



# Risks Newsletter



Number 297 – 10 March 2007



Editor: [Rory O'Neill](#) of [Hazards](#) magazine. Comments to the TUC at [healthandsafety@tuc.org.uk](mailto: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](#).

## In this issue

- **ACTION**
- Vote now for serious safety sanctions!
- **UNION NEWS**
- Give safety reps more time to make work safer
- "Rock solid" RMT action on working hours
- Journalists hacked off by stressful work
- Parents "are abusing teachers"
- Fire authority criticised after worker deaths
- **OTHER NEWS**
- Widow gets £355,000 asbestos payout
- Asbestos victims 'getting younger'

- BP fought off Texas safety controls
- Concern at Shell's "dismal" offshore safety record
- Don't kill yourself driving for a living
- Firm pays £250,000 after worker's electrocution
- Butcher fined after teen is burned
- Unions say fight for temp workers' rights goes on

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

- Canada: New law allows asbestos use in toys
- Global: Two journalists killed every week
- Sweden: Site dust causes heart attacks
- USA: Writing's on the wall for safety?

## RESOURCES

- *Hazards*, villains, heroes and killers
- An academic journal you'll want to read

## EVENTS AND COURSES

- IOSH 07 safety conference, 27-28 March, Telford
- TUC courses for safety reps

## ACTION

### Vote now for serious safety sanctions!

The TUC wants you to back a proposal for more serious safety penalties on dangerous employers. The call comes in response to a Labour Party 'Labourspace' online competition to find the best work-related campaigning issue. The winner will be invited to present their campaign to the prime minister at No.10. The TUC's 'Give safety some teeth!' campaign and competition entry, which needs your vote, is pushing for more meaningful penalties for safety offences, including higher fines and a new safety duty on directors. TUC says: "Unless fines are increased in line with those for other offences, and a new more imaginative approach to sanctions is taken, less responsible companies will continue to avoid making many small but crucial changes, and we will see many more preventable deaths at work." It only takes a few moments to vote. If you want you can add a comment, telling the Labour Party just what you think about the current penalties for workplace safety offences. The TUC safety penalties campaign is listed on Labourspace.com as the "most popular campaign this week". It's down to you to make sure it maintains this lofty position.

- [Background on the campaign](#). Back the TUC 'Give safety some teeth' campaign and [vote for serious safety penalties](#).

## UNION NEWS

### Give safety reps more time to make work safer

A union safety role that saves society millions each year and prevents thousands from being injured or made sick is being undermined by a lack of support from employers and the government's official safety watchdog, the TUC has warned. A survey of unions found that the

top problem facing union safety reps was a difficulty getting employers to act on safety concerns. Over one-third (35 per cent) of reps questioned rated this as their top concern and 90 per cent listed it as a top three concern. The same proportion said the problem for safety reps was getting their legally allowed time off for training and to undertake inspection, investigation and other crucial workplace safety functions. The TUC says that because union safety reps are able to spot dangerous areas of the workplace and identify ways of working that can make staff ill, they are able to reduce lost time by as much as 616,000 days a year. Some conservative estimates suggest that union reps already prevent over 11,000 cases of work-related ill-health or injury a year, with the real effect on safety almost certainly more than double this. While some employers can see the benefits of working with safety reps, the survey findings, published this week in Hazards magazine and based on responses from national safety officers in 20 TUC unions representing over 5.6 million union members, reveal a real concern that many employers still refuse to give safety reps the time to carry out all important safety inspections or speak to colleagues about safety concerns. A third of all the survey respondents (35 per cent) said one of their top problems was getting support from the official safety enforcement agencies. This is reflected in official enforcement statistics, which show no record of the HSE ever prosecuting an employer for breaching the regulations on safety reps' rights. It is now three years since HSE even issued an improvement notice for failure to abide by the safety reps' regulations. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "Up and down the UK, thousands of safety reps are trying to make work safer for their colleagues, in some cases with little help from employers. It would make the world of difference to the poor safety record of UK workplaces if the HSE gave safety reps more support and got tough with bosses who refuse to give safety reps their legally entitled time off." He added: "If safety reps were guaranteed time off to inspect factories, offices, and other workplaces, the UK would see a real reduction in the number of workers killed, made ill or injured by their jobs every year."

- [TUC news release. Safety repressed: Safety reps save lives and cash, so why doesn't HSE give them more time?](#), Hazards magazine, issue 97, 2007. [Hazards safety reps webpages](#).

### **“Rock solid” RMT action on working hours**

Signallers working for Network Rail in Scotland have demonstrated their anger over the company's failure to implement their 35-hour week agreement with a “rock-solid” strike, rail union RMT has said. It warned that the company should not jeopardise safety by “putting scab managers in charge of signal boxes.” As more than 400 signallers and supervisory staff stopped work at noon on 7 March at the start of a 48-hour strike, the union warned Network Rail the RMT executive would next week put in place plans for a ballot of signallers across Britain. “Reports from RMT organisers and reps across Scotland tell us that our members' strike is absolutely rock-solid,” RMT general secretary Bob Crow said. “Network Rail should understand that our members are determined to achieve the 35-hour week we agreed to last July, and it is the company that holds a very simple solution in its hands.” The union leader added: “Rather than risking lives by putting scab managers in charge of signal boxes the company should be concentrating its efforts on implementing the agreement we reached with them eight months ago. Network Rail now has the choice of engaging constructively with us to resolve this dispute or facing a ballot of our signalling members throughout Britain.” Prior to the stoppage, which caused widespread cancellations and disruption to services, the RMT general secretary wrote to HM Railways Inspectorate (HMRI) to raise concerns about Network Rail plans to staff signal boxes with staff it said would not have suitable local knowledge, a move RMT said would be likely to jeopardise safety on the rail network.

- RMT news releases on [the dispute](#) and the

[HMRI complaint. BBC News Online.](#)

### **Journalists hacked off by stressful work**

Stress is one of the biggest health problems journalists face, their union NUJ has said. The union says there is a long list of reasons their members are hacked off, including long hours and shift work, lack of control, lack of job satisfaction, insecurity, fear of violence, bullying, bad relations with other work colleagues, low pay, boredom, isolation and problems with the working environment such as noise, overcrowding and poor facilities. New NUJ guidance aimed at tackling stress in the workplace says it is a major issue to be tackled by the union. “Stress is a vital issue for chapels and branches to take up – seeking both to secure action to tackle the causes of stress in the workplace and to put in place support mechanisms for those suffering from the effects of stress,” it says. “Well-trained health and safety reps can make all the difference in promoting well-being at work and building the union’s strength in the workplace through organising around stress at work. The NUJ provides training for reps on tackling stress as part of our health and safety training.”

- Tackling stress at work, Chapel/Branch guidance number 1, March 2007 [[pdf](#)].

### **Parents “are abusing teachers”**

Teachers in Lancashire are being subjected to increasing abuse by parents, a union survey has revealed. Teaching union NUT says it is appalled at how many of their members have suffered verbal and physical abuse from irate parents in the past 12 months. Primary school parents were said to be the worst offenders with 128 incidents of parental abuse. One teacher was attacked by a parent. A further 21 secondary school teachers told the survey they had been confronted by parents. Primary school pupils had also

physically attacked, swore at and targeted other verbal abuse at their teachers, according to those who responded to the survey. Lancashire NUT president Kenneth Pearson said the number of reported incidents of parents abusing teachers was “unacceptable by any standards.” He said: “Parents come into school and complain about the teacher's attitude and have a go. We have situations, like in one school, where if certain parents come in, only the head can deal with them and then only with two others present.” He added: “It wouldn't be allowed in the workplace, people would be sacked, but it seems to be acceptable in the classroom against teachers.” Findings of the survey have been sent to schools and Lancashire County Council, which is developing a new policy on violence and behaviour in schools. The survey was circulated to 4,000 teachers and had a 21 per cent response rate.

- [Lancashire Evening Post](#). [Lancashire Telegraph](#).

### Fire authority criticised after worker deaths

A fire authority failed to introduce necessary safety procedures and training, a union investigation after the death of firefighters Mike Miller, 26, and Jeff Wornham, 28, has found. Matt Wrack, general secretary of firefighters' union FBU, commenting after an inquest into the deaths in a high rise fire in February 2005, said: “Everyone at this incident did the very best they possibly could with the resources, training and equipment available to them. But initially there were not enough firefighters to tackle this fire safely and none of them had specific and practical training in fighting fires in high rise blocks.” He added: “The FBU investigation concluded that Hertfordshire fire authority failed to put in place proper procedures, did not have adequate training and did not send enough firefighters in the initial response to tackle this fire safely. But this tragic loss of life could have happened in any number of fire authorities across the UK, it was only by misfortune that it happened in Stevenage.” The union leader

concluded: “The entire fire service and government need to learn the lessons of what happened in Stevenage. There must be an end to the constant pressure to cut frontline fire crews and cut corners with training and other safety critical activities.” The firefighters died as they battled unsuccessfully to save Natalie Close, 32, who was trapped in a 14th storey flat. They were attempting to tackle the blaze without water because the dry riser had been padlocked shut against vandals. Smoke alarms were not working.

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

### OTHER NEWS

#### Widow gets £355,000 asbestos payout

The widow of a former Vickers employee who died from mesothelioma has received a £355,000 payout. Jean Allen, 69, secured the compensation following the death of her husband Keith from the asbestos-related cancer in 2004. Mr Allen, 71, developed the disease as a result of exposures during his 25 years working for Vickers. He began at the firm in 1961 and his work often took him into condenser and turbine areas of power stations. He was also involved with the navy's earliest nuclear submarines and during these years he was exposed to asbestos lagging operations. Despite being past retirement age, Mr Allen was working for a Norwegian company dealing with offshore gas and oil projects when he was diagnosed with mesothelioma in 2002. Mrs Allen said: “The company that Keith worked for in Norway held his job open for him and were totally supportive when we were trying to find out what was happening. They didn't want to lose him.” Mrs Allen's solicitors said her husband's age made the large payout unusual. Pauline Chandler, a solicitor with Manchester's Pannone law firm, said: “The value of this settlement is a reflection of how active and healthy Keith Allen was before mesothelioma struck him down.” She said Mr

Allen was an example of an active elderly person who could have been shown to people who consider the over-60s, and the over-70s, past it and boring, to prove it was not true. In a second asbestos-related case, Brian Brady has been awarded £7,500 after a ruling by Birmingham Crown Court that he should be compensated for the asbestos-related condition pleural thickening. The 71-year-old was exposed to asbestos fibres as an instrument mechanic for British Alcan in Workington and now suffers from shortness of breath and is unable to carry out every day tasks like gardening.

- [North West Evening Mail. Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)
- [Action Mesothelioma website.](#)

### Asbestos victims 'getting younger'

Asbestos-related cancers are affecting more and more young people and women, according to a top occupational disease lawyer. Geraldine Coombs, who heads Irwin Mitchell's Manchester-based asbestos team, is representing a 27-year-old woman who is thought to be the youngest-ever victim of mesothelioma, an incurable cancer caused by asbestos exposure. Ms Coombs said the Leigh Carlisle believes she developed the disease as a result of a short cut on her way to school which took her by a factory. Ms Carlisle said: "I know that men working there cut asbestos sheets and handled asbestos materials in the yard, but I had no idea that by walking through the yard I could have inadvertently got cancer." Ms Coombs said she was representing other relatively young women affected by a condition generally associated with men, particularly those working in the construction trades. "We are also representing a nurse in her 40s who worked in a Tameside hospital where there was an asbestos removal programme. Historically, mesothelioma affected people in their 60s and 70s, but recently we have seen younger victims diagnosed, who were exposed to asbestos in unconventional ways." The legal expert took a swipe at insurance

companies that, she said, constantly seek to frustrate the compensation process even though they know mesothelioma usually kills within two years. "We try to complete cases within the lifetime of the victim, but insurers often do not make admissions of negligence and they look to take cases to trial. It's upsetting to see what clients go through and how much they suffer, but helping someone who is dying to get financial security for their families is very rewarding."

- [Manchester Evening News.](#)

### BP fought off Texas safety controls

UK multinational BP successfully lobbied against tighter environmental controls by regulators in Texas, saving \$150m (£77m) in monitoring and equipment upgrades prior to the fatal Texas City refinery explosion in 2005, internal documents show. A 5 March report in the Financial Times says proposed controls would have forced BP to invest in upgrading the exhaust system on the unit at the refinery that exploded, to include a flare. The US Chemical Safety Board (CSB) said the upgrade would have prevented - or at least mitigated - the blast that killed 15 and injured over 170. John Mogford, BP's group vice-president for exploration and production, who led the company's internal investigation into the blast, said in his May 2005 report that a "conversion to a flare system would have reduced the severity of the incident." A flare would have contained and safely burned off most, if not all, emissions, preventing them from catching a spark on 23 March 2005, according to the CSB. Until the accident, BP was considered the "greenest" of the big oil companies and was able to convince regulators not to impose such tough controls. Susan Moore, BP regulatory affairs manager, was nominated for a \$1,000 bonus for her efforts. However, she has recently found herself at the centre of BP civil litigation arising from the Texas City refinery blast. On 26 January 2007, she admitted in a sworn deposition to deleting documents after plaintiffs' lawyers subpoenaed her laptop on an

anonymous tip that she had information useful in the lawsuits from those injured and killed in the refinery explosion. The lawyers are seeking all deleted documents from BP. The company has received a series of grand jury subpoenas from the US Justice Department relating to the Texas City explosion. The department, which is investigating possible criminal conduct on the part of the company and its executives, has requested documents and testimonies in connection with the accident. BP chief executive Lord Browne's pay packet shrank for the second year in a row, with his total pay package last year falling to £4.57m, down 28 per cent from 2005, as BP suffered problems including oil spills and safety fears. Details of Lord Browne's pay settlement were revealed in the oil giant's annual review. According to the report, Mr Brown's salary and bonus payments came in at £2.5m, down from £3.3m last year. The value of shares awarded to Lord Browne under an incentive scheme also fell to £2m from £3.1m in 2005.

- [Financial Times](#) and related [Financial Times](#) story. [The Independent](#). [The Pump Handle](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- [BP Annual report and accounts 2006](#). [Hazards BP webpages](#).

### **Concern at Shell's "dismal" offshore safety record**

Shell has been repeatedly warned by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) about the poor state of its North Sea platforms, and has received a series of official improvement notices. The Guardian reports the company's "dismal record" undermines Shell's public commitment to improve its performance after a fatal explosion on the Brent field in the North Sea in 2003 and raises further concerns about Britain's ageing oil and gas equipment ([Risks 266](#)). The report echoes concerns raised consistently by offshore unions ([Risks 267](#)). As recently as 13 November, an HSE improvement notice said on the Clipper 48 platform "Shell have failed to implement a suitably resourced maintenance regime to achieve

compliance with their maintenance strategy. This has led to an excessive backlog of maintenance activities for safety critical equipment." Critics fear that some of the long-established oil infrastructure in the North Sea is being neglected because it is coming to the end of its commercial life. Shell was served with a similar notice on 1 September, about the state of facilities on the Leman A platform in the central North Sea. Last summer Shell insisted it was in the middle of a \$1bn (£515m) programme to upgrade its platforms, saying: "Safety is and will remain our first priority." But the HSE website shows Shell was issued with 10 improvement notices during 2006, although one referred to an onshore facility at St Fergus in Scotland. Shell has been served with 42 notices since 1999, according to HSE's online enforcement database.

- [The Guardian](#).

### **Don't kill yourself driving for a living**

The government is warning that stress and distractions could be placing working drivers at serious risk, and has launched a new campaign targeting the UK's three million-strong army of "White Van Men". Road safety minister Dr Stephen Ladyman said: "I used to drive for work myself and I know the pressures. Tough deadlines can push you over the speed limit, and distractions like the boss calling you on your mobile can take your attention off the road. Simple measures which anyone can adopt will make a real difference, and that's what our new campaign is about." The minister added: "Government research shows that around 200 fatalities and serious injuries involving somebody at work occur on our roads every week. Our message to drivers is that good driving is also safe driving, and employers must take responsibility for managing the safety of their staff when out on the road." The government says its 'THINK! Driving for Work' campaign will focus on removing many of the hazards van drivers face, such as stress, fatigue and answering mobile phones whilst driving. Drivers and their bosses will also be encouraged to plan journeys

better in a bid to reduce speeding. The government is also rolling-out the ‘Driving for Work Business Champions’ initiative. Run by road safety charity Roadsafe, the programme aims to spread advice and good practice and will encourage business leaders to communicate directly with other employers about the benefits of managing work-related road safety.

- [DfT news release](#). [THINK! Road safety website](#).

**Firm pays £250,000 after worker’s electrocution**

Civil engineering giant Balfour Beatty has been told to pay over £250,000 in fines and court costs following the fatal electrocution of a rail worker near Basingstoke. Balfour Beatty Rail Infrastructure Services pleaded guilty to safety offences at Winchester Crown Court. The case followed the death of Jason Lee Pepall, 29, on of the London-to-Winchester line in August 2003. The court heard that Mr Pepall, who was working for Balfour Beatty as a contractor from McGinley Recruitment Services, was part of a team working on the line when the incident occurred. Prosecutor Nicholas Haggan QC told the court that Mr Pepall was acting as lookout for a gang of workers repairing conductor rail insulator pots on the tracks, but had also been helping out with some of the physical work. He said his co-workers heard a scream from Mr Pepall, “who had apparently bridged the conductor and running rails and had been electrocuted.” Mr Haggan said an investigation into the incident revealed a “catalogue of errors by the defendant company,” including inadequate supervision, failure to use protective gloves when working on a live railway line, and failure to undertake a risk assessment or prepare a method statement or have a formal training system in place. Mr Haggan said the company had several previous convictions for breaches of health and safety legislation, for which it had received substantial fines. The judge, Mr Justice Royce, ordered Balfour Beatty to pay a fine of £180,000 and court costs of £73,602.41.

Andrew Stretton, from the Office of Rail Regulation, said: “This was a tragedy that should not have happened, but the positive outcome is that working procedures, not only changing rail pots with a live rail, but other maintenance procedures, have been changed.”

- [ORR news release](#). [Hampshire Chronicle](#).

**Butcher fined after teen is burned**

A family butcher has been fined £2,000 for health and safety breaches after a teenage employee suffered severe burns to his feet. Philip Woolgar, who was 17 at the time, received second degree burns when meat cooking equipment inside Piggotts Family Butchers in Biggleswade was knocked over spilling boiling hot water on to his feet. Mid Beds District Council prosecuted the business for failing to have suitable health and safety procedures in place to protect employees and for failing to carry out a proper risk assessment. Bedford Magistrates Court heard how the teenager spent five days in hospital after the incident last June and required skin grafts to help his feet heal. Piggotts directors Carl and Jane Billings pleaded guilty to safety breaches. Mid Beds solicitor Mark Woolsey explained that the incident happened when a meat boiler was moved from its original location for cleaning and put on an upside down cooking tray. He said: “While on the tray it had been used for cooking meat. From this one occasion whilst in use it was tipped over and spilled boiling water across the floor in the premises.” In a statement, the manager admitted he forgot to put the boiler back on its secure wheels because he was busy and stressed. The business was also ordered to pay £992 in costs. Research published this week found US youngsters aged 14 to 18 who work at retail and service jobs during the school year put in an average of 16 hours a week, often at jobs that are dangerous and unsupervised. The report from the University of North Carolina said some of the working conditions found in interviews with a representative national sample of 928 teenage workers violated federal law.

- [Mid Beds District Council news release](#). [Luton Today](#). [Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#). [CBS News](#).
- [Hazards young workers webpages](#).

### Unions say fight for temp workers' rights goes on

Unions have pledged to continue their fight for temporary workers' rights after the government last week wrecked the chance of new laws to provide employment protection for millions of temporary and migrant workers who have lower wages, no sick pay, holidays or pensions. Temporary work has also been linked to increased workplace accident and ill-health risks ([Risks 296](#)). Jim Fitzpatrick, minister for employment relations, talked out the private member's bill to give agency workers new rights despite 115 Labour MPs - a third of the party - turning up to back the measure. The bill had been introduced by Labour MP Paul Farrelly and was backed by the TUC and unions. Union general secretaries Derek Simpson of Amicus, Tony Woodley of TGWU, Billy Hayes of CWU, Paul Kenny of GMB and Dave Prentis of UNISON said in a statement after the 2 March debate: "Today's events demonstrate the need and the urgency for legislation and the fact that MPs across the country see this as an absolute priority. Unfortunately the government has chosen not to support this bill, and for this reason it is likely not to proceed, but they need be aware of the extent of the problem, and the devastating impact it is having on many people's lives and those of their families." They added: "Without the protection that only legislation can provide, workers will continue to be exploited by unscrupulous employers and this scourge in society will be allowed to continue. This is not the end of our campaign it can only be the beginning."

- [Amicus news release](#). [CWU news release](#). [The Guardian](#).

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### Canada: New law allows asbestos use in toys

New Canadian federal regulations allow asbestos to be used in children's toys. Pat Martin and Catherine Bell, members of parliament from the left of centre party NDP used hand puppets dubbed Toxic Timmy and Ms. O'Thelioma, named after an asbestos-related cancer, to raise their concerns at a news conference last week in Ottawa. "You would have to be crazy to put asbestos in children's toys," Martin told reporters in the voice of Timmy. "It's sort of like putting razor blades into children's apples at Halloween time." New regulations introduced by Canada's Conservative government say explicitly "a person may advertise, sell, or import an asbestos product... that is used by a child in learning or play." Martin commented: "The rest of the world is banning asbestos in all its forms and Canada is actively seeking out new markets and applications. It defies reason." NDP said putting carcinogens into children's toys and playthings is a "spectacularly bad idea" and showed an appalling lack of judgment on the part of the Conservative government. "What's even more absurd is that the Canadian government is spending a fortune subsidising and promoting this deadly material," said Catherine Bell. Canada continues to be one of the world's largest producers and exporters of asbestos, "dumping approximately 220,000 tonnes per year into developing nations and third world countries," says NDP. All of the mining occurs in Quebec, where one-third of work-related deaths are attributed to asbestos exposure each year, according to a 2006 study conducted the Centre for Study of Living Standards, an Ottawa-based non-profit organisation ([Risks 287](#)).

- [NDP news release](#). [CBC News](#). [International Ban Asbestos Secretariat](#).

### Global: Two journalists killed every week

One thousand news media personnel around the world have been killed trying to report the news over the past 10 years - almost two deaths every week, according to a new report. The statistic is one of the main findings of Killing the messenger, the world's most comprehensive inquiry into the deaths of journalists and other news media professionals. The research covered the period between January 1996 and June 2006 and was conducted by the International News Safety Institute (INSI) - a coalition of media organisations, press freedom groups, unions and humanitarian campaigners dedicated to the safety of journalists and media staff. "In many countries, murder has become the easiest, cheapest and most effective way of silencing troublesome reporting, and the more the killers get away with it the more the spiral of death is forced upwards," said INSI director Rodney Pinder. "Most of those killed were murdered because of their jobs; eliminated by hostile authorities or criminals as they tried to shine light into the darkest corners of their societies." The chair of the special INSI inquiry - BBC Global News Director Richard Sambrook - said: "The figures show that killing a journalist is virtually risk free. Nine out of 10 murderers in the past decade have never been prosecuted. This encourages more of the same. This is the most shocking fact at the heart of the inquiry." The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) welcomed the report. IFJ president Christopher Warren said: "Every journalist and every media organisation should study this report in its detail. It provides clear evidence that the industry must work together to address this crisis. Every union and every employer should pledge to adopt a joint strategy to confront the threats we all face." One of the key recommendations of the report calls for social dialogue and media organisations and unions to work together to help build a culture of safety within the industry. INSI was created in 2003 on the proposal of the IFJ and the International Press Institute, which brings together media executives and employers, and the IFJ says that its work has underscored the need for co-operation to confront the safety crisis.

- [INSI news release](#) and [Killing the Messenger](#) report. [IFJ news release](#).

### Sweden: Site dust causes heart attacks

Construction workers who are exposed to airborne particles in the workplace are more likely than others to die of a heart attack, a major Swedish study has found. Researchers from Gothenburg and Umeå found there has been little improvement in building site health and safety conditions in the last 25 years. Their study is based on health data collected from 176,309 Swedish male construction workers from the 1970s onwards and compared the builders' data to that of a control group consisting of 71,778 workers who were not exposed to airborne particles. During the 25-year follow-up period, 7,273 men in the larger construction workers' group died of heart attacks and 1,813 died of strokes. The corresponding figures for the control group were 1,790 and 497. "The increased risk may not look so dramatic, around 12 per cent when the whole group is taken into account, but it still means that many people die each year as a result of risks in their workplaces," said professor Kjell Torén from Sahlgrenska University Hospital. According to Torén, who led the study, workers are exposed to the same airborne particles today as they were 25 years ago. These include solvents, varnishes, diesel smoke and cement dust. Some chemicals like the paint stripper methylene chloride and carbon monoxide in exhaust fumes cause strain because they make the heart work harder to compete for oxygen. Dust damage to the lungs can also cause "right sided heart failure", where the heart is damaged through overwork, trying to provide sufficient oxygen to poorly functioning lungs.

- [The Local](#). [BWI health and safety webpages](#).

### USA: Writing's on the wall for safety?

The last time the official US safety watchdog OSHA designed a workplace poster to tell workers about their health and safety rights under federal law, it was aimed solely at employees and clearly told workers how to contact the safety agency. But under the Bush administration, employers receive special attention and assistance while workers take a back seat in safety issues. The Hill newspaper reports the Bush administration's OSHA has redesigned the workplace safety poster - and confusingly moved the toll-free hotline number for workers to call to report safety and health issues to a new section that tells employers how they may call OSHA to get the agency's help, "without citation or penalty." By regulation, the safety poster must include information for workers on how to contact the "nearest office of the Department of Labor." But nowhere on the new poster does it tell workers how to contact OSHA or, unlike the previous version, how to file a complaint, report an emergency or seek advice. Peg Seminario, AFL-CIO's health and safety director, commented: "This poster is supposed to be about workers' rights," adding however: "This administration has really focused a lot of effort in reaching out to employers instead of focusing on what it should, enforcing the law." In an email to the newspaper, a spokesperson for the House Education and Labor Committee, which is expected to hold oversight hearings on OSHA later this year, said: "The original purpose of this poster was to provide information for workers about their rights. Compared to the original, the new poster makes it easier for employers to learn about OSHA's 'voluntary compliance assistance' for employers, instead of making it easier for workers to use their rights to ensure a safe workplace." Under the business-friendly Bush administration, voluntary programmes have increasingly replaced enforcement activity.

- [AFL-CIO Now blog](#) and [Bushwatch](#) on workers' rights abuses.

## RESOURCES

### **Hazards, villains, heroes and killers**

If you want to know what's good, bad and plain ugly in workplace health and safety today, you should grab copy of the brand spanking new issue of Hazards magazine. The latest issue questions why top bosses – like those at BP, for example – can be virtually assured of their liberty, even when there is damning evidence about the boardroom's deadly neglect of safety. It reveals how the life-saving, disease preventing heroics of union safety reps is not being fully appreciated by either employers or HSE, and shows how workers worldwide are making links to improve safety. So, if you to know more about all of this, or about asbestos, occupational cancer, stress, safety enforcement – heck, just about everything – make sure you have your subscription sorted. Remember, Hazards is the only health and safety magazine written for union safety reps and is the only health and safety magazine of any sort to win major UK and international awards for its first class news, advice, campaigns and resources. It's also dirt cheap, thanks to massive discounts for trade union subscribers.

- [Hazards magazine. Subscription details, rates and online subscription form](#). For further details [email](#) or telephone the *Hazards* subscription hotline on 0114 201 4265.

### **An academic journal you'll want to read**

The latest issue of the excellent *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health* is now available online. It includes papers on issues including construction and asbestos. Fiona Murie of the global building union federation BWI explains why union organisation is crucial to site safety, wherever you work. Stirling University occupational health professor Andy Watterson is guest editor and concludes unions and campaigning organisations like the UK Construction Safety Campaign are "best placed and often the only organisations that can

then press international bodies, national governments, the construction sector, and specific building companies to act to reduce the enormous toll exacted by avoidable deaths, injuries, and illnesses in the industry.” Another paper covers the crucial role played by the Construction Safety Campaign in highlighting safety abuses and promoting workplace action. Unlike most academic journals, all papers can be downloaded without charge from the IJOEH website. It is the one scientific journal that is always worth a look.

- [International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health](#), volume 13, number 1, January - March 2007.

- [IOSH 07 conference and exhibition webpages](#). ‘Health and safety: the changing world of work,’ IOSH 07 safety conference, 27-28 March, International Centre, Telford.

#### **TUC courses for safety reps**

#### **COURSES FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2007**

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

## **EVENTS AND COURSES**

### **IOSH 07 safety conference, 27-28 March, Telford**

The national conference of safety professionals’ organisation IOSH is to take place in Telford on 27-28 March. The 2007 theme is ‘Health and safety: the changing world of work.’ IOSH says: “Our focus will be on the issues thrown up by new working practices, social trends and emerging hazards and how the health and safety profession can best respond to them. Workplace stress, 24/7 safety, competency, culture change and communication are today’s buzzwords in the boardroom and in the media.” It adds: “IOSH 07 will enable you to take these concepts and turn them into concrete reality on the ground. Fewer accidents, less sickness absence, smaller insurance premiums, better employee relations and a safer, healthier workforce - deliver these, and health and safety becomes a vital ingredient of the organisation and not needless red tape.” Speakers include HSE chief executive Geoffrey Podger, national director for health and work Dame Carol Black and Dr Janet Asherson, head of the health and safety for the employers’ organisation CBI.