that they were found not guilty on." DCA added: "The two companies were not refunded their costs on the charges for which they were found guilty. Therefore, they bore that cost in addition to the total fines of £13.5 million and costs of £600,000 that the court imposed." Balfour Beatty was fined £10 million plus £300,000 costs and Network Rail £3.5 million plus £300,000 costs. John Pickering, the solicitor representing the four victims of Hatfield and some of the survivors, said: "There seems to be a disconnection between the level of the penalties and the level of the costs they are recovering. It's hard to understand the logicity or the morality of this award."

- [The Telegraph](#).

Senior judge treated for stress

Scotland's most senior judge is being treated for stress. Lord Hamilton was admitted to a Glasgow hospital two weeks ago. It is understood he is now in Glasgow's Priory Clinic. A spokesperson said "his return to work will remain subject to medical advice." The 63-year-old was installed as Lord President of the Court of Session and Lord Justice General six months ago. Doctors advised him to take an extended period of leave at the end of April. A spokesperson for the judge said: "On medical advice the Lord President was admitted to hospital on May 13. It is requested that the Lord President's privacy is respected during this time."

In his absence the Lord Justice Clerk, Lord Gill, is acting as presiding judge of the Court of Session and the High Court. Lord Hamilton, formerly Arthur Hamilton QC, was appointed as a judge in 1995. Since it was opened in October 2003, the £1m Glasgow Priory Hospital has treated a number of high profile patients for conditions such as stress and alcohol or drug addiction. They include soccer star Paul Gascoigne and Scottish television presenter Gail Porter.

- [BBC News Online](#). [Scotland on Sunday](#). [Glasgow Herald](#). [The Sunday Times](#).

increasing instances of employer harassment. In one case, a builder turned a hose on a 64-year-old safety expert and tried to frog march him out the gate. In another, an employer set a heavy on an authorised safety rep. CFMEU official Mal Tulloch was thrown across an office and had a chair thrown at him while he was on the ground. CFMEU says there have been a number of assaults on construction union officials attempting to carry out safety audits on hazardous work practices on Sydney building sites in the last month.

- [Daily Telegraph](#) and related [Workers Online story](#). [Workers Online](#).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australia: Bosses hide deadly evidence

Companies in Australia are using new anti-union laws to keep unsafe conditions and workplace accidents, including fatalities, under wraps. In the latest incident, an Australia Post-owned warehouse has blocked union access to a site following a fatal forklift accident. National Union of Workers (NUW) spokesperson Mark Ptolemy said he tried to enter the depot but was informed by management that his visit was unlawful under the Work Choices legislation. He was turned away the day after a young Filipino worker was fatally crushed during a forklift accident at the parcel distribution centre. Mr Ptolemy said he arrived at the site to meet members who were distressed about the accident, but access was blocked. “We were greeted by a corporate lawyer who basically told us that we had no jurisdictional right to be onsite and asked us to get offsite,” Mr Ptolemy said. “We got our members and called them out for a meeting. But the company's reaction was to tell them to go back to work and threaten to call the police if we didn't remove ourselves from the premises.” He said senior management had flown up from Melbourne and slapped a “shut up or get out” order on staff, hindering efforts to get to the bottom of the tragedy. Unions investigating safety breaches are reporting

Australia: Strike threat over unsafe laws

There could be widespread strike action in Australia in response to severely curtailed legal safety rights, a top union leader has warned. Bill Shorten, national secretary of the Australian Workers Union (AWU), has accused the federal government of paying lip service to health and safety standards in the workplace, while eroding union safety rights as part of a package of industrial relations reforms. He said industrial action will remain an option until the government recognises unions' right to educate workers on safety practices. The industrial relations changes make it illegal for workplace agreements to include a right to attend union safety training or receive pay for undertaking such training ([Risks 258](#)). “Safety is worth fighting for by all means possible,” Bill Shorten said. “I think the government privately recognise that they went too far in this legislation and they just need to find a way out of the corner they're in.” Addressing a meeting of union members, he said complaints were made at the Beaconsfield mine in Tasmania before the disaster in which one miner died and two were trapped for 14 days ([Risks 256](#)), but they were not followed up by management. “We are not convinced there's been constructive interaction between the Tasmanian regulators and inspectors and the workforce below ground,” he said. “It's a fact - it's a sad fact - but between 1990 and 1998 in

Tasmania, where they had a form of pro-active mines inspection, there were two underground deaths. In the next eight years there's been seven.”

- [Yahoo News](#). [ABC Online](#). [The Age](#).

Cambodia/Australia: Campaign to protect “beer girls”

Young women in Cambodia employed by major brewing companies as “beer girls” are facing exploitation, violence and HIV infection. Sharan Burrow, president of Australian union federation ACTU, last week launched an international campaign by a coalition of unions, human rights and political leaders against the promotional campaigns used by beer companies seeking to gain a slice of the lucrative Asian beer market. The campaign is seeking to highlight the inadequate wages of beer girls and the high rate of HIV infection which is leading to thousands of early deaths among the women. It spotlights the shocking situation of young south east Asian women who are being exploited and subjected to sexual assault and violence while working in restaurants and karaoke bars to promote well-known beer brands including Heineken, Carlsberg, San Miguel, Stella Artois, Becks, Bass, Anchor and Budweiser. Sharan Burrow said: “There are more than 20,000 'beer promotion women' working in Cambodia alone. These women wear the costume of an international beer and sell that brand exclusively, often to meet a quota of a 24-can case per night.” She said low wages provide “only about half what is needed to support their families. The low wage means many of the women are forced into prostitution, sometimes after drinking with a client to reach a sales quota.” She added: “Unions are also troubled by reports that many well-known beer brands are now aggressively expanding their markets into China using similar marketing strategies. Heineken is reported to already have 1,200 beer girls operating in China where there is proportionately a much larger workforce of women that could face the prospect

of the 20 per cent HIV/AIDS related deaths seen in Cambodia.”

- [ACTU news release](#). [Fairtrade Beer](#). [Beergirls.org](#).

Canada: Job-related cancer killed firefighter

Days after he died from colon cancer, a firefighter finally won a legacy that will help other firefighters hit with job-related illnesses. Joe Adamkowski, 49, died on 14 May before learning the Workplace Safety Insurance Board had approved his claim for job-related cancer compensation. The decision will help firefighters focus on getting better and not having to have their claims recognised, said Scott Marks, president of the Toronto Professional Fire Fighters Association. He said in Ontario “it is getting to the point that claims will be recognised and we don't have to jump through political hoops” to win them. Ontario still has a long way to go to catch up with a number of other Canadian provinces. Last year firefighters in British Columbia (BC), Canada won a new law recognising primary site brain cancer, primary site bladder cancer, primary site kidney cancer, primary non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, primary site ureter cancer, primary site colorectal cancer and primary leukaemia as occupational diseases associated with long-time work as a firefighter ([Risks 231](#)). This change to the Workers Compensation Act in BC created a 'rebuttable presumption' which means the onus will be on compensation authorities or the employer to bring forward proof to establish why a worker should not be eligible for compensation rather than placing the burden of proof on a sick firefighter. Similar presumptions have been enacted for firefighters in the provinces of Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia. None of these cancers are recognised by the UK government as eligible for industrial injuries benefits payouts.

- [Toronto Sun](#). [Southern Maryland Online](#).

- Hazards [cancer](#) and [work and health](#) webpages. [US firefighters' union IAFF webpages on presumption laws](#) in the US and Canada.

China: Bankers arrested over mine deaths

Two bankers were arrested last week for their alleged links to a coalmine accident in northern China that left at least 57 miners missing and feared dead. The official Xinhua news agency reports at least 15 officials have been arrested, including two from the Zuoyun county branch of the Agricultural Bank of China, who are suspected of “responsibility” in the accident. Miners told managers to cease mining due to rising water levels six days before the 18 May mass flooding, but were ordered to continue mining. Mine supervisors did not report the accident immediately, and reportedly tried to cover it up by paying off the victim’s families, destroying evidence and initially saying that only four men were trapped. The State Council, China's cabinet, has ordered a special inquiry into the accident and dispatched an investigation team to the mine. Also on 18 May, near Beijing, a coal mine collapsed in Fangshan District, killing five miners. The mine is owned by Jingmei Coal, part of the Beijing Coal Group. These two mid-May tragedies follow a fierce explosion at the Wayaobao Coal Mine in Shaanxi Province on 29 April. It killed 32. Fatalities occurred in other Chinese mining sectors as well over the past month. On 13 May, at last three were confirmed dead after the Dalongshan Iron Mine collapsed in Anhui Province. On 30 April, in an effort to heighten production, the Zhen’an County Gold Mining Co. in Shaanxi Province raised water levels on a dam, which then burst and killed 17 villagers.

- [ABC Radio Australia](#). [ICEM in brief](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Ireland: Call for action on killer bosses

Campaigners in Ireland are demanding legal action against employers guilty of health and safety breaches. The call comes after figures released in May showed 73 people died in work-related accidents last year, the highest annual number of workplace deaths recorded for more than a decade. The campaigners say compliance with health and safety regulations remains relatively low and the penalties have been, to a large extent, insignificant. Of 40 companies taken to court last year, 85 per cent were found guilty and fined a total of 463,338 (£317,000). Trade unions and compliant companies are keen to see more companies fined for flouting the regulations. Corporate manslaughter legislation introduced last September in the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act will raise the penalties and could have serious implications for directors, managers and other officials who are found guilty of endangering their workers. “Section 80 of the Safety Health and Welfare Act, which makes explicit the responsibilities of directors and managers, was only introduced last September,” said the Law Reform Commission director of research, Raymond Byrne, “so none of the 2005 convictions would have been under the new act.” He added: “On conviction on indictment for a more serious offence, the maximum fine is 3 million (£2 million), imprisonment for up to two years, or both.” Denis Farrell, the deputy general secretary of the Building and Allied Trades Union (Batu), said: “The construction industry needs legislation and serious penalties.” The Irish safety authorities signalled a shift to more voluntary approaches in June 2004, with the creation of the first US style voluntary protection programmes ([Risks 165](#)). The union SIPTU in May this year called for action after figures showed a massive upturn in injuries and occupational disease cases ([Risks 256](#)).

- [Sunday Business Post](#).
- [TUC/Hazards deadly business campaign](#).

Japan: Government sued for asbestos neglect

Asbestos victims are suing the Japanese government following what they say has been decades of neglect in dealing with a known health hazard. In the first group lawsuit against the government over asbestos, the eight plaintiffs say the government is responsible for their suffering because it took no action against factories that produced or used asbestos, despite being fully aware nearly 70 years ago of asbestos-related health problems. They are seeking a total of 244 million yen (£1.2 million). The plaintiffs include four former factory workers between 64- and 79-years-old with asbestos-related diseases. The other plaintiffs are family members of two workers and two residents who died of the illnesses at or near factories that handled asbestos in the Sennan district in southern Osaka Prefecture. The plaintiffs said the central government conducted surveys on at least 1,000 workers at 19 factories in the Sennan district and other areas with asbestos between 1937 and 1940. The results showed that about 60 per cent of people who had worked for 10 to 15 years in those areas suffered from asbestosis. The rate shot up to 100 per cent among those working for 20 years or more. The plaintiffs said factory doctors at the time called for government regulations to prevent further harm, but the state neglected its duties to supervise those plants and protect human lives. They say this inaction violates the principle of respecting human lives under Article 13 of the Constitution.

- [Asahi Shimbun](#). [Japan Times](#).

RESOURCES

Stress updates and workshops

HSE has updated its stress webpages to include more information on its stress management standards and details of a series of free workshops. The free, one-day stress workshops are scheduled to start this month and will run through to November. The focus will be on

reducing work-related stress using HSE's management standards approach. HSE say the workshops are aimed at the five sectors reporting the highest levels of stress-related ill-health: Education; health services; central government; local authorities; and financial services. A number of objective scientific studies place construction and manufacturing jobs high on the workplace stress league table, but these do not appear in HSE's highest risk ranking.

- [HSE stress webpages](#). [Details of the HSE stress workshops](#) or email HSE for details of the [Health](#), [Education](#), [Central Government](#), [Local Government](#) and [Finance](#) workshops.
- Making the stress Management Standards work: How to apply the Standards in your workplace [[pdf](#)].

EVENTS AND COURSES

Union occupational health seminar, 21 June, Newcastle

A union organised seminar in Newcastle will look at key features of occupational health strategies and will also develop a trade union approach to employers' duties under the Disability Discrimination Act. Attendees will also be updated on a union-led Disability Champions Project, will be introduced to Workplace Health Connect (an initiative for providing occupational health and safety advice and guidance to small and medium sized employers) and will learn about 'everyday sport', a Sport-England led programme for promoting physical activity at work. The day also includes the Annual General Meeting of the Northern TUC Health and Safety Forum.

- [Union occupational health seminar](#), 9:30am to 3.00pm 21 June, Civic Centre, Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear. Further details from [Melanie Lowden](#), Northern TUC, telephone 0191 227551.

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