



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 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

Union reps really make a difference

Despite clear evidence that union reps make workplaces safer and more productive, they are seeing their careers damaged as a result of their unpaid role. Research this week from Personnel Today and the TUC reveals that 92 per cent of union reps - 38 per cent “definitely” and 54 per cent “possibly” - believe they could be sacrificing their careers in order to represent their colleagues even though they enjoy a largely positive, professional working relationship with their organisations’ human relations departments. Paul Nowak, national organiser at the TUC, commented: “Too many union reps feel their careers are put on the line because of their representative role. Finely worded policies are not enough - managers need to demonstrate practically that staff taking on reps roles will not lose out when it comes to career prospects, pay or development opportunities.” Other TUC research published this week highlights the positive contribution that unions make to company performance. The report, 'Making the difference: Union representatives and company performance', suggests that unions can help organisations develop the trust needed between employer and employee that is central to achieving high performance. It adds the unions also prevent management abuses, because “we do make it more difficult for managers to hire and fire people at will, to disregard health and safety or unilaterally demand a more intense pace of work. If these constraints on ‘flexibility’ are the main barriers to improved performance or higher productivity then it is not surprising that unions should be seen as the villains of the story.” The report points to a series of studies showing better health and safety standards in workplaces with effective union organisation on safety.

- [TUC news release](#) and 'Making the difference: Union representatives and company

performance' report [[word](#)]. [Personnel Today](#).

- [Hazards union effect webpages](#). [TUC 'Health and safety: The union effect' briefing](#).

End discrimination against the missing million

Trade unions have this week called on MPs to support a private members’ bill designed to stop the exploitation of hundreds of thousands of agency workers. The Temporary Agency Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) bill seeks to give agency workers the same rights as full-time and directly employed staff on key issues including basic wages and sick and holiday pay. Unions say it would prevent unscrupulous employers and agencies exploiting workers and undercutting the hard-won pay and conditions of permanent employees. The draft legislation is being brought by Paul Farrelly, the Labour MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme. The bill, which is backed by the TUC and unions including Amicus, TGWU, GMB, UNISON, CWU and UCATT, will require the support of 100 MPs if it is to progress beyond its second reading in the Commons on 2 March. A statement from general secretaries Derek Simpson of Amicus, Tony Woodley of TGWU and Billy Hayes of CWU said: “With agency staff now numbering well over one million workers, and set to grow further still, the government cannot continue to place these workers out with the most fundamental employment protections.” Paul Farrelly MP said: “This issue affects every part of the country and every MP, so I hope that the government will support the bill which aims to stop discrimination against hundreds of thousands of ordinary working people and their families.” TUC research last year concluded in almost nine out of ten workplaces, agency staff were earning less than staff employed directly by the company because they were either paid a lower hourly rate or missed out on overtime. They also tended to receive less annual holiday pay and no sick pay ([Risks 260](#)). A study last year found that men in temporary jobs are more likely to suffer health problems than men in secure employment ([Risks 288](#)). Precarious work has been linked to host of workplace injury and

ill-health risks ([Risks 260](#)), with studies showing the health of insecure workers is between that of the secure - healthiest - workers and the unemployed. A European study last year said insecure work was on the increase and was one of the factors leading to new types of occupational health problems at work ([Risks 242](#)). And a major report in 2005 reached similar conclusions, adding globalisation was fuelling the trend ([Risks 233](#)).

- [TGWU news release. Private Members Bills.](#)
- [Worked to death - Heart disease and stroke risk. Hazards get-a-life news and resources. Businesslink agency workers health and safety guide.](#)

Flood of support for UNISON water@work campaign

A union campaign for easy access to drinking water at work has won the backing of public health and water industry bodies. The UNISON campaign, launched by general secretary Dave Prentis in London on 30 January, aims to encourage businesses to recognise the benefits of water to human health and encourage employers to provide wholesome drinking water at work. Ian Gray, policy officer with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), welcomed the campaign, adding: "Water and good hydration are essential for healthy workplaces and workers. Under the Workplace Regulations 1992 employers must provide an adequate supply of wholesome drinking water for all people at work in the workplace. Businesses should make this readily available – and we encourage them to do so." Industry body Water UK is also backing the UNISON initiative, saying more and more businesses are promoting fresh drinking water to their staff and realising the health benefits to business of good hydration, increased productivity and a decrease in sickness absence. Pamela Taylor, chief executive at Water UK, commented: "Good hydration is critical for our well-being, and yet the understanding of the important role that the nation's tap water can

play in boosting workplace health is poor. Good hydration can help improve concentration, reduce headaches, and stop feelings of tiredness, anxiety and irritability. It can also help prevent many minor health complications that lead to lost productivity and absence from work." She added: "Water UK is delighted to support UNISON in its efforts to protect employee health and safety, improve the work environment and ensure all employees have access to fresh tap water at work."

- [Water@Work website. CIEH news release. Water UK news release and Water for Health website.](#)
- [HSE welfare at work guide](#), including [the legal position on provision of water at work](#).

Venture capitalists don't care about workers

Millions of UK workers now have their job security and conditions determined at the whim of venture capitalists, the union GMB has said. GMB general secretary Paul Kenny said: "Three million people in the UK work for companies owned by venture capitalists who have not the slightest interest" in the jobs done by the workers in the firms they control. "For example at AA, owned by Permira, patrol staff are forced to work overtime up to 11.75 hours per day five days a week every week," he said. "The AA have also cancelled holiday leave until April 2007 because of shortage of staff to deal with stranded motorists. Part-time AA call centre staff are forced to work 6 hours per day every day without a break. This is not untypical." Last year, GMB warned that the AA hours increase from 11 to 11.75 hours per day would put workers lives at risk, and said it had already represented several workers injured in road traffic accidents whilst working ([Risks 278](#)). The union leader added: "UK workers need rights to flexibility which are enforceable. Trades unions need the freedom to act as enforcers on their behalf. Neither is currently the case and parliament needs to act to meet the legitimate aspirations of the UK workforce." He was

commenting this week after the publication of an Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) report which said half of the working population, 52 per cent of men and 48 per cent of women, say they want to work more flexibly. EOC said the struggle to find a job that is compatible with life is leading to increasing pressure for a ‘new deal’ at work, with workers wanting greater control over the hours and location of their work.

- [GMB news release](#). [EOC news release](#). Working outside box: the Interim Report of the Transformation of Work Investigation, EOC, January 2007. Summary [[pdf](#)] and full report [[pdf](#)]. [New Stateman](#). [Work Wise UK news release](#). [IT Week](#). [Recruiter Magazine](#).

OTHER NEWS

Injury lawyers say it's time for boardroom jail terms

Top personal injury lawyers have said a realistic prospect of jail time for top bosses who neglect their safety responsibilities is necessary if the issue is to be taken seriously in Britain's boardrooms. Commenting after a series of reports implicated BP's London-based global board in cost cutting and mis-management that contributed to the Texas City refinery blast that killed 15 ([Risks 291](#)), Mick Antoniw of the law firm Thompsons, said: "The Enron case illustrates that if a senior executive is guilty of fraud then he faces a long term of imprisonment. But if his or her conduct leads to death then there is nothing more than a company fine." David Urpeth, of the personal injury department of Irwin Mitchell, said: "Only when you are looking down the barrel of a gun with the prospect of prison at the end of it will this really be taken seriously by directors." Both Urpeth and Antoniw are frustrated that the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Bill currently before parliament fails to deal with the issue of director culpability, instead promising nothing much more than fines on the business. "While I welcome the Bill, I am disappointed

that individual directors will not be held personally liable under the Bill," said David Urpeth. "Personal liability would focus the minds of directors and ensure that they placed the health and safety of workers and the public at the very top of their companies' agendas. That way, we might see a reduction in tragic but avoidable accidents." Commenting on this month's Baker Panel Report, which accused BP of having a "corporate blindspot" on safety and which said ultimate responsibility for safety at the company lay with the London-based board and chief executive Lord Browne, Kevin Allars, head of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) chemical industries division, this week told Risks: "HSE will be considering the contents of the report and its implications for its regulation of BP and indeed the wider major hazard industry – and developing our intervention approach accordingly." Asked if HSE would be investigating possible evidence of safety offences committed in the company's London boardroom, he responded: "Enforcement in respect of Texas City is a matter for the US administration." BP's webpage on the Texas City incident this week carried a message saying "it will be temporarily unavailable during pending litigation at the request of the US Court."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#). [The Times](#). [Financial Times](#).
- [Hazards BP webpages](#).

NHS to get work accident payback

The NHS could claim back over £150m a year for treating employees injured at work, the government has said. The money would be recovered from insurance companies in cases where personal injury compensation has been paid to workers. Hospitals can already recover costs from insurance companies for treating patients injured in road accidents, which nets the NHS around £115m. The scheme allows the recovery of the cost of both hospital treatment and ambulance care. Commenting on the new NHS Injury Costs Recovery scheme, health

minister Andy Burnham said: “Although this scheme will undeniably raise useful additional sums of money for hospitals, it is not simply about raising more cash. It is based on the legal rights of the NHS and the responsibilities of those to blame.” He added: “We hope it will act as an additional impetus to improving health and safety. It is unacceptable that taxpayers have to pay for the medical treatment of someone injured at work simply because employers fail to take adequate steps to protect their workforce.” TUC general secretary Brendan Barber commented: “It is only right that where employers cut corners at work and take risks with the health and safety of their employees, it is them, not taxpayers, who pay the cost of treating the hospitalised ill or injured worker. Employers can easily protect themselves from increased costs by ensuring that employees do not get injured through negligence in the workplace.”

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

Work injury and disease benefits to be reviewed

The TUC has said an official review of the occupational injury and disease benefits system must improve and extend its scope. The review of the Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit (IIDB) scheme was announced this week by Jim Murphy, minister for employment and welfare reform. IIDB provides compensation and benefits for people who are injured or made ill through work, although it has strict limitations based on disability level, only applies to a limited list of industrial diseases and has other restrictions which together make most workplace injury and occupational disease sufferers ineligible for payouts. The benefit was introduced in 1948 when 61 per cent of jobs were in heavy industry. DWP says this has now halved, with 70 per cent of today’s workforce in office and service occupations. It says the review “is part of the government’s commitment to help more people move off benefits and back into work. At present

IIDB claimants do not automatically have access to support such as Pathways to Work, which helps people with health conditions to return to work, education or training.” Jim Murphy said: “IIDB was introduced in 1948 to serve a specific purpose. The workforce and the labour market have changed radically since then, with a huge shift away from the heavy industries and women now forming half the workforce.” He added: “We want your views on what this scheme should look like in the 21st century. We want healthy and safe workplaces. We want to ensure that no-one is left behind; that an injury at work should not mean someone is written off and consigned to a life on benefits. We want to make sure that the people who need the resources most, are those who receive them.” DWP says review will address questions such as what is the purpose of a ‘no-fault’ occupational injuries and diseases scheme; who should be covered by a new occupational injury scheme; and whether employers should do more to help reduce the risks of work related accidents and illness occurring. TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson said: “The TUC welcomes the review. IIDB has helped millions of workers over the past 60 years, however there are many who have been injured or made ill through work that the scheme has failed.” He added: “The existence of a no-fault, low cost scheme like this is of benefit to everyone and we hope the review will be used to extend and strengthen it.”

- [DWP news release](#) and [consultation document](#), Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit scheme – A consultation paper [[pdf](#)].
- [Hazards compensation webpages](#).

Payout after asbestos causes breathlessness

A North Yorkshire man has been awarded “substantial” compensation developing a lung disease caused by exposure to asbestos fibres in his youth. Geoffrey Stead, 65, received the payout from British Rail after he was diagnosed with pleural thickening. He was exposed to asbestos as an apprentice plumber while working

for British Rail during 1956 to 1957. He was just 16 when he was charged with stripping out asbestos laden pipes from old boiler houses. He was put in touch with solicitors after contacting the Ridings Asbestos Support and Awareness Group (RASAG). The group, which is a registered charity, provides free advice and support to people and their families throughout Yorkshire who have been affected by asbestos. Mr Stead said: “When I decided to sue for compensation it was never about the money, it was about getting someone to say they were responsible for making me work in conditions that would damage my health in the future.” Asbestos exposures can cause cancers, including mesothelioma and lung cancer. Helen Tomlin of Thompsons Solicitors said: “Unfortunately he is one of many people who have been exposed to asbestos in the past by British Rail to the detriment of their health in the future.” Another Thompsons client, Elsie Hammond, is looking for people who worked with her husband, Bryan, at Darlington Insulation, John T Schofield & Sons, Cork Insulation and Joseph Nadins, all based in the Teesside area. The companies were asbestos insulation contractors working in ships and public buildings and employees would travel the country for work. Mr Hammond, 73, died in February 2006 from asbestos-related lung cancer.

- Thompsons Solicitors news releases on the [Geoffrey Stead](#) and [Bryan Hammond](#) cases.
- Anyone who has any information that could assist in the Bryan Hammond case should contact Tony Hood at Thompsons Solicitors on 0191 269 0488.

Government challenges dockers' asbestos payouts

The financial future of hundreds of former dockers suffering from asbestos related illness is hanging in the balance. Following a High Court test case last year they won the right to seek compensation from the government for their asbestos-related illnesses ([Risks 259](#)). But at the

Court of Appeal this week lawyers for the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) made a bid to reverse the high court ruling. If DTI is successful, it would block the dockers' compensation claims. Kevin Johnson, a partner at personal injury law firm John Pickering and Partners, said the DTI, which now has responsibility for the former dock labour boards, is trying to pass off the responsibility to others. He said: “The government is responsible for the dock labour boards who employed health and safety staff. Who else were the staff there to protect if not the dock labour force? It doesn't ring true for the government to argue that this was someone else's responsibility, and not theirs.” He added: “Former dock workers who become ill from asbestos want to give their families financial security. Their choice of financial security or insecurity is in the hands of the Court of Appeal.” The judgment is expected in a few weeks.

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

Councils must act to protect employees' health

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has warned local authorities across Scotland to be proactive in identifying and addressing health and safety issues affecting their staff. HSE says the legal duty to provide occupational health support for staff is outlined in laws including the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. The HSE alert comes after an employment tribunal involving Dundee City Council. HSE had issued a legally binding improvement notice after it determined the council had an inadequate management system and provisions in place to deal effectively with occupational health risks. The council appealed against the improvement notice at the employment tribunal in September last year, but this upheld the HSE's action. Dundee City Council has since put into force a comprehensive action plan. HSE inspector David Steven said: “Following the Dundee Council decision other local authorities across Scotland can be in no doubt about their duty to provide health

monitoring and provision for their staff on an ongoing basis. The appropriate use of occupational health expertise and resources is necessary to comply with statutory duties but will also help employers meet non-statutory principles such as reducing work related sickness absence.” HSE says it has worked with other councils to introduce “a proactive approach to managing occupational health.” It points to South Lanarkshire Council, which had worked with trade unions to introduce a sickness absence approach which is not punitive, but which includes free physiotherapy for employees whether attending or absent from work, access to a comprehensive occupational health team and an employee support officer who deals with all absences due to psychological illness.

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

Tribunal over-rules stress unfair dismissal decision

A worker who was fired after taking time off sick with work-related stress has seen an unfair dismissal ruling reversed at an Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT). This overturned an earlier unfair dismissal ruling against the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS). Personnel Today reports the bank dismissed an employee known as Mrs S McAdie after long-term absence for stress. The original tribunal found that RBS had caused the stress that led to McAdie's absence from work. It then found that the bank had unfairly dismissed her, as a reasonable employer would not have found itself in this situation. However, the EAT ruled that RBS had not dismissed McAdie unfairly, as there was nothing it could do to bring her back to work. Katie Clark, a partner at law firm McDermott Will & Emery, told Personnel Today: “This is a boost for employers.” She said employment law is not clear cut about when an employer can dismiss an employee on long-term absence, but internal procedures should be stuck to, and reasonable efforts made to find them alternative

employment. A Newcastle employment tribunal last year ([Risks 276](#)) upheld claims of disability discrimination brought against TRW Systems by GMB member Craig Routledge, who became depressed and unable to work as a result of the wearing effect of alternating shifts. The tribunal ruled that the company, which manufactures car parts, had indirectly discriminated by not giving Craig assurances it would provide a full-time day job for him after he became too ill to work nights. In 2003, NUJ member Mark Hayes, an editor at Quantum Business Media, was awarded £95,000 compensation at an employment tribunal after being driven to a breakdown by overwork and bad management.

- [Personnel Today.](#)
- [Hazards work stress webpages.](#)

Six figure payout in disability discrimination case

A council worker who was sacked by fax while on sick leave has received a reported £130,000 in compensation in an out-of-court settlement. Elizabeth McDonald had claimed disability discrimination and unfair dismissal against Walsall Council, but settled her case when the offer was made during tribunal proceedings. McDonald was sacked by fax in April 2005 while she was on sick leave after having complications following a thyroid operation. Both sides issued a joint statement following the move, which said: “In order to save the costs of litigation over a period of eight days or potentially more, the parties have agreed to settle the claim before the employment tribunal.” It added: “The council agreed that Miss McDonald became ill and that, subsequently, the council did not recognise the extent of her illness for the purposes of the disability discrimination legislation. Lessons will be learned from this and applied in future.”

- [Express and Star. Personnel Today.](#)
- [Hazards sickness absence webpages.](#)

Dangerous fast work puts youths at risk

Exposure to work hazards and a frenetic job pace increases the likelihood of injury among adolescent and young adult workers, a new scientific review suggests. Canadian researchers found the work setting also appears to play a role in predicting the risk of injury, with food service and construction industry jobs topping the list of hazardous employment in this group. “These studies provide sufficient evidence that the type of work setting, in particular restaurant work and manual labour jobs, was independently associated with work injury,” said lead author F Curtis Breslin, a scientist at the Institute for Work and Health in Toronto. Breslin’s team analysed nine studies published between 1997 and 2005 that examined non-fatal injuries among 12- to 24-year-old workers. The review, published in the February issue of the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, covered six US studies, and three conducted in Canada and Australia. “We found that when males and females are working similar jobs, they have a similar risk for work injury,” Breslin said. “Even though you have males having higher injury rates, it seems to be attributable to them being in more dangerous jobs like construction,” he said, not to factors specifically associated with gender. Minority status appeared to be a significant predictor of increased injury risk, after taking work setting and work hours into account.

- [Center for the Advancement of Health news release. Science Daily.](#)
- Breslin FC and others. Non-agricultural work injuries among youth: A systematic review, American Journal of Preventive Medicine, volume 32, issue 2, pages 151-162, February 2007 [[abstract](#)]. [IWH summary report](#) of its systematic review of factors associated with occupational disease among young people.
- [Hazards young workers webpages.](#)

Deaths report warns of trawler fatigue risks

A fishing boat probably grounded and sank off Skye with the loss of two crew members because one of them fell asleep in the wheelhouse, a report has said. Neil Sutherland, 39, and David Davidson, 40, died when their prawn trawler, the Brothers, went down on 1 June. The Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) report into the incident warned trawler crews of the dangers of tiredness. It said the accident showed the importance of regular breaks. The report said that both men would have been suffering the effects of fatigue from working long hours and from a lack of sleep. Stephen Meyer, chief inspector of marine accidents, said: “Prawn fishing is generally done during good weather and fisherman will work very long hours to make the most of it. This accident clearly shows the importance of being alert at work and ensuring that fisherman have regular and substantial breaks.” Marine officials have now issued a flyer to trawler crews urging them to take fatigue seriously.

- [BBC News Online. MAIB report and Fatigue – take it seriously! flyer.](#)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australia: Airline staff abused after entertainment crashes

Passengers travelling with Australian airline Qantas have taken to abusing and threatening staff long-haul flights. The problem has become so common that the flight crew union, the Flight Attendants Association of Australia, has formally complained over failures in the carrier’s entertainment system on of cabin crew exhibiting “stress related problems” caused by aggressive passengers. On 19 January the union wrote to Qantas management about the entertainment system. It said the airline had a duty of care to better protect cabin crew against angry

passengers. Association president Steven Reed told The Sun-Herald some cabin crew were becoming so upset by the abuse that they became physically ill. He requested a meeting with Qantas general manager of aviation health services Dr Ion Morrison and Qantas occupational health and safety committee chair Michael Von Reth to devise a strategy to help staff cope.

- [Sydney Morning Herald.](#)

Canada: Old safety system ignores new workplaces

Workplace safety inspections in Canada are out of whack with the reality of the modern workplace environment, a TV investigation has found. ‘Out of sync’, the latest instalment of CBC Investigative Unit's investigation into workplace safety, used freedom of information laws to obtain evidence from official workplace safety databases. Reporters found inspections were up to 10 times more frequent in traditional workplaces than in non-traditional ones. They said the problem is particularly severe in health care. Not only are health care workers facing an ever-increasing threat of violence, the investigative team found, but the agencies responsible for regulating safety in hospitals are not doing their job. They added that government inspections are also following a traditional five-day, nine-to-five schedule, while an increasing number of people are working outside the traditional nine-to-five shifts, and their likelihood of having an accident increases during those periods. The CBC News analysis shows that most government inspections are not being conducted during hours outside the regular workday, such as weekends. After a lengthy union campaign, the Criminal Code of Canada was amended after the 1992 Westray mining disaster that killed 26 miners in Plymouth, Nova Scotia. Under Bill C-45, a corporation can be found guilty of criminal negligence for an unsafe workplace. As yet, there have been no convictions under the law.

- [CBC News. CBC News "Out of sync" investigation.](#)

Global: Migrant workers get the 3-D jobs

Migrant workers are not taking local jobs and driving down wages, but are being exploited in dirty, dangerous and degrading jobs, a top union official has said. “Scare stories about immigration are not new nor is immigration damaging to industrialised economies,” Neil Kearney, general secretary of the Brussels-based International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) told the World Economic Forum in Davos last week. “However, large scale immigration may deplete developing countries of skilled labour and the most energetic and courageous of their unskilled workforce.” He added: “Today, most immigrant workers in industrialised countries are employed in the three 'D' jobs - those that are dirty, dangerous or degrading. They are not, in the main, competing with local labour.” He said jobs offered to migrant workers should match skills and immigrant workers should have equality in wages, conditions of work, rights and opportunities. “A worker is a worker regardless of origin and should be treated as such,” he said.

- [ITGLWF news release.](#)

Global: BWI secures 12th global standards pact

International construction union federation BWI has signed up a major company to a global agreement underpinning workers’ rights including safety everywhere the firm operates worldwide. Dutch construction company VolkerWessels and BWI signed the international framework agreement last week, in a deal that also covers the firm’s contractors, subcontractors and suppliers. Announcing what is its 12th such agreement with a major international company, BWI commented: “The agreement is based on

the core conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). In addition, the company also agreed to offer decent wages and working conditions as well as to provide a safe and healthy working environment.” VolkerWessels is a network of 125 operating companies, trading as independent entities with their own profit and market responsibility. It is based in the Netherlands, but has offices in Belgium, Germany, the UK, the USA and Canada. As well as committing the company to decent working hours and employment practices, the agreement says: “Best occupational health and safety practice shall be promoted and shall be in compliance with the ILO Guidelines for Occupational Health Management Systems. All workers shall be given training on occupational hazards and their prevention.” Worldwide, global union federations and multinationals have now signed 49 global agreements committing firms to certain key employment standards. All but six have explicit health and safety clauses.

- [BWI news release](#) and VolkerWessels/BWI framework agreement [[pdf](#)].
- [Hazards global union agreements webpage](#).

South Africa: Deaths soar as gold mines cash in

Fatalities in South Africa’s gold mining sector had worsened, with mining houses seeking to cash in on a robust gold price by revisiting disused parts of their mines, the parliament’s minerals and energy affairs committee has heard. Mining Health and Safety Council acting chair Mthokozisi Zondi told the committee that while there was a 26 per cent drop in mining fatalities in the platinum sector in 2005-06, gold mining’s figures worsened. The council is a tripartite body representing government, unions and employers and is tasked with advising the minister on health and safety matters. “We have a very old gold-mining sector and are mining areas that are highly stressed,” he said. Acting chief inspector of mines in the minerals and energy department Thabo Gazi said that while the gold-mining sector employed 35 per cent of the country’s

155,000 mineworkers, it was responsible for 51 per cent of fatalities in 2005/06 (104 of the total of 202) and 56 per cent of all injuries (2,324 of 3,966). Gazi said the same regressive trend was evident in the gold sector again in 2006/07. He added that with commodity prices going up, mining houses had revisited dangerous mines. “The improvement in the economy comes at a cost of human lives,” he said.

- [Business Day](#).

USA: Bush takes stranglehold on safety watchdog

President Bush has signed a directive that gives the White House much greater control over the rules and policy statements that the government develops to protect key areas including public health, workplace safety, the environment and civil rights. In an executive order published last week, Mr Bush said that each agency must have a regulatory policy office run by a political appointee, to supervise the development of rules and documents providing guidance to regulated industries. This will give the White House a gatekeeper in each agency to analyse the costs and the benefits of new rules and to make sure the agencies actions are in line with the president’s priorities. The White House said the executive order was not meant to rein in any one agency. But business executives and consumer advocates said the administration was particularly concerned about rules and guidance issued by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Business groups welcomed the executive order, saying it had the potential to reduce what they saw as the burden of federal regulations. But consumer, union and environmental groups denounced the move, saying it gave too much control to the White House and would hinder agencies’ efforts to protect the public. The directive issued by Mr Bush says that, in deciding whether to issue regulations, federal agencies must identify “the specific market failure” or problem that justifies government intervention. Representative Henry

A Waxman, a Democrat and the chair of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, said: “The executive order allows the political staff at the White House to dictate decisions on health and safety issues, even if the government’s own impartial experts disagree. This is a terrible way to govern, but great news for special interests.”

- [New York Times](#). [Lifelines](#).

RESOURCES

Lost in cyberspace

There’s lots of safety news out there in cyberspace, and plenty said about unions, but high quality, union-friendly and regularly updated health and safety news is still hard to find. And it has just got harder, with the demise of two key contributions. Workers Online, produced by Unions NSW in Australia and which was Labourstart Labour website of the year in 2002, was the first and best online union tabloid and regularly contained punchy coverage of workplace safety issues. It folded in December. For health and safety activists, there was an even more grievous loss this month, when after four years and over 2,800 postings, the US-based Confined Space blog came to an end. It was the first union-friendly health and safety blog, and had become phenomenally successful, earning blogger Jordan Barab an American Public Health Association (APHA) award. The good news is that its many fans in the US have rallied to fill the gulf. A public health blog, The Pump Handle, is now running a dedicated occupational health and safety webpage, Confined Space@TPH. And Tammy Miser of United Support and Memorial for Workplace Fatalities (USMWF) is continuing the Confined Space weekly roll call of those killed at work, at a new The Weekly Toll blog. Meanwhile, in Australia there’s always the OSHReps online safety journal, produced by Victorian Trades Hall Council. For news from the UK and worldwide, there is Risks, of course

– now heading towards its 300th issue. And Hazards magazine’s website has won both international and UK awards, including top prizes from Labourstart, APHA and this month the Workworld Media Award ([Risks 291](#)), and should be on every union safety rep’s must see list.

- [Beyond Confined Space](#). [Workers Online](#).
- Still want to know going on? See: [Confined Space@TPH](#). [The Weekly Toll](#). [OSHReps](#). [Labourstart/Hazards health and safety newswire](#). [TUC Risks](#). [Hazards magazine](#).

EVENTS AND COURSES

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2007

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