



Risks Newsletter



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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

Shopwork red card bid to stop red mist

Up to half a million shopworkers suffer verbal abuse every day, a report by the retail union Usdaw suggests. As a centrepiece of the union's campaign against the growing problem, shopworkers on 12 July - Respect for Shopworkers day - handed customers red cards to remind them to respect staff. The union's report found 95 per cent of those questioned had experienced verbal abuse. It says shopworkers suffer "disgusting" verbal abuse every day, forcing many to quit their jobs. Usdaw's research also concluded there has been a huge increase in swearing, sexist comments and other forms of taunts from "out of control" shoppers. The union says last year verbal abuse of shop staff "shot up by an alarming 35 per cent." The red cards warn that anyone abusing staff can be removed from stores or even prosecuted. Usdaw general secretary John Hannett said: "The red card is a reminder to the public that if they feel themselves losing control in a shop, to take a step back, think about their actions and understand that no situation in a shop, no matter how stressful, gives you the right to verbally abuse a retail worker." He added: "Most shoppers would never think of physically assaulting a shopworker, but many seem to think it is alright to scream the most disgusting abuse into the faces of retail workers."

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

Union back safety campaign on foreign lorries

Lorry drivers' unions have joined with vehicle operators to call for more stringent checks on foreign lorries working in the UK, after government inspectors found they were three times as likely to be breaking safety rules. The groups say the number of operating offences by foreign lorries is increasing, notably drivers' hours breaches and overloading, and say foreign lorries are now involved in a disproportionately

high number of accidents. Transport unions URTU and TGWU and trade bodies the Freight Transport Association (FTA) and the Road Haulage Association (RHA) agreed the united approach last month. TGWU's Ron Webb said: "Whether drivers are from the UK or visiting from Europe we must ensure that all UK road users are protected by the operation of safe vehicles driven by safe drivers. We fully expect UK enforcement authorities, notably VOSA (the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency) and the police, to apply the same high standards to foreign vehicles as they quite correctly apply to UK vehicles and drivers." Bob Monks of URTU said: "Foreign vehicles and their drivers entering the UK are faced with different and less familiar traffic and driving conditions. But we need UK enforcement authorities to ensure that our foreign visitors are obliged to meet the same safety levels as we expect in the UK." In a joint submission to the government-convened Road Haulage Task Group, FTA and RHA called for foreign lorries working in the UK to be required to register details of ownership and vehicle records to assist the work of UK enforcement authorities. At present VOSA and the police have instant access to information regarding UK based vehicles but little or no information regarding foreign vehicles. VOSA has said thousands of foreign lorries are to be pulled over for checks in a year-long campaign after government inspectors found that they were three times as likely as British trucks to be breaking safety rules. VOSA plans to make a five-fold increase in the number of checks on foreign lorries, with inspections rising to 22,500 over the next year.

- [RHA news release](#). [TGWU news release](#). [The Times](#). [Transport News Network](#).

Chauffeurs driven into the ground

A new GMB survey of chauffeur drivers has found they are working dangerous long hours and are under constant pressure from well heeled bosses to work in excess of 70 hours per week. GMB has now joined forces with road safety charity Brake to push for official action to tackle

the resulting safety and health risks in transport's private hire sector. They are demanding measures including: A full enquiry into the long hours culture of the chauffeur industry, the application of the Working Time Regulations to the industry with no option to opt-out, and enforcement of existing regulations. The survey found half of the drivers interviewed averaged at least 70 hours a week at work. Most drivers were not getting the minimum required rest breaks. Bert Schouwenburg, organiser with the GMB professional drivers' branch, said: "How many deaths on our roads are due directly to sleep deprivation as a result of the pressure put on professional drivers by their employers to work long hours? The government must take action on our recommendations and enforce the laws that are designed to protect all road users." Brake's Cathy Keeler said the survey findings were "extremely disturbing." She added: "Employers and drivers need to wake up to the fact that tiredness and driving are a potentially lethal combination. The government needs to tighten up the law and provide effective enforcement to ensure that employers do not put pressure on drivers to work horrendous shifts, putting themselves and other innocent road users in danger."

- [GMB news release](#). [Brake](#).

Call for action on transport security

Marking the 7 July first anniversary of the London bombings, transport unions have remembered the dead, injured and bereaved, and have repeated their calls for safety lessons to be learned. London Underground union RMT said a year on Tube security remained a "confused mess". RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "In the wake of the bombings we called for a raft of measures, including breathing apparatus for frontline staff, improved training, a second qualified crew member on trains, and action on train radios, and it is unacceptable that we are still asking a year on." He added: "Our members and the emergency services responded selflessly and professionally to the July 7 attacks, and it is

time there were systems in place that stop exposing them and the travelling public to unnecessary risk." Steve Hart, the London regional secretary of the bus workers' union TGWU, paid tribute to all those affected by the blasts, adding "we acknowledge the TGWU members who drove their buses full of injured passengers to hospitals and those who went back into central London, without hesitation, to evacuate stranded bus passengers once the all clear was given. Our members may have been privatised but their actions last year showed that they remain public service workers committed to the public service ethos." Keith Norman, general secretary of the train drivers' union ASLEF, said: "I am sure I speak for all ASLEF members when I offer my heartfelt sympathy to all those involved in the bombings – and express my hope that the carnage of 12 months ago will encourage us all to work for the understanding, tolerance and fortitude that will build a world of peace."

- [RMT news release](#). [TGWU news release](#). [ASLEF news release](#).

Unions and Amec set offshore standard

Two offshore unions have hailed an agreement with international project-management and service company Amec on the use of foreign workers. GMB and Amicus announced this week that non-UK labour recruited for a project in the North Sea this summer would have the same terms and conditions as people working alongside them from this country. The agreement involving 150 people from the Philippines covers pay, holidays, training and health and safety. The workers were recruited after it emerged the skill shortage in this country had left Amec with no option but to recruit the 150 workers from south-east Asia for the multimillion-pound North Sea oil project. A spokesperson for Amec said: "We recently recruited 100 UK workers for our North Sea hook-up and commissioning operations, but the numbers were not enough for us to meet the peak workload over the next few months. We and the partnering trades unions -

Amicus and GMB - worked closely together to agree a solution which ensures that the workers here on a temporary basis from the Philippines are employed under the Offshore Contractors' Association terms and conditions.” Keith Hazlewood, GMB national secretary for offshore, commented: “This agreement maintains the principle of being paid the rate for the job and to stop any exploitation of non-UK labour being used as a cheap option.” Amicus regional officer Graham Tran is now hopeful that other companies, if they have to recruit from abroad, will follow the Amec example and sign up to a similar agreement. He added any overseas worker “should be getting paid the same rate for the job - there must be no compromise on safety or entry qualifications, and these people should only be used as a 'top up' if a company can't get the right people in the UK.”

- [GMB news release](#). [Press and Journal](#).

Union victory on Sunday opening

A campaign by retail union Usdaw to prevent an extension of Sunday trading hours has been successful. Trade and industry secretary Alistair Darling announced on 6 July that Sunday shopping hours for large stores will not be extended. Thousands of Usdaw members had written to their MPs asking them to oppose any increase to the current six hour opening limit on Sundays for big stores. Usdaw’s survey of 4,000 retail staff showed that 80 per cent already had to work on Sundays and 95 per cent opposed any extension to the six hour limit. “We’re delighted the government has listened to the voice of millions of Britain’s retail staff,” said Usdaw general secretary John Hannett. “We have run a highly effective, fact based campaign relying on our members’ evidence rather than emotion.” He added: “Urdaw members are grateful for the support of Britain’s shopping public who told us they were happy with the present six hour limit and to the 300 plus MPs who signed an Early Day Motion opposing longer hours and supported our campaign.”

- [Urdaw news release](#). [DTI news release](#).

OTHER NEWS

Families unite against work killers

Relatives of people killed at work have created a new national campaigning group to push for justice for safety crimes. Fack – families against corporate killers – says families bereaved as a result of unsafe and unhealthy workplaces are angry and frustrated. They feel they have been robbed twice: Once of their loved ones in incidents that should have been prevented by employers simply obeying the law on workplace health and safety; and secondly of their right to justice. Fack, launched at this weekend’s National Hazards Conference in Manchester, says it will campaign to stop workers and others being killed in preventable incidents and will direct bereaved families to sources of support. The campaign is seeking urgent government action “to halt the complacency about deaths at work and decent laws with will bring dangerously negligent bosses to justice.” Fack wants a review of the way work-related deaths are investigated and the way families are treated. And it says workers and safety reps must be given more rights to protect themselves against exposure to unacceptable risks to their lives and health. Hilda Palmer of the Hazards Campaign, which is supporting Fack, said: “Fack has grown out of the pioneering work of individual families like Ann Elvin and the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign, and wants to create a united voice to all families devastated by a death at work.” She added that Fack “aims to unite families in one strong voice to demand an end to work-related deaths and to direct bereaved families to sources of legal help and emotional support.”

- [Fack news release](#) and [website](#). [National Hazards Conference](#).
- Find out more: [fack](#) c/o Hazards Campaign, Windrush Millennium Centre, 70 Alexandra

Road, Manchester M16 7WD.

Four prosecutions and almost a funeral

A firm fined four times in its six year history for criminal safety breaches came close to killing a man in the latest incident. Sonae (UK) Limited was this week fined £70,000 and ordered to pay £77,046 costs at Liverpool Crown Court following a fire and dust explosion. The prosecution followed a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation of the June 2002 incident at its premises on Knowsley Industrial Park, where it manufactures and processes particleboard. Employee John Henry Thomas was seriously injured as a result of the explosion, suffering blast injuries to both lungs, rib fractures, a head injury, fractures to his neck vertebrae and an injury to the left elbow. All three previous incidents had also resulted in serious injuries. HSE inspector Tim Beaumont, who led the investigation into the latest incident, said the factory's design and construction had not taken adequate account of safety. "The production line was made up of sections designed and installed by different suppliers. No-one made sure that when everything was put together all the risks were properly managed. So in June 2002 when some smouldering material entered the production line it caused a fire that was able to spread through the entire production line." He added: "This incident shows that companies responsible for managing a complex production process need to carry out careful assessments of risk. Companies should not just look at small sections of the process in isolation. They need to think about the bigger picture and manage the risks arising from the whole production line." The company had earlier paid out almost £100,000 in fines and costs after safety prosecutions in 2000, 2001 and 2004, each incident involving a serious injury. The firm has also been fined for environmental offences.

- [HSE news release.](#)

Trust fined for latex blunder

The health trust running Swindon's Great Western Hospital has been fined after a nurse with a known allergy to latex was given latex gloves to wear. Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust was fined £1,000 and ordered to pay £10,000 in costs after admitted failing to properly assess the risk to nurse Wendy Roberts of wearing latex gloves. Jonathan Cooper, prosecuting on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), told Swindon Magistrates' Court: "During her training Mrs Roberts did have episodes of eczema and noticed dryness and cracks of her skin, particularly when she was using latex gloves. These incidences were recorded in her occupational health records, which noted that the trust should order low allergy gloves for her." On returning to work from maternity leave, she was provided with latex gloves, he said, causing her to develop skin problems and subsequently visit the trust's occupational health therapist. A statement issued by Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust said: "Although we did have an appropriate policy in place at the time it was not followed through adequately. This was an isolated incident which occurred three years ago and centres on the single issue of failing to properly assess the risk to a member of staff of wearing gloves made of latex, to which she was sensitive. Although the side effects of itching hands and dry skin were not serious, we were greatly concerned by the case and immediately took steps to prevent a re-occurrence. With the measures we now have in place, this type of incident should not happen again." Several health workers have recently received six figure compensation payouts after suffering serious and career ending reactions to latex products ([Risks 263](#)).

- [Swindon Advertiser.](#)
- [Latex Allergy Support Group.](#)

Miscarriage welder wins damages

A female welder who raised safety concerns when pregnant and who went on to win a sex discrimination claim against her father's company has been awarded £7,500 for injury to feelings. Suzanne Bunning, 31, took GT Bunning of Dereham, Norfolk to an industrial tribunal after suffering a miscarriage. When she became pregnant her employer – the firm is run by her now estranged father and two uncles - carried out a risk assessment and concluded her welding job was not high risk. This followed a request to be transferred to an easier job when she discovered she was pregnant. This was initially refused but the firm subsequently gave her a job in a stores area. She later miscarried and resigned a month later. She claimed at a tribunal the miscarriage was due to the stress of being forced to continue manual work at the firm. A 2003 Employment Appeals Tribunal overturned a ruling of the initial tribunal and upheld her claim. It argued that the requirement that she return to her old job or to another medium risk job amounted to a detriment for the purpose of the Sex Discrimination Act and also that it was capable of amounting to a breach of contract. Her claim for unfair dismissal was rejected, however. The £7,500 was awarded at a remedy hearing in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, in June. Partner Tom Fletcher said the tribunal had not taken into account that the onus is on the employer to explain the risks to a pregnant employee. He said: “It seems an employer can send a pregnant employee into any risk if she doesn't complain or isn't aware of the risk. They are putting the emphasis on the pregnant woman to ensure her own safety when the duty is on the employer to avoid the risk. This tribunal finds there is no duty or responsibility to ensure pregnant employees are safe. It's amazing.”

- [BBC News Online](#). Bunning v Bunning EAT/0136/03.

Royal Mail not delivering on safety

A Royal Mail preoccupation with productivity has seen safety sidelined, a damning official report has found. The Health and Safety

Executive (HSE) report on Royal Mail's delivery work across the UK found local managers were poorly trained, unable to manage safety effectively and lacked support and authority. At national level, changes in work organisation had been poorly thought out and badly implemented. The report gives the company 10 recommendations to improve its act. It was instigated after CWU area safety reps and union officials complained of rising accidents and falling standards. CWU says the report is “heavily critical of Royal Mail's health and safety management” and highlights a “cavalier” attribute to safety. It adds that a number of improvement notices were served on Royal Mail during the inspection programme, which is about to enter its third year. Commenting on the report, CWU national safety officer Dave Joyce said: “The HSE's findings say a lot about the lack of compliance with safe working methods in Royal Mail delivery and what's clear from the report is that local Royal Mail managers lack knowledge, commitment and resources and as a result are undermining safe systems of work and have failed to put safety policies into practice.” He added: “Regrettably, the switch to the single daily delivery and in particular ‘job and finish’ has simply made things worse and safety issues have been sidelined in pursuit of ‘getting the job done at all costs’. Hopefully the HSE involvement and enforcement action will call to account managers top down who have adopted a cavalier attitude to safety.”

- [CWU news release](#).

HSE dismisses sick public sector myths

Public sector workers are no more likely to go sick than private sector workers in similarly sized firms, the Health and Safety Executive has found. But its research did find that some private sector employers, particularly smaller firms, were inclined to under-report true absence levels. HSE's Survey on Workplace Absence, Sickness and (ill) Health (SWASH) 2005 suggests differences in public and private sector sickness absence rates are small, averaging just 0.3 days

per employee, when account is taken of the size of an organisation and differences in the age and gender profiles. The survey, based on 10,000 interviews with employees, confirmed that levels of absence were higher in organisations with more than 250 employees, which would include virtually all public sector employers. HSE says the majority of private sector employees work in small or medium sized organisations, which are prone to under-report sickness. Older employees take more days sickness absence in total than their younger counterparts. However, young people have more spells of short-term absence than older employees. The survey also found that public sector workers are more likely to work when they are ill than those in the private sector. There were notable differences in sick pay arrangements between the private and public sectors, with over one-fifth of private sector respondents reporting that they received no pay for the first three days of continuous absence. The annual CBI/AXA sickness absence figures, published in May ([Risks 257](#)), put public sector absence at 30 per cent higher than the private sector, but failed to take account of organisational size, gender, age and reporting differences between the sectors. Sickness levels overall were at a 20 year low, CBI said. The new HSE report echoes the findings of ‘Sicknote Britain?’, a report last year from the TUC ([Risks 189](#)).

- [HSE news release. Personnel Today.](#)
- [Hazards sickness news and resources.](#)

Two million shaken, not heard

More than two million workers in Great Britain are exposed to either excessive noise or hand arm vibration, says the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which has this week launched a national programme to tackle the problems. The initiative’s two key objectives are “to eliminate new cases of occupational induced hearing damage” and “to control new cases of hand arm vibration syndrome (HAVS) sufficiently to enable workers to remain at work without

disability.” The programme launch included speakers from industries with a noise and vibration risk, including shipbreaking, tunnelling, recycling and tool hire, employers’ organisations, HSE and Rob Miguel of the union Amicus. Sayeed Khan, chief medical officer at EEF and a Health and Safety Commissioner, said: “Help us to help you – HSE is keen to promote good practice and identify problem areas that remain.” HSE says the new programme will include “stakeholder engagement and inspection activity to promote the use of good practice controls measures to control exposure of workers”, and initially will focus on hand arm vibration exposure in foundries, heavy fabrication and construction. HSE’s website includes information on vibration and noise control, and on the new programme.

- [HSE news release. HSE vibration webpages. HSE noise webpages.](#)

Risk assessment is the easy bit

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is urging businesses to spend less time dotting 'i's and crossing 't's on risk assessments and more time on putting practical actions into effect. Its revamped risk assessment guide features examples that spell out, in plain English, what is - and what is not - expected. HSE's deputy chief executive, Jonathan Rees, said: “We want to save lives, not tie businesses up in red tape - good risk assessment is the way to achieve this. Risk assessment is at the heart of sensible health and safety.” He added that risk assessments “should be a practical way of protecting people from real harm and suffering, not a bureaucratic back-covering exercise. On its own paperwork never saved a life, it needs to be a means to an end, resulting in actions that protect people in practice.” HSE says the revamped guidance, ‘Five steps to risk assessment’, has been simplified to make it even easier for normal business people, not just health and safety experts, to use. It now places greater emphasis on making sure that decisions are put into practice. TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson welcomed the new guide.

“This new practical guidance shows that risk assessment is not rocket science. It shows clearly what employers need to do to obey the law. It also shows the need to involve workers in the process.” He added: “Sadly many employers have still done no risk assessment and we hope this publication will be used by all sectors where the basic approach is relevant.”

- [HSE news release. HSE risk management webpages](#), including online risk assessment guide. Five steps to risk assessment, INDG163(rev2) [[pdf](#)].

Nanotechnology probe announced

A nanotechnology policy review has been ordered by the government, two years after an officially commissioned report raised safety concerns. Ministers have asked the Council for Science and Technology (CST) to undertake an independent review of the government's response in the two years since the Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering report, ‘Nanoscience and nanotechnologies: opportunities and uncertainties’. The 2004 report called for a precautionary approach and concluded the existing laws on safety and nanotechnology - products produced using microscopic engineering of substances - were not up to the job and must be reviewed, with additional requirements introduced on testing and labelling ([Risks 167](#)). At the time, the government said it would work with the Health and Safety Executive to address some of the concerns raised. The new review will be led by Professor Sir John Beringer, who said: “We will be taking a close look at what the government has done, whether it has responded quickly enough, and how well prepared it is for new developments in nanotechnology.” TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson commented: “We welcome this review. While the TUC welcomes Britain's emergence as a leader in this field, the advances must not be at the expense of the health of workers, consumers, or the environment.” A letter this week to the Independent newspaper from groups including

Corporate Watch, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, said: “We urge the British government to scrap the current plans for a voluntary notification scheme and to introduce robust regulation. This should be based on the level of scientific uncertainty regarding the safety of existing products and comprehensive research into the health and environmental risks and other potential impacts posed by nanomaterials.”

- [DTI news release. CST call for evidence](#): Submissions should be made [to CST](#) no later than 2 October 2006. [The Independent](#).
- [Hazards nanotech news and resources. TUC nanotechnology factsheet](#).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australia: Boss wants advance notice of sick leave

Australia’s bad bosses have taken full advantage after the government took an axe to basic employment protection. Workers have been denied access to union safety training ([Risks 255](#)), refused entry to inspect hazardous workplace or investigate accidents ([Risks 259](#)) and have been threatened with fines for standing up against unsafe and unhealthy conditions ([Risks 249](#)). But now one employer had gone a step further and demanded his staff warn him at least 12 hours in advance if they are going to be sick. The government's Office of Workplace Services is investigating claims that a 21-year-old mining worker, Lorissa Stevens, was bullied and sacked when she refused to sign a personal contract – an AWA, introduced to undermine union collective agreements - containing the right to fine her if she did not give 12 hours notice of taking sick leave. Office of Workplace Services director Nicholas Wilson said that “what has sparked our interest is particularly the potential for people to be docked pay as a result of taking sick leave.” Under the sick leave clause in the

contract refused by Ms Stevens, she could have been fined \$200 (£80) and had her pay docked.

- [The Age. Daily Telegraph.](#)

Global: Greed, aggression, murder and asbestos

Stories of greed, aggression and murder this week highlight the shameful past, present and future of asbestos, the world's biggest ever workplace killer. James Hardie, the Australian company that agreed two years ago to create the biggest ever compensation fund for workers dying as a result of its asbestos business ([Risks 233](#)), hasn't yet handed over a cent. It did however just award its CEO Louis Gries a \$2.5 million (£1m) pay hike. One of India's largest unions has announced a campaign to stop a ship believed to be lined with asbestos from being dismantled there, calling it "aggression" by the developed world. The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) said it was teaming up with environmental group Greenpeace, which opposes the dismantling of the 11-storey Blue Lady at a shipbreaking yard in Alang in Gujarat state. In Spain, work has begun to demolish a factory in San Vicente de Raspeig where eight employees contracted asbestos disease during the 1990s, and later died. A prosecutor has presented eight charges of murder in a court case currently being heard in Alicante, and 29 counts of injury caused by serious negligence. The accused are two managers and two company doctors, for failing to adopt adequate health and safety measures.

- [Workers Online. AMWU news release. Yahoo News. Bloomberg.com. Typically Spanish.](#)

Palestine: IFJ condemns shooting of photographer

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has condemned the shooting of Palestinian photographer Mohammad Az Zanon. He was

shot by Israeli forces as he took photographs in Gaza. "The IFJ is calling on the Israeli government to protect all media staff covering the conflict in the region," said IFJ general secretary Aidan White. "Palestinian photographers and journalists should not be the targets of the military or anyone else in the region and we are urging the Israeli and Palestinian governments to make sure they are protected." Az Zanon, a photographer for Palestine's Ma'an News Agency, was shot last week while taking photographs in Zaitoun, where he lives. He was first hit by shrapnel in the mouth and finger but kept on working, the agency said. He was then shot in the stomach by Israeli soldiers. He underwent surgery after the shooting and is still in the hospital. "These ruthless attacks must stop," said Naim Tobassi, president of the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate (PJS). At least nine journalists and media staffers, including British cameraman James Miller, have been killed in the Occupied Territories since 2000, all by Israeli gunfire. IFJ says in most cases, the army has failed to conduct serious investigations or publicly account for them. In 2004, IFJ and the International News Safety Institute announced a safety programme for journalists in Palestine ([Risks 171](#)). INSI this month launched 'The Safety Zone', a quarterly newsletter on journalist safety issues.

- [IFJ news release. Ma'an News Agency report. INSI news release.](#)
- [International News Safety Institute. The Safety Zone.](#)

Ukraine: Chernobyl thyroid cancer risk confirmed

A new study has confirmed a substantially increased risk of thyroid cancer among people exposed to radiation during childhood and adolescence after the Chernobyl disaster. The July report in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute said a total of 13,127 of the 32,385 individuals living in the most contaminated area of the Ukraine during the nuclear plant

meltdown and who were under 18 at the time were screened between 1998 and 2000. The team from Columbia University in New York found that 45 cases of thyroid cancer occurred compared with 11.2 cases that would have been expected in the absence of radiation exposure. The study found a “strong” relationship between radiation exposure and thyroid cancer risk; the higher the dose, the greater the risk. “We estimate that 75 per cent of the thyroid cancer cases would have been avoided in the absence of radiation,” the researchers said, adding: “This estimate demonstrates a substantial contribution of radioactive iodines to the excess of thyroid cancer that followed the Chernobyl accident.” An April report from Greenpeace said latest official figures on the Chernobyl toll from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) were a “whitewash” that “hugely underestimated” the magnitude of the problem ([Risks 253](#)).

- [PlanetArk](#). Mykola D Tronko, Geoffrey R Howe and others. [A cohort study of thyroid cancer and other thyroid diseases after the Chernobyl accident: Thyroid cancer in Ukraine detected during first screening](#), JNCI, volume 98, no.13, pages 897-903, 2006.

USA: Toxic chemicals more expensive

There’s a high price to pay for toxic chemicals – literally. A US study has found toxic chemicals are more expensive than switching to safer alternatives. Experts from the Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI) at the University of Massachusetts Lowell identified safer, cheaper alternatives to five heavily used hazardous chemicals. The ‘Five chemicals alternatives assessment study’, commissioned by the state authorities, investigated whether less toxic alternatives were available for lead, formaldehyde, perchloroethylene, hexavalent chromium, and di(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate (DEHP). The chemicals are widely used in the drycleaning, wire and cable, metal finishing, healthcare, cosmetology and other industries. TURI conducted an alternatives assessment

comparing the five chemicals with approximately 100 alternatives within 16 applications. The \$250,000 (£136,000) study found for every application studied, at least one alternative was commercially available, was likely to meet the technical requirements of some users, and was likely to have reduced environmental and occupational health and safety impacts. “The scientific assessment that TURI took on provides all of us - legislators, consumers, and industry - with critical information that will lead us to selecting safer substitutions that makes sense for our individual situations,” said Massachusetts senator Pamela Resor. The findings also won some support from industry. David Wawer, CEO of the Massachusetts Chemistry and Technology Alliance, said: “Because TURI worked with all impacted Massachusetts industries and other stakeholders, we now have a solid platform of research to create academic, industry, and community partnerships in the pursuit of new technological processes for Massachusetts manufacturers.” Legislation to phase out the five chemicals would now be brought forward, Senator Resor said. She added the bill would “reduce exposure to both the workers in industrial plants as well as to the general population.”

- [TURI news release](#). Five chemicals alternatives assessment study, executive summary [[pdf](#)]. [Metro West Daily News](#).
- [TURI website](#).

RESOURCES

Vehicles and waste and recycling

GMB has produced a guide to the use of vehicles in the waste and recycling industry, which it says “is proportionally the most dangerous industry in which to work in the UK.” The guide says one of the major factors involved in a number of serious accidents is the size of the vehicles used and the increased potential for collision between the vehicle and pedestrians or workers. GMB’s

guide includes an outline of risk assessment requirements, managing and reducing risks, training, and vehicle use.

- [Considerations for the use of vehicles in the waste and recycling industry](#), GMB guide.

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/](http://www.tuc.org.uk/s) website pages on health and safety. See what's on offer from [TUC Publications](#) and [What's On in health and safety](#).
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