



Risks Newsletter



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Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 14,000 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

Work health watchdog "too under-resourced"

to work

The body charged with protecting the occupational health of 29 million British workers is too under-resourced to operate effectively, the union representing official health and safety specialists has warned. Prospect, the union for Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors, scientists and specialists, says it is fearful that a current review of HSE's Corporate Medical Unit (CMU) will spell its death knell at a time when the HSE is seeking to shed 250-350 jobs as a result of a funding shortfall ([Risks 270](#)). The unit, formerly the Employment Medical Advisory Service (EMAS), has dropped from 120 staff in the early 90s – half doctors and half nurses – to the equivalent of seven full-time doctors working as medical inspectors and 25 nursing staff working as occupational health inspectors today. Prospect says allowing the HSE's medical service to wind-up completely would be bad for firms and workers and could also breach the government's national and international legal obligations. Steven Kay, chair of Prospect's HSE branch, said: "Not only does the UK lag way behind the rest of Europe in occupational health provision; the parlous state of our occupational medicine facilities means the true size of the problem has been underestimated." He said HSE estimates of occupational cancer and respiratory disease prevalence, for example, both fell dramatically short of the real figures. In its evidence to the HSE review, the union has called for CMU to be maintained to undertake a strategic role, developing standards for occupational health service provision, raising awareness and contributing to policy formulation in HSE and as part of the government's Health, Work and Well-being strategy. Steve Kay concluded: "The small investment we are calling for is a tiny drop compared to the potential gains to the economy that a more focused approach to occupational health would deliver by reducing the billions lost through ill-health."

- [Prospect news release](#).

BA cabin crew to resist work-while-sick rule

British Airways cabin crew have voted overwhelmingly in favour of strike action in protest at imposed management changes, including a work-while-sick rule to drive down sickness absence. TGWU deputy general secretary Jack Dromey, speaking after the strike vote in which over nine out of 10 workers backed action, said the outcome showed just how serious the situation has become. "BA cabin crew have voted to say the airline has gone too far. BA must rebuild the trust of its cabin crew by negotiating rather than imposing change and by listening to its staff rather than riding roughshod over their concerns," he said. BA chief executive Willie Walsh acknowledged there were genuine concerns among staff about how the firm managed sickness absence - and said he was prepared to negotiate with the union. However BA disputes the union's claim that new sickness absence policies are forcing workers to work while unwell. TGWU negotiators, led by Mr Dromey, have been meeting with senior BA managers this week. The union said the cabin crew's concerns, which include issues over the implementation of sickness absence policies as well as pay grading and on-board staffing and responsibility levels, had built up over the last two years but had failed to be addressed properly by the company's senior management. A poll this week on the Guardian website showed overwhelming support for the action.

- [TGWU news release](#) and [commentary on the Guardian poll](#). [The Guardian](#) and [Guardian poll](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- [Hazards sickness webpages](#).

Government must 'neutralise' workplace allergies

The union Amicus is calling for action from the government to combat workplace allergies. Amicus health and safety officer Rob Miguel, a member of the official Advisory Committee for Toxic Substances, put the union's case last week

in evidence to an allergy sub-committee of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology. The union says the incidence of allergic diseases in the UK is rising overall but says workplace-related allergic diseases are being under-reported. It points to a “world’s largest” outbreak of allergic respiratory disease at Birmingham company Powertrain in 2004, where over a hundred employees were eventually developed breathing conditions caused by metalworking fluids ([Risks 255](#)). The union says it is concerned that many of the causes of workplace allergies – “sensitisers” - are not being identified “and therefore not controlled by industry.” It adds that the official government industrial disease compensation system fails to recognise many of the sensitisers that many authorities believe can cause work-related allergies. This means applications for industrial disease benefits are frequently refused. The union says one-third of people suffering from occupational asthma are unemployed and remain unemployed after six years. It is calling for more government funding for prevention and rehabilitation initiatives. Amicus safety officer Rob Miguel commented: “We need tough action from the government to tackle the causes of workplace allergies and to ensure that employment checks do not screen people out of employment who may be susceptible to allergies.” He added: “Amicus is calling on the government for more funding to identify and remove or neutralise the causes of workplace allergies. We want industry to understand it's about addressing and controlling the causes, not screening out so called susceptible people.”

- [Amicus news release](#) and [submission summary](#). [House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology sub-committee hearings on allergy and allergic disease](#).
- [Hazards work and health webpages](#).

RMT stands up for train safety

Rail union RMT has warned there could be industrial action if any workers at the First Great

Western rail company are victimised for refusing dangerous work. The union says its members have raised concerns that the firm is “playing a very dangerous game” with new high-speed train services, where it says have been reintroduced in south-east Cornwall without adequate risk assessments. RMT wants risk assessments of stations in the region, including Devonport, Saltash and St Germans. Local paper The Herald reported a letter sent from RMT general secretary Bob Crow to union members described many of the stations as “badly lit, unevenly surfaced, un-staffed and sharply curved.” The union letter adds, the paper says, that the firm has refused to undertake assessments of these services due to “grandfather rights” - as high-speed trains used the stations in the 1980s. The letter also said the union could ballot for industrial action if staff were disciplined for refusing to work because of safety fears. RMT regional organiser for Wales and West, Brian Curtis, told The Herald a meeting between the union and the company this week was “positive” and joint risk assessments would be undertaken. “Once the assessments have been done I will meet with the company to take the matter forward,” he said. “The company and union both want a safe system of work. We just have to work out how we do that.”

- [Plymouth Herald](#).

TGWU calls for overhaul of coach industry safety

Transport union TGWU is calling for a thorough review of training regimes within the coach industry and a speed up of a new driver certification process. Speaking at the union's national coaching conference earlier this month, TGWU national organiser Graham Stevenson said the union wanted to ensure the travelling public was reassured about safety in the industry. He said this meant the focus had to be on ensuring training standards were high, that schedules were realistic and allowed for some flexibility, and that drivers were familiar with the routes they were expected to drive. He added

that the union was asking “are the training standards rigorous and high for all drivers? Is the sub-contracting culture appropriate for passenger and driver safety? Why are drivers routinely instructed to attend training as overtime?” Mr Stevenson said the industry needed to put as much focus on these issues as they had on the vehicle safety issues. He added that there should be an acceleration of the driver certification process to ensure all coach drivers meet the new requirements on the Certification of Professional Competence earlier than the scheduled implementation date of September 2008.

- [TGWU news release](#).

OTHER NEWS

Call for BP chiefs to have bonuses linked to safety

Shareholders are calling for BP directors to have their bonuses linked closer with the company's safety and environmental performance, following incidents such as the March 2005 Texas City refinery fire, where 15 people were killed and 180 were injured. The Local Authority Pension Fund Forum has called on BP chair Peter Sutherland to address the issue of how senior executives' pay is related to non-financial issues. Corporate governance body Pirc, which has been advising the local authority pension funds, said: “Health and safety and environmental criteria should have a more prominent role in the executive remuneration performance indicators of energy companies.” The pressure on BP comes as incoming chief executive Tony Hayward prepares to meet former US Secretary of State James Baker, who earlier this week savaged BP in an a BP-commissioned report into its safety performance in the United States, which said a “corporate blindspot” on safety went right up to the London-based global board, headed by chief executive Lord Browne. Pirc said it was awaiting “with interest” a response from the oil group. BP said this week that annual bonuses for executives were already linked to health and safety and

environmental issues. The company added that Texas City and other problems in the US were partially responsible for Lord Browne's 2005 annual bonus being cut to £1.75m, from £2.28m for the year before – although his overall pay package increased by almost £700,000 ([Risks 249](#)). Lord Browne’s reputation was shredded by the Baker Panel report. It said: “BP executive management apparently believed they were appropriately addressing process safety issues and risks, and it took the tragedy of Texas City to wake BP up to the fact that it was not adequately measuring, tracking, and managing process safety performance.” If Lord Browne had shown as much leadership on safety as he had done climate change and alternative fuels then it would “likely have resulted in a higher level of process safety performance in BP's US refineries,” the panel argued. “Until BP's management, from the group chief executive down through refinery superintendents, consistently articulates a clear message on process safety, it will be difficult to persuade the refining workforce that BP is truly committed on a long-term basis to process safety excellence,” said the report. Lord Browne told reporters the Texas City blast “was a watershed” that would “forever change BP.” However BP had a higher number of fatalities than the other major US refineries prior to the tragedy. Two workers had died at the plant just six months before the Texas City blast ([Risks 217](#)). And another explosion, this time with no injuries, occurred at the same plant less than six months later, in August 2005 ([218](#)).

- [Local Authority Pension Fund Forum news](#). [The Guardian](#). [The Scotsman](#). [Bloomberg News](#). [Financial Times](#). [New York Times](#). [Washington Post](#). [The Herald](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- Confined Space on [the report](#) on [the real story behind the report](#). [Hazards BP safety record webpages](#).
- [BP news release](#) and the full Baker Panel Report [[pdf](#)].

Death number 3 in deep coal mine

A 42-year-old man has been killed as he worked underground at a coal mine. Contract worker Anthony Carrigan became trapped underground when a tunnel wall collapsed on 17 January. He was pronounced dead at the scene. The Health and Safety Executive has launched an investigation. It is the third death at Daw Mill Colliery in Arley, north Warwickshire, in just eight months. Paul Hunt, 45, died on 6 August 2006 after sustaining fatal head injuries at the colliery. Trevor Steeples, aged 46, died on 19 June 2006 after being overcome by a build up of methane gas. After the latest incident, police were called to the UK Coal-owned mine by ambulance staff at the scene. Richard Dodd, of West Midlands Police, said: "The man had been buried underground in the mine. The emergency care practitioner went down the shaft to try and render aid but unfortunately the man had suffered severe traumatic injuries. Resuscitation attempts were made but sadly it was not possible to save the man and he was confirmed dead at the scene." Stuart Oliver of UK Coal said the three deaths were completely unrelated and a thorough investigation would take place. "There has been discussions for some time about the condition of this roadway and that is why there was people carrying out repairs and other work," said Mr Oliver. "The three deaths here have all been in different circumstances. A cluster of fatalities is unheard of I think, particularly at a pit that until June last year had an exemplary safety record." The three deaths are thought to be the first in UK coal mines since 2002. The mine, which employs around 500 workers and is Warwickshire's last remaining pit, produces approximately three million tonnes of coal a year.

- [BBC News Online](#). [Coventry Telegraph](#). [UK Coal](#) webpage on [Daw Mill](#).

The price of a life

Asbestos continues to kill in record numbers – at least 4,000 UK deaths last year – and for many the best they can hope for is some compensation

before they die. Essex pensioner Thomas George has been awarded more than £115,000 after developing the cancer mesothelioma as a result of asbestos exposure as an apprentice. He worked as a lagger's mate for Kitsons Insulation of Barking when he was just 16. He was diagnosed with the deadly cancer in March 2006. The cancer has no cure. Mr George said: "Receiving the compensation marks a period of closure for the family. We have been able to gain a sense of justice and we are now able to enjoy the time we have left together." Thompsons Solicitors represented Mr George. The law firm has also represented railway workers blighted by asbestos disease, with three cases involving British Rail's carriage works in Derby recently receiving what are believed to be six figure settlements. David Ball, 73, who sprayed asbestos onto carriages and who has watched several of his friends die of asbestos disease, was diagnosed with mesothelioma in July 2005. Joan Blower, lost her husband Colin to mesothelioma aged 70 in September last year. She said: "We're so angry with British Rail as Colin was never warned of the dangers of working with this killer substance." The widow of coach fitter John Beadsworth, from Littleover, who died from asbestos-related lung cancer in October 2005 also received a payout. In Wales, Keith Jones, the son of a former worker at Neath's Metal Box can factory, received £60,000 in damages after his mother Beryl died from exposure to asbestos there. He was granted the damages at the Cardiff Civil Justice Centre earlier this month. Mrs Jones worked as a packer and latterly a cleaner at the factory from 1954 to 1968. The judge said he was satisfied "transfer belts" were made of white (chrysotile) asbestos and were used to take cans into ovens, and that asbestos dust had got in to the air. Mrs Jones was diagnosed with mesothelioma in August 2001 and died four months later.

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#). [Derby Evening Telegraph](#). [Western Mail](#).
- [Hazards asbestos news and resources](#).

Crane crash kills Polish worker

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is investigating the death of a worker crushed to death by a crane. The worker, believed to be a Polish national, was killed instantly when a 120ft crane collapsed on a Liverpool city centre building site on the afternoon of 15 January. Police carried out forensic tests at the scene. The dead worker's colleague, 31-year-old Barry Walker, was trapped in the cab of the crane for an hour while firefighters struggled to free him. He suffered back and shoulder injuries when the crane, used on a site building luxury flats, toppled over, crushing six cars. The development is being built by David McLean contractors in Colquitt Street in the city centre. The crane involved in the accident was on hire from Falcon Crane Hire Ltd - the same company involved in a crane collapse in Battersea, London, on 26 September 2006, where a worker and a local resident were killed. Commenting after the latest tragedy, HSE head of operations Mike Cross said a joint investigation with Merseyside Police was underway, and added: "I am urging all building companies on Merseyside to ensure they are following our advice, which if followed, should ensure that these cranes can be operated safely."

- [Liverpool Daily Post](#). [Cranes Today](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- [HSE statement](#), [HSE briefing](#) and tower crane safety alert [[pdf](#)].
- [Battersea Crane Disaster Action Group](#).

Firm fined after four tonne rail truck hits worker

A company has been fined £150,000 after an employee was run over by a four-tonne rail truck. Saint Gobain Pipelines, based at Stanton-by-Dale, Ilkeston, was also ordered to pay £10,000 costs at Derby Crown Court. Roy Howard Moore, 53, received serious leg and pelvic injuries while he was maintaining a conveyor belt on 13 December 2004. The

prosecution was brought by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which said the firm did not have proper procedures in place to protect workers from vehicles at the site. HSE inspector Kevin Wilson said: "Considering the extent of his injuries Mr Moore has made remarkably good progress. This incident could easily have resulted in a fatality." Saint Gobain pleaded guilty to charges of breaching the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 at an earlier hearing before Southern Derbyshire Magistrates' Court. HSE inspector Kevin Wilson said: "It is vitally important that transport movements at workplaces are planned and organised. This means eliminating or reducing potential contact between vehicles and pedestrians by providing effective physical barriers with appropriate crossing points."

- [HSE news release](#). [Nottingham Evening Post](#).

Multiple fines over site death fall

The death of a novice construction worker in an accident "that should never have happened" has resulted in fines and costs totalling nearly £150,000, with site firms, directors, supervisors and two foremen all facing charges. David Moran, aged 31, from Manchester, had no demolition or construction qualifications for the cash-in-hand job at Chesford Grange, Woolston, where he was killed in September 2002. He fell eight feet through a fragile roof. The incident occurred on only his second day working in the industry. A December prosecution at Manchester Crown Court resulted in fines of £87,000, with costs of £57,000. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector Nic Rigby, who headed the investigation, said: "Unfortunately, his death is not unique: on average, one person is killed on a construction site in Great Britain every five or six days and many more are seriously injured." Four companies pleaded guilty while Bernard O'Sullivan, then owner of the site's main contractor, Excavation and Contracting (UK) Ltd, was found guilty earlier this year of failing to ensure non-employees were not exposed to

health and safety risks. The dead man's employer, Elmsgold Haulage Ltd, based in Manchester, along with Excavation and Contracting (UK) Ltd, Dennis O'Connor and John McSweeney, were found responsible for seven health and safety breaches on the site. Elmsgold Haulage was fined £10,000 for each charge and ordered to pay total costs of £9,756. McSweeney was fined £5,000 for each charge and ordered to pay total costs of £5,000. Excavation & Contracting (UK) Ltd was fined £35,000 and ordered to pay £9,972 costs. Bernard O'Sullivan was fined £20,000 and ordered to pay £30,000 costs, and Dennis O'Connor, the site foreman, was fined £2,500 and ordered to pay £2,500 costs. A second foreman was acquitted. Another company, Knight Frank, based in Hanover Square, London, had earlier admitted two charges of breaking health and safety regulations and was fined £3,500 for each offence and order to pay £4,580 towards prosecution costs. According to HSE's Nic Rigby: "This case, which involves the prosecution of two managing directors, a planning supervisor, two demolition companies and a site foreman, must send a strong message to those at all levels of the industry, from the boardroom to the shopfloor, that if they fail to exercise the responsibilities that the law places upon them, no matter who they are in the structure of the project, they will be held to account for those failings."

- [HSE news release. Redhill and Reigate Life.](#)

Serious injuries lead to £12,500 fine

A construction company has had to pay out over £13,000 in fines and costs after flouting safety guidelines. Best Build Limited admitted not taking adequate safety measures to protect a sub-contracted electrician who fell 10ft through a skylight. Neil Nadin suffered serious injuries and had to have an operation to insert pins into his right arm. The hearing at Coalville Magistrates Court was told the accident was at Boothorpe Hall, in Blackfordby, near Ashby, in January last year. Nick Garner, prosecuting for the Health

and Safety Executive (HSE), said the firm had not carried out a risk assessment of the building. Joe Wheeler, a director at Derby-based Best Build, said: "In hindsight, the safety assessment should have been carried out beforehand. It wasn't, and the firm is very sorry." He said the firm was facing insolvency and already had three county court judgements against it. Magistrates fined the firm £10,000 for exposing Mr Nadin to risk and £2,500 for not having guard rails in place. Best Build Limited was ordered to pay £992.18 costs.

- [Leicester Mercury.](#)

Depression and drugs face job cut survivors

Workers who keep their jobs following a round of redundancies are almost as likely to end up on stress medication as their colleagues who are made redundant, according to new research. University College London researchers, writing in the February edition of the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, said more help should be offered to "survivors". They examined records of prescriptions given to Finnish municipal workers after redundancies in the mid-1990s. The UCL team compared evidence of mental health problems such as stress and anxiety in those who remained in post after "downsizing", with those who lost or left their jobs. They looked at prescriptions among more than 26,500 municipal workers in Finland between 1994 and 2000, after a period of redundancies sparked by a national recession. Information was gleaned from national registers. Almost 5,000 worked in "downsized" units, but kept their jobs in 1993 when the redundancies occurred. Just over 4,000 lost or left their jobs during the downsizing, while a further 17,600 escaped exposure to the process altogether. They found men who lost or left their jobs were most at risk of a prescription for a psychotropic drug, including anti-depressants. They were 64 per cent more likely to be given such a prescription than those working in organisations where no job losses had occurred. But men who kept their jobs in downsized organisations were almost 50

per cent more likely to be given a prescription for one of these drugs than were those whose organisations were not downsized. Women working in downsized organisations were 12 per cent more likely to be given a prescription. Sleeping pills were most often prescribed to men while anti-anxiety drugs were most often prescribed to women, the findings showed. The increased chances of a prescription for a psychotropic drug after downsizing represents “a great burden, not only on the individual, but also on society,” said the authors. “Our findings imply that work conditions should increasingly be recognised in large scale preventive strategies for psychiatric disorders.”

- Mika Kivimäki and others. Organisational downsizing and increased use of psychotropic drugs among employees who remain in employment, [Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health](#), volume 61, pages 154-8, 2007. [BBC News Online](#).

Safety minister No.9 in nine years

Lord McKenzie of Luton is the new workplace safety minister. He has been appointed parliamentary under secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions, and replaces Lord Hunt, who has the rare distinction of having held the post for over 18 months ([Risks 206](#)). Lord McKenzie becomes the ninth safety minister in nine years – Labour completes 10 years in power in May 2007. Commenting on the appointment, work and pensions secretary John Hutton said: “I am delighted that Lord McKenzie will be joining the department and look forward to working with him. His breadth of experience will be a great asset to the team at what is an exciting and important time for the department.” A career accountant, Lord McKenzie counts among his responsibilities ‘Health and Safety Executive and Commission’ and ‘work and well-being and vocational rehabilitation’. Apart from health and safety his brief will cover the Child Support Agency, maternity and paternity pay, sustainable development issues, diversity, freedom of information, data protection, human

rights, devolution, research and statistics, civil partnerships, and all DWP issues in the Lords.

- [DWP news release](#) and [list of ministerial responsibilities](#).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Canada: Bystander asbestos cases hit families

Many of the sons, daughters and spouses of Canadian workers sickened by asbestos are now developing cancers, which doctors say have been triggered by the dangerous dust brought home inadvertently by their fathers and husbands. Tom O'Donnell, who lives in Bowmanville, Ontario, is one of those second generation victims known as a “bystander.” At age 49, he is facing an early death due to mesothelioma, a deadly cancer caused by asbestos exposure. His father, who worked with asbestos for 30 years, and like many others had no idea it was dangerous, died of the same disease a decade ago. Then O'Donnell's sister died, followed by his brother. “They figure it was on his clothes. The dust was on his clothes, it would be in the car,” O'Donnell told CTV News. Doctors are worried about rising numbers of mesothelioma cases across the country – which is still an asbestos producer and whose government actively supports global asbestos trade ([Risks 285](#)) – and are urging vigilance. A CT scan can now detect early signs of the disease. “If anyone in your family worked with asbestos in the 1950s to early 1980s it would be worthwhile being checked out by a health care provider, especially if there are respiratory symptoms,” Dr Abe Reinhartz told CTV News. James Brophy, executive director of a workers’ occupational health clinic in Sarnia, Ontario, and an occupational cancer authority, agreed. He said “early detection and surveillance... could save people's lives.” Canada has a “no fault” workers’ compensation system, but this only pays out to those who developed their disease because of exposures in their own workplaces, leaving some “bystander” victims destitute. “It's

so obvious compensation boards should be recognising these people as suffering from work-related diseases whether they were in the workplace or not,” said Dr Brophy.

- [CTV News](#).

Finland: Police failing to probe safety crimes

Finnish police are failing to investigate and record serious workplace safety incidents despite this being required by law, an expert has warned. Researcher Anne Alvesalo from the Police College of Finland said only a fraction of workplace accidents are being investigated by the police and their seriousness is being underestimated, despite occupational safety being covered by the criminal code. She blames poor training and a lack of motivation, with even some workplace fatalities not being referred to prosecutors. Police records recorded only 910 workplace accidents in 2003, and only one in six of these were referred on to prosecutors. Statistics Finland recorded over 100,000 workplace accidents that year. “The legislator has emphasised occupational safety by covering it within the criminal code,” she said. “Police has not been trained for workplace accident investigation. A few policemen may have participated in a one- or two-day course.” She added: “Policemen do not necessarily even recognise as crimes events that have led to accidents.” She said this was particularly the case where the affected worker had indicated they had some personal culpability. Alvesalo believes that investigations into workplace accidents would improve if they were subject to scrutiny by the economic crime unit. She said neglect of occupational safety is often motivated by pursuit of economic gain.

- [Trade Union News from Finland](#).

Global: Study highlights overwork risks at sea

Fatigue is endangering ships’ crews, vessels and the environment, researchers have concluded. A report from Cardiff University’s Centre for Occupational and Health Psychology presented at the 23 January meeting of the International Maritime Organisation’s training sub-committee in London, concludes there is overwhelming evidence of the existence of maritime fatigue, yet the industry has been reluctant to invest resources into monitoring or preventing it. It notes that in civil aviation, by comparison, flight time is regulated by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) Agreement, with a limit of between 70 and 100 hours of flight time allowed over a period of a month, compared with the 98 working hours a week permitted by maritime regulation. The report, ‘Adequate manning and seafarers’ fatigue: the international perspective’, commissioned by the global transport unions’ federation ITF, says scant progress has been made to regulate and enforce hours of work in the industry. It also highlights the worrying phenomenon of false record keeping, where seafarers are bowing to pressures that undermine on-board safety and health. Commenting on the research, John Bainbridge, assistant secretary of the ITF’s seafarers’ section, said: “This report confirms what we already know. Seafarers are routinely working excessively long hours, endangering themselves and the marine environment. It’s time to stop putting seafarers at risk and to learn from the examples of best practice in other industries.” The report calls for a holistic approach to maritime fatigue, encouraging the development of an on-board safety culture underpinned by realistic staffing levels, and a more robust approach to regulation.

- [ITF news release](#). Adequate manning and seafarers’ fatigue: the international perspective – summary [[pdf](#)] and full report [[pdf](#)].

Global: Union call for action after media’s “bloodiest year”

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has confirmed the death toll of at least 155 killed

and 22 accidental deaths has marked out 2006 as the bloodiest year on record for journalism worldwide. The global media unions' federation this week released its annual report on journalists and media staff killed, 'Journalism put to the sword in 2006', which provides a detailed account of the deaths, including 69 deaths in Iraq alone. IFJ says the report provides a challenge to employers and governments to do more to improve levels of security and safety. It says that media leaders such as Reuters, the BBC and CNN have used their global reputation alongside regional networks, including some leading members of the European Broadcasting Union, to help pioneer a safety culture – but the industry as a whole is “still in deficit” when it comes to reducing the risks journalists and media staff face. “There is a dramatic discrepancy between media which take their responsibility to staff safety seriously,” said IFJ general secretary Aidan White, “and those who, frankly, appear to send people into the field and don't give a damn what happens to them.” IFJ says media employers have no excuse not to join the International News Safety Institute (INSI), an independent industry-wide coalition campaigning for safety training and better protection for journalists. “Everyone must pitch in to reduce this appalling level of violence against our people,” said White.

- [IFJ news release](#). Journalism put to the sword in 2006 [[pdf](#)].
- [International News Safety Institute \(INSI\)](#).

Ireland: Mushroom industry faces safety clean up

A commitment by Ireland's official safety watchdog to carry out at least 100 inspections of mushroom farms during 2007 has been welcomed by a union representing workers in the industry. SIPTU regional secretary Mike Jennings, commenting on the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) announcement, said: “Exploitation of workers in some sections of the mushroom industry is extreme,” adding “it's not

just about low wages and long working hours – it's about condemning employees to working conditions where their physical health is being threatened, and this is much more worrying. We have several reported cases of workers in the industry suffering from headaches, nausea, dizziness and vomiting – especially when their workplaces have been sprayed with chemicals. Other complaints include skin rashes, hair loss and changes in the menstrual cycle.” He said very few mushroom pickers receive any safety awareness training. He added that the union had “drawn attention to the outrageous practice of forcing employees to work in mushroom tunnels which have been contaminated by insecticide and fungicide fumes following spraying. This happens when employers blatantly ignore regulations providing for quarantine periods after each chemical spray.” And the neglect can lead to deaths and occupational disease, he said. “In August 2005 a 14-year-old Lithuanian boy - Justinas Gleiznys - died from hydrogen sulphide poisoning while working with spent mushroom compost. Despite this tragedy, no additional safety precautions have been evident in the industry.” Spores can also lead to an occupational disease, “mushroom workers' lung”, he added. “Yet we are aware that in many employments no breathing apparatus is provided to pickers.”

- [SIPTU news release](#).

EVENTS AND COURSES

RSI awareness conference, 24 February, London

A free RSI awareness conference provide an opportunity to find out about RSI conditions, treatments, therapies, how to work round the limitations of strain injuries and how to seek assistance, says RSI Action. There will be presentations from top medical, legal, disability, treatment and prevention experts.

- [RSI awareness conference](#), 10am to 4pm, 24 February, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT Free – but [registration is required](#).

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2007

- [Northern](#), [Southern & Eastern](#), [Yorkshire & Humber](#), [South West](#), [Midlands](#), [Scotland](#), [Wales](#)