



# Risks Newsletter



---

Number 299 – 24 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

### • UNION NEWS

- Union warns hummus action could spread
- Privatisation of vehicle checks 'a threat to safety'
- Payouts for workers injured in work falls
- Squash cab campaign presses safety message

### • OTHER NEWS

- TUC continues to call for greater rights for safety reps.
- Union criticises "slap in the face" for reps
- Probe traces BP blast blame back to London
- Call for new journalist killing law

- Firm fined over father and son drowning deaths
- Firm fined after driver is crushed
- Family's payout fight after shredder death
- Pair jailed for asbestos crimes
- No-one is safe from asbestos
- Conservative bid to scupper construction law

### • ACTION

- You can help TUC win on penalties!

### • INTERNATIONAL NEWS

- Australia: Rights reform "biggest threat since asbestos"
- Denmark: Union study exposes work cancer tragedy
- Extraterrestrial: Lunar dust 'may harm astronauts'
- France: Few workers protected from major health risks
- Russia: Mine disaster prompts safety action
- USA: Unions wear down Bush in protective gear victory

### • EVENTS AND COURSES

- TUC courses for safety reps
-

## UNION NEWS

### Union warns hummus action could spread

Changes to production methods after a salmonella in hummus scare could place workers at additional risk in an already unsafe firm, a union has warned. GMB says a new requirement to boil tahini oil “is giving rise to very dangerous congestion” at the Bakkavör hummus manufacturing plant in North West London. The firm, which supplies tubs of hummus to Sainsbury's, Tesco, Marks and Spencer and Waitrose, had to recall half a million tubs of hummus last month, with tahini oil fingered at the culprit. The new manufacturing process requires the workers to boil the tahini oil in two very large pans, cool it and repack it in a cramped, poorly ventilated area. GMB says its members “are seriously concerned about the risks of serious injuries that could result from an accident” and say the legally required risk assessments have not been conducted. The union says the site, which refuses to recognise the union, has a poor health and safety record. The firm’s London factories have received a series of Health and Safety Executive (HSE) improvement notices for safety offences ([Risks 288](#)). GMB officer Tahir Bhatti commented: “Bakkavör managers are putting production for the main supermarkets ahead of their legal duty to protect the health and safety of their workers. They have a poor track record on health and safety on that site. GMB has warned them before to stop cutting corners and putting our members at risk. Several union members have been badly injured and disabled by machines on the site.” He added: “GMB call on Bakkavör to conduct an immediate risk assessment to prevent serious injury to GMB members in this plant. GMB calls on HSE to inspect the plant. GMB is asking the major supermarket chains to step in as well. GMB members will demonstrate outside their head offices if immediate action is not taken on this warning from GMB members in that plant who fear for their safety.”

- [GMB news release.](#)

### Privatisation of vehicle checks ‘a threat to safety’

Safety on the UK’s road network would be put at risk if plans to privatise some of the vehicle safety watchdog’s core functions are pushed through, a union has warned. Prospect members in the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) say key safety functions under threat include: lorry and bus testing; training services; operator licensing administration; prosecution and legal services; traffic, vehicle and MOT enforcement administration; and routine enforcement. The union warning comes after management at the agency revealed that a review of outsourcing options had identified a public private partnership as the preferred way forward. The union, which says the privatisation move is in response to a call for “efficiency savings”, is lobbying for a full and open parliamentary debate examining the case for keeping VOSA in the public sector. Prospect says the Transport Select Committee shares its concerns, with its annual report for 2006 noting: “We have serious reservations about proposals to outsource any testing and enforcement responsibilities. Safety must be the top priority.” The union estimates that one major incident avoided through increased enforcement would save £1m in delay costs, while 50 per cent of critical incidents – such as side swipes, insecure loads and tiredness – could be addressed through VOSA inspections. VOSA section secretary Kevin Warden said: “Our members are determined to fight to ensure that the largest and heaviest vehicles on our roads, and the roadside enforcement of those vehicles, is not undertaken by a company looking to create profit rather than VOSA’s objective of a safer environment for us all.”

- [Prospect news release.](#)

### Payouts for workers injured in work falls

Two workers injured in workplace falls have received substantial compensation payouts. GMB member Robin Watkins, 46, a worker employed by Birmingham City Council to service and repair playground equipment in local parks, was removing a Victorian swing when the ladder he was using slid sideways, causing him to fall. He suffered multiple fractures to his left ankle in the June 2005 incident, leaving him with a level of disability assessed at 10-15 per cent and requiring seven months off work. “People visiting me said that I would have a case, so I sought legal advice through my union, the GMB in Birmingham,” he said. “If nothing else, it was my opportunity to ensure that the same incident wouldn’t happen to other workers.” The Council initially denied liability but after it was pointed out that they had failed to comply with the Work at Height Regulations 2005, which came into force shortly before Mr Watkins’ accident, they admitted liability. The claim was settled for £21,000 and Mr Watkins’ employer subsequently sent him on ladder and scaffolding courses. In a second case, a former employee of the Peugeot car plant in Ryton, Coventry was awarded an undeclared sum after breaking a wrist in a July 2005 fall. Amicus member Shirley Gough, 58, was injured after falling heavily on metal bolts left by the factory gates. “I don’t know how the bolts came to be there, but it was clearly very dangerous as I found to my cost,” said Mrs Gough. “Mrs Gough took the right action by turning to her union for help,” said Barry Robinson, an Amicus union representative. “We will always support our members who believe their employer has not taken steps to protect them from injury.”

- Thompsons news releases on the [Robin Watkins](#) and [Shirley Gough](#) cases.
- [HSE falls webpages](#).

### Squash cab campaign presses safety message

Some train cabs are so unsatisfactory the safety of rail drivers and passengers is being put at

risks. The warning from train drivers’ union ASLEF came last week on International Rail Safety Day, 13 March. Members of the union’s national executive, regional representatives and union members distributed leaflets and stickers at London Bridge station, to publicise “Squash”, ASLEF’s campaign for train cabs that “are Safe, Quiet, User-friendly, Air-conditioned, Specially seated and Healthy.” ASLEF general secretary Keith Norman said: “No matter how hard a driver tries, it is impossible to maintain necessary levels of concentration in a cab that lacks basic facilities like air conditioning.” The union said Rail Safety and Standards Board reports from July 2006 provide “conclusive evidence” that high temperatures compromise safety, with “signals passed at danger” (SPADS) up by 62 per cent in the sub-standard cabs. “Had the cabs been fitted with modern air-cooling systems, this could have been avoided,” said Keith Norman.

- [ASLEF news release](#).

## OTHER NEWS

### TUC continues to call for greater rights for safety reps.

The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) agreed to revise the guidance to the safety representatives but a decision on proposals from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that safety reps should have no new consultation rights has been deferred. At a 15 March meeting, the HSC considered HSE’s recommendations arising out of last year’s consultation on worker involvement ([Risks 257](#)). The HSE paper noted: “There will be a high level of interest in the results of the consultation from stakeholders. In particular, the TUC and trade unions are likely to be disappointed that our proposals are not more far-reaching.” Commenting on the outcome of the HSC meeting, a TUC spokesperson told Risks: “We welcome the fact that the HSC agreed to revise the Brown Book [the safety reps’ regulations and related code of practice and guidance], but are disappointed

that, despite overwhelming support for legislative change, the HSC deferred making a decision on the modest proposals that had been consulted on.” She added: “We urge the HSC to respect the views of those employers, safety representatives and safety professionals who responded to the consultation exercise and implement the proposed changes as soon as possible.” The meeting agreed there should be further discussions involving the TUC and CBI on whether changes could be made to either the regulations or the related approved code of practice to deliver a safety rep right to be consulted on risk assessments and to receive a response to safety queries. A further paper on legislative changes will be produced in the next few months. Commenting on a number of other measures also recommended in the HSE paper and agreed by the meeting, including guidance for employers and online tools for safety reps, HSC chair Bill Callaghan said: “This new approach, building on the achievements already delivered, will help to bring workers and their employers together to raise workplace standards and improve health and safety performance.”

- [HSC news release](#). Worker Involvement: results of the consultation exercise and a proposed approach to current and future work, HSE paper to the HSC meeting, 15 March 2007 [[pdf](#)].

### Union criticises “slap in the face” for reps

Amicus have criticised the recommendation from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) not to recommend changes to the safety representatives regulations ([Risks 257](#)). In a statement, Amicus said: “Despite 91 per cent of respondents agreeing there should be a duty on employers to consult safety reps on risk assessment and 96 per cent saying there should be a duty to respond to representations from safety reps, the HSE recommended to the Commission that there be no changes to current health and safety law.” The statement added: “This is an incredibly embarrassing decision, in the light of such an overwhelming response in favour from the

consultation.” The statement, which also calls for complaints about the HSE recommendations to be made directly to HSE chief executive Geoffrey Podger, said: “What is most insulting is the slap in the face to safety reps, who each day make it their life to improve the working environment, helping work colleagues and their employers to ensure people go home safe. Employers themselves recognise this fact, and the majority have shown their support in their response, it seems the HSE is willing to chance slapping them in the face as well.”

- [Amicus news release](#).
- [Consultation consultation: TUC tells the government it wants new rights for safety reps](#), *Hazards*, Number 94, April-June 2006.

### Probe traces BP blast blame back to London

The final official report into the Texas City disaster, which killed 15 people and injured a further 180, has accused top BP bosses of ignoring warnings that a disaster was imminent. The US Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board's (CSB) report, published in Houston this week, concluded that cost cuts mandated by the company's London headquarters contributed to the tragedy and the BP board knew of the problems in Texas but did “too little and too late”. The board said: “The Texas City disaster was caused by organisational and safety deficiencies at all levels of BP Corporation.” It added: “Warning signs of a possible disaster were present for several years, but company officials did not intervene effectively to prevent it.” Workers were severely fatigued, the report found, with some having worked 12-hour shifts for over 30 consecutive days. CSB laid blame squarely at the feet of Lord Browne and his colleagues in London, saying: “The BP chief executive and the BP board of directors did not exercise effective safety oversight.” According to CSB chair, Carolyn W Merritt: “The combination of cost-cutting, production pressures, and failure to invest caused a progressive deterioration of safety at the

refinery. Beginning in 2002, BP commissioned a series of audits and studies that revealed serious safety problems at the Texas City refinery, including a lack of necessary preventative maintenance and training.” She added: “These audits and studies were shared with BP executives in London, and were provided to at least one member of the executive board. BP's response was too little and too late. Some additional investments were made, but they did not address the core problems in Texas City. In 2004, BP executives challenged their refineries to cut yet another 25 per cent from their budgets for the following year.” Among CSB's recommendations are calls for BP to encourage guilt-free reporting of incidents and to appoint a non-executive director with direct experience of process safety. The board also calls on both the petroleum industry and US unions to develop fatigue prevention guidelines limiting hours and days of work.

- [CSB news release, news release on approval of the report and recommendations. CSB webpage on the Texas City blast. USW news release.](#)
- [The Guardian](#) and [Guardian Business. New York Times. The Financial Times. The Times. Reuters.](#)
- [Hazards webpages on BP's safety record.](#)

### Call for new journalist killing law

News company ITN has launched a campaign to create a new crime of wilfully killing a journalist. The call comes four years after the death of ITN reporter Terry Lloyd. A coroner ruled in 2006 that Mr Lloyd, 50, was unlawfully killed by troops and called for charges against them ([Risks 279](#)). This week ITN released the names of 16 US marines who were present when Mr Lloyd was killed in southern Iraq. It said that one of the named men “almost certainly” fired the shot that killed him in March 2003. At an inquest in October 2006, the coroner said that the troops shot Mr Lloyd in the head while he was in a

makeshift ambulance, having already been hurt in crossfire. Mr Lloyd's interpreter Hussein Osman was also killed and his cameraman Fred Nerac is missing, believed dead, following the shooting - which took place near Basra on 22 March 2003. As a tribute to journalists who have died in war zones, ITN is campaigning for a specific international crime of killing a journalist. The company argues that it would help to deter soldiers from killing journalists and emphasise the unique role played by war correspondents. The move was welcomed by journalists' union NUJ. The union's general secretary Jeremy Dear said: “We have for a long time campaigned for the killing of journalists to be a specific crime under international law.” He added: “At times of war the need for scrutiny, accountability and facts is more important than ever - the public expects journalists to deliver that. Journalists in turn have a right to expect they will be given the best protection possible under international law.”

- [NUJ news release. The Guardian. The Times. BBC News Online.](#)
- [International News Safety Institute website](#) and new ‘War, journalism and stress’ [trauma self-help website for journalists.](#)

### Firm fined over father and son drowning deaths

British Waterways has been fined £100,000 after admitting safety breaches that led to two deaths. Mark Wells, 41, and his 19-year-old son Luke were found in a submerged tractor in the Kennet and Avon Canal at Mill, Wiltshire, in December 2004. They had been hedge trimming on the canal when the towpath gave way. British Waterways admitted it had breached safety regulations, and that failing had cost two men their lives. In a statement, the company said: “BW accepts that it failed on this occasion to conduct its operations in a way to ensure, so far as is reasonably practical, the prevention of an accident.” A proper risk assessment had not been conducted and a crucial safety bulletin had not

been released to staff with an instruction that machinery should not be operated within 1.3 metres of the canal edge. Robin Evans, British Waterways chief executive, said: "I deeply regret that these tragic deaths occurred and offer my deepest sympathies to the family and friends of the two men." Kim Cary, mother of Luke Wells and former partner of Mark Wells, submitted a statement to Swindon Crown Court. The statement, which was read by the judge and both barristers, said: "Those of you who read this may have children of your own and you will all know only too well that it is a parent's greatest fear to lose a child. Well, from one parent that knows only too well it is a million times worse than you can ever dread to imagine." The statement added: "I was very disappointed and saddened that we received no written words of condolence from British Waterways after the untimely death of Luke and his dad, Mark - just a mention from their solicitor. Grief is the price we must pay for loving, and our price is the highest." The British Waterways website includes sections on "responsibility" and "accountability" but makes no mention of the deaths of Luke and Mark Wells, or of the conviction.

- [Wiltshire Times](#). [BBC News Online](#). [British Waterways website](#).
- [Hazards deadly business webpages](#). [Families Against Corporate Killers \(FACK\)](#).

### Firm fined after driver is crushed

A Barnsley firm has been fined £70,000 after one of its drivers was fatally injured by a falling excavator as he tried to load it onto a lorry. John Ferneyhough, 48, from Bolton-on-Deerne, died on 24 September 2004 while trying to lift the excavator using a poorly maintained lorry-mounted crane. E J Lidster and Sons Ltd pleaded guilty at Sheffield Crown Court to failing to ensure the safety of an employee. The firm, based in Burton Grange, was also ordered to pay costs of £35,000. The court heard Mr Ferneyhough was fatally injured after the hook attachment on

the crane failed while the excavator was suspended above his flat bed lorry at the firm's site in Sheffield. After the hearing, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector David Stewart said: "The risks involved in lifting operations and workplace transport should never be underestimated. It is vital that lifting equipment is effectively maintained and lifting operations are planned properly to ensure workers' and public safety." He added: "The underlying cause of this accident was the company's poor maintenance regime for its lorry loader cranes which meant that on the day in question the crane involved was not in a condition fit for use because of earlier damage to the hook. Employers have a duty to ensure that their plant is safely maintained. Failure to do this can have tragic consequences as this accident has demonstrated all too clearly."

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

### Family's payout fight after shredder death

The family of a recycling plant foreman who died when he was pulled through a paper shredder in front of his teenage son have launched a High Court battle for more than £400,000 compensation. Father-of-three Kevin Arnup, 36, was working alongside his son Jason at the MW White Ltd recycling plant in Station Road, Ketteringham, near Norwich, three days before Christmas in 2003, when the paper shredder they were operating became blocked. They had both climbed inside the machine to unblock it when the shredder started up again. Company owner Paul White was jailed for a year in September 2005 after his failure to install a basic switch led to the horrific death of his lifelong friend ([Risks 225](#)). He admitted manslaughter and safety offences. Mr Arnup's widow, Melly Arnup, is now suing the company for more than £400,000 over the death of her husband, who had been working at the plant for six years and was the most senior member of staff on site. Jason, who was 15 at the time, is also suing the company. The family's counsel, Robert Weir, said the company admitted

primary liability in November 2005 for the horrible accident but was arguing that Mr Arnup was himself careless and it was disputing the amount of the payout due to his widow and son. The company also argued at the High Court that £229,000 death-in-service and benefit trust payments made to Mrs Arnup should be deducted from the final damages award. Judge Seymour has indicated he will reserve his decision until a later date.

- [Eastern Daily Press](#).

### Pair jailed for asbestos crimes

Two demolition men from Bradford have been jailed for asbestos-related crimes – but another repeat offender has escaped with community service for a second time. William Reidy, 59, who had previous convictions for similar offences, was sentenced at Bradford Crown Court to 16 months in prison for depositing asbestos waste in contravention of environmental and special waste laws. His foreman, 61-year-old Leonard Imeson, was jailed for four months. Both men had pleaded guilty. The court heard how they were paid to remove building waste from companies across Yorkshire, but boosted their profits by illegally dumping it. A third man, Neil Medley, 45, was given 100 hours community service after he pleaded guilty to two offences of falsifying documents. Medley had an earlier April 1999 conviction for safety and child labour offences, after employing schoolchildren to remove asbestos. On that occasion he was ordered to do 240 hours community service, a decision which caused outrage, with the TUC, unions and campaigners all calling for a substantial jail term. During the current case, prosecuting barrister Tahir Khan said the three men were working together in a demolition business run by Reidy, called Space Making Development (SMD). Environment Agency officers estimated that 200 lorry loads of demolition waste had been dumped illegally and the lorries were traced back to SMD. The judge said the defendants were experienced in the demolition business, they knew that asbestos

waste had to be dealt with carefully and yet had failed to do so despite a risk to public health. Paul Salter, environmental crime officer at the Environment Agency, said: “This case shows that businesses cannot get away with putting profits before the environment and human health. Demolition contractors must take their responsibilities seriously because people will not put up with them blighting our towns and countryside.”

- [Environment Agency news release](#). [Telegraph and Argus](#). [BBC News Online](#).

### No-one is safe from asbestos

Over three decades of warnings from unions and campaigners that use of asbestos would lead to a disease epidemic have been proven tragically correct. The death toll is no longer dominated by asbestos workers – construction workers are now the single largest affected group. And hundreds of cases are emerging of people developing asbestos related cancer after very short or low level exposures – including the children and grandchildren ([Risks 295](#), [Risks 282](#)) of exposed workers and, increasingly, younger people ([Risks 279](#), [Risks 287](#)). Robert Fleming, a former headteacher from County Durham, died earlier this month from the asbestos cancer mesothelioma, after being exposed to asbestos from boiler lagging and broken cement tiles at Tudhoe Grange school. Anthony Pope, 48, a Cornish man exposed to asbestos while on a government training scheme, was diagnosed with the same condition last year. He was exposed to the dust while working for the Manpower Services Commission scheme from 1985 to 1987. His job entailed cleaning up old buildings, like village halls and churches and he was exposed to asbestos while wire brushing and repairing roofs. Mr Pope’s lawyer, Julie Appleby added: “We would urge anyone who worked with Mr Pope to get in touch with us. Their evidence is vital to help us pursue compensation on Mr Pope’s behalf. He has been diagnosed with a disease, which he was exposed to through carrying out a hard day’s work. It is

important that justice is served and he is fully compensated.”

- [Northern Echo. Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)
- Anyone who worked with Mr Pope or worked on the Manpower Services Commission Scheme from 1985 to 1987 should call Julie Appleby on 0191 269 0488.

### Conservative bid to scupper construction law

Conservative leader David Cameron is spearheading an assault on new health and safety regulations, designed to enhance worker protection and encourage practical solutions to good health and safety management. The assault takes the form of a one sentence Early Day Motion calling for the new Construction Design and Management (CDM) Regulations 2007 to be annulled. The regulations were only signed by the minister for health and safety on 7 February and laid before parliament on 15 February, with a view to implementation on 6 April. The modest regulations require all those involved in the construction process to work together. Criticising the move by the Tory leader, an Amicus statement said: “The support for this new law is well renowned, and comes from organisations such as the Health and Safety Executive, Department of Trade and Industry, trade unions and most of the construction business community. These regulations were approved unanimously by the Health and Safety Commission, which represents both large and small employers, trade unions, safety professionals and local authorities.” Amicus adds: “It seems incredible that the opposition is asking for this annulment, in light of recent figures revealing that 74 people have died on building sites already this year, an increase of 14 per cent on the 2005/06 figures” ([Risks 298](#)). CWU national safety officer Dave Joyce commented: “Let’s hope a Tory government never returns to power with people like Cameron in charge. We can see what a Tory government's attitude to health and safety would be. It really

would be back to the bad old days when the Tories sabotaged EU health and safety directives in the early 90s.”

- [Amicus statement. Early Day Motion: EDM 1151, David Cameron.](#)

## ACTION

### You can help TUC win on penalties!

The TUC is urging all union reps and campaigners 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 already one of the top campaigns on Labourspace, but needs your support if it is to claim top spot.

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

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

**Australia: Rights reform “biggest threat since asbestos”**

A safety institute has slammed employment rights reforms in Australia which it says are doing “undeniable” damage to workplace health and safety. Victorian Safety Institute of Australia (SIA) vice-president Kevin Jones said that the Liberal government’s ‘WorkChoices’ reforms, which drastically curtailed union and employment rights at work, pose the “biggest threat to the safety of Australian workers since asbestos.” Speaking ahead of this week’s Safety in Action conference in Melbourne, he said it was now “undeniable” that the new federal industrial relations system had a negative effect on occupational health and safety.

“WorkChoices is opening a Pandora's box of new health problems stemming from stress and high workloads,” Jones said. “It's the greatest threat to workers' health since asbestos, because it harms people from all walks of life in such an insidious way - millions of Australians will suffer its potentially devastating effects.” National union federation ACTU this week launched a major campaign against the industrial relations reforms, with a hard-hitting ‘Boys in the Boardroom’ TV advertisement first airing this week. The advertisement features suited businessmen sitting in a corporate boardroom, discussing how they can use the Howard government’s laws to increase company profits at the expense of workers’ terms and conditions.

- [OSH Reps SafetyNet Journal. ACTU news release.](#)

**Denmark: Union study exposes work cancer tragedy**

A trade union study has identified high levels of occupational cancers in construction workers in Denmark and has prompted immediate government action. Danish Confederation of Construction Workers Unions (BAT-Cartel) researchers analysed statistics in the Danish National Cancer Registry. They found a range of

jobs had a statistically significant risk for a range of cancers, many associated with asbestos exposure. Rates of lung cancer and mesothelioma in plumbers were over three times the expected level. In carpenters, joiners and electricians, mesothelioma was more than twice the expected rate, and higher still in insulators at over six times the expected figure. The study also found an excess of lip cancers in outdoor workers, and some lung and stomach cancer excess in painters. In certain jobs, rates of one asbestos cancer, peritoneal mesothelioma, were massively elevated. In response to the union analysis, the Danish minister for employment, Claus Hjort Frederiksen, announced that the Asbestos Act would be amended so that the Danish Cancer Registry would automatically register cancer cases with the National Board of Industrial Injuries. The BAT-Cartel says this should ensure that people who have occupationally contracted asbestos-related lung cancer will be compensated. It is now demanding a national action plan on asbestos, including a national asbestos registry and a duty on employers to manage asbestos.

- [International Ban Asbestos Secretariat report.](#)
- Survey of cancer risk (1970-2003) among employees in the Building and Construction Branch in Denmark, BAT-Cartel [[pdf – In Danish](#)].
- [Hazards occupational cancer webpages.](#)

**Extraterrestrial: Lunar dust 'may harm astronauts'**

Scientists are investigating the possible threat posed to astronauts by inhaling lunar dust. A study suggests the smallest particles in lunar dust might be cause lung scarring and other health effects, if comparisons with dust-related exposures and ill-health on Earth apply. US space agency Nasa has set up a working group to look into the matter ahead of its planned return to the Moon by 2020. Astronaut Harrison H (Jack) Schmitt, the last man to step on to the Moon in Apollo 17, complained of “lunar dust

hay fever” when his dirty space suit contaminated the habitation module after an energetic foray on the lunar surface. Nasa is now keen to assess the effects of more prolonged exposure and to address the problem before humans are sent back to the Moon in just over a decade. Details of the work were presented to the Lunar and Planetary Science Conference in Houston, Texas. The researchers suggest it is possible lunar dust could cause fibrosis, or scarring of the lungs, similar to that caused by asbestos or silica. Professor Larry Taylor, director of the Planetary Geosciences Institute at Tennessee said: “The medical doctors are interested in things that are less than about three microns. So we did some particle size determinations and discovered that a very large portion of lunar soil is potentially dangerous, approximately 1-3 per cent of the total soil by weight.” Other possible concerns are the minute nano-sized particles which could pass directly from the lung into the bloodstream.

- [BBC News Online](#). [New Scientist](#).

### **France: Few workers protected from major health risks**

A major survey of French workplaces has revealed few workers are adequately protected from a number of major health risks at work. In June and July 2006, around 2,000 workplaces in France were inspected to determine whether adequate measures had been taken to protect workers from the risks posed by carcinogenic, mutagenic or reprotoxic substances (CMR agents) – in general, substances that carry a cancer or reproductive health risk. The inspection was led by representatives from regional health insurance funds and by labour inspectors. They found only 40 per cent of workplaces using CMR agents - nearly half of all the firms visited were using these substances - had carried out the necessary risk assessment. In just under half of these firms, CMR agents had been replaced with non-harmful or less harmful agents. In only one-third of cases (34 per cent) had the employer instituted “collective”

measures to deal with the problem at source, protecting all workers. In 31 per cent of companies using CMR agents, the only protective measure was personal protective equipment such as masks. This equipment was often worn incorrectly and was poorly maintained, the study found.

- [HESA news report](#).

### **Russia: Mine disaster prompts safety action**

The Russian Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov, has called for tougher safety measures after one of the country's worst mine accidents in a generation. It appears most of the Ulyanovskaya mine's management was underground at the time of the explosion, which left a reported 106 people dead. A total of 203 miners were working 270 metres underground when a methane explosion occurred. Preliminary reports say that a roof collapsed inside the mine, either releasing or forcing high levels of methane gas through mine shafts. Those levels did register on newly-installed and British-made gas detection equipment, which was being inspected by a British safety specialist at the time. He was accompanied by an interpreter, the mine's chief engineer, and some 20 other managers and technicians from the mine. All were killed in the blast. Mining deaths in Russia reached their peak in the late 1990s. A lack of funds led to antiquated equipment not being repaired and to managers failing to provide for even a minimum of safety standards. Kemerovo region, where Ulyanovskaya is located, was the testing ground for mine privatisation in Russia. A politically controversial measure, some politicians say it drastically worsened an already poor safety record. Trade unions argue it led to miners and their managers putting commercial considerations ahead of safety.

- [ICEM news release](#). [ITAR-TASS news report](#). [BBC News Online](#). [The Guardian](#). [Sky News](#). [The Times](#).

**USA: Unions wear down Bush in protective gear victory**

Faced with a union lawsuit, the Bush administration has now said it will issue a final rule telling employers they must not charge for personal protective equipment (PPE). First proposed in 1999, the rule has languished in the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) since the Bush administration came into office. The rule would require employers to pay for such safety items as protective clothing, lifelines, face shields, gloves and other equipment used by an estimated 20 million workers. The action follows a lawsuit filed by national union federation AFL-CIO and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) in January this year ([Risks 289](#)). AFL-CIO president John Sweeney said: "This rulemaking has taken far too long. We will be monitoring the Department of Labor's actions to make sure they honour this commitment and issue a strong, protective rule." Less than a week ahead of the lawsuit deadline, Bush's labour secretary, Elaine Chao, filed papers with the court committing the government to issue a final rule in November 2007. UFCW president Joe Hansen says the nearly eight-year delay has been dangerous and deadly for workers. "This is a victory for workers who have suffered needlessly while awaiting action by the Bush administration. According to OSHA's own estimates, 400,000 workers have been injured and 50 have died while the rule has been in limbo. We expect a strong final rule this November."

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

- [AFL-CIO Now](#). [UFCW news release](#). [AFL-CIO news release](#).

**EVENTS AND COURSES****TUC courses for safety reps****HEALTH & SAFETY COURSES**