



Risks Newsletter



Myth of the month

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Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 14,500 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

TUC wants Beijing improvements not scapegoats

Firms producing official merchandise for the Beijing Olympics must be made to observe basic employment rights, the TUC has said. The call came after the Beijing Olympics Organising Committee indicated it intended to cancel contracts with four Chinese factories suspected of abusing workers' rights for the production of licensed goods bearing the Olympic logo. TUC said the committee should not end the contracts, but ensure firms end the abuses. The evidence of poor employment practices came in research published by the Playfair Alliance, which includes the TUC, Labour Behind the Label, international union bodies and campaign groups. It found evidence of children as young as 12 producing Olympic merchandise. The same report, 'No medal for the Olympics' also uncovered adults earning 14p per hour - half the legal minimum wage in China - with some working up to 15 hours per day, seven days a week. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "The workers in these factories have been subjected to serious exploitation but the Beijing Games organisers must not simply cut and run. Terminating the contracts would add insult to injury. Instead, they should be insisting that the abuses are ended, wages increased and hours cut. And they should put pressure on the International Olympics Committee (IOC) to add respect for workers' rights to the Olympic Charter." Chair of Labour Behind the Label, Maggie Burns, said: "We're pleased that the IOC has acknowledged there's a problem with the way that some goods are being made in China for the Beijing Games. But the IOC makes no suggestions as to how it might work with the Playfair Alliance to lift standards in the factories making Olympic merchandise. The IOC must not let Beijing walk away from the exploiting factories, but should work with us to tackle these problems."

- [TUC news release](#) and [earlier release](#). [Unite news release](#) and [update](#). [Playfair 2008 news release](#). [ITUC news release](#). [ITGLWF news release](#).

- No medal for the Olympics on labour rights report [[pdf](#)].
- [Playfair Alliance](#) and campaign statement [[pdf](#)]. [Clean Clothes Campaign](#). [Labour Behind the Label](#).
- [The Guardian](#). [BBC News Online](#). [No Sweat](#).

Talks after workplace death walkout

Workers at Aberthaw power station construction project in the Vale of Glamorgan have raised safety fears with management after the death of a 49-year-old worker on site. On Tuesday, hundreds of construction and maintenance staff walked out of the site over the issue. The Health and Safety Executive is investigating the incident, where a man was killed on Sunday after suffering a heart attack and falling from a platform. Site union Unite had been pressing for weeks for improved first aid. Staff want a registered nurse to be available on the site at all times. The site is owned by npower, but the workers who walked out are understood to have been working for contractors AMEC and Alstom. A spokesperson for AMEC said a registered medical nurse was due to start work on the flue gas desulphurisation project this week, following weeks of negotiations about first aid. A spokesperson from the union Unite confirmed workers had walked out in unofficial action over the lack of medical facilities. The Welsh Ambulance Service said they were called to the power station at 2237 BST on Sunday. A paramedic and an ambulance arrived 19 minutes after the call and found the man was having a heart attack. They took him to the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff, where he died. The ambulance workers reported that medical staff were already on the scene when they arrived, and the ambulance workers assumed those were part of the workforce at Aberthaw, the service said. Press reports say after an earlier incident, an injured worker had to be ferried to hospital by van, because an ambulance took so long to arrive. Construction firms were given permission for round-the-clock working on the site less than two weeks ago.

- [BBC News Online](#) and [earlier BBC report](#).
[South Wales Echo](#).

Jarvis pays for knee injury

Construction firm Jarvis is to pay £8,000 damages to a rail worker injured as a result of safety breaches. RMT member Eric Barker tripped over a brake handle at a York depot in October 2004, sustaining knee injuries that required several weeks off work. The handle was jutting out into a walkway because there was no room in the storage compound. Eric, who already had problems with his knee, fell heavily, and sustained injuries which exacerbated the arthritis in his knee. He was eventually retired on ill health grounds due to the arthritis. Bob Crow, RMT general secretary, said: "We're pleased with the outcome of this case for our member Eric Barker. All employers have a duty of care to their employees. This case illustrates how crucial it is for equipment to be safely stored away. It's a warning to other employers." Phil Kyte of Thompsons Solicitors, Eric's representative, said: "Jarvis plc clearly breached the Workplace Regulations which led to Eric Barker's accident. His compensation is therefore wholly justified and will help to secure his future given the earnings he lost at the time."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

RMT ballots over 'bonus scapegoating'

Network Rail workers being scapegoated over the Grayrigg accident in Cumbria are being balloted on strike action, rail union RMT has said. Ballot papers were sent last week to 119 Network Rail staff employed in the area that includes the site of the Grayrigg crash and who have had their £400 bonus withheld ([Risks 308](#)). In a separate dispute, papers are also going out to more than 400 signallers and supervisors in Scotland who were docked a £300 bonus after

striking over the company's failure to honour a 35-hour week deal. "Network Rail have only their own blatant double standards to blame for creating this situation," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said. "The company has effectively pointed a scapegoating finger at 119 of our members in Cumbria while the Grayrigg investigation is still under way, and that is unfair, unjustifiable and unacceptable. Our strike threat shamed company's executives into suspending the smaller part of their own fat bonuses, but they have still walked away with payments many times the size of the £400 they have withheld from our members."

- [RMT news release](#).

Taxi leaders welcome smoking ban

Leaders of England's taxi drivers have welcomed the complete ban on smoking in taxis and private hire vehicles which comes into effect at the end of this month. "For some years we have promoted the right of drivers to ban smoking in their taxis, and the new law will end any confusion on the issue," said taxi driver Jim Kelly, who chairs the cab trade committee of Unite's TGWU section. "For us, this is primarily a workplace health issue. Like other workers, taxi drivers are entitled to do their job without being at risk of cancer and other deadly diseases from cigarette smoke." He added: "No-one would expect to be able to blow smoke over a factory or office worker while they are at their posts. Now taxi drivers, together with bar staff and others still at risk from cigarette smoke, will get the same protection and consideration as the rest of the working population." He said he had just returned from Dublin, where a workplace smoking ban was working well. "I hope the next generation of taxi drivers will wonder how we ever tolerated smoking in our vehicles, and this measure could mean a lot more of our members will still be around to answer that question," he said. From July, it will be illegal in England to smoke in virtually all enclosed public places, workplaces and public and work vehicles,

including public transport and buildings associated with public transport.

- [Unite news release](#).
- [TUC smoking webpages](#), including smoking policy guide [pdf]. [Hazards smoking news and resources](#).

UK union attacks Mittal over Kazakh safety

Arcelor Mittal’s safety performance at its Kazakhstan coalmines is a stain on the UK, one of Britain’s leading trade unions said this week. The condemnation from Unite came after revelations that 90 miners had been killed in Mittal’s operations in Kazakhstan since 2004. A union spokesperson said that the safety record and working conditions at the steel group’s Kazakh operations were shameful because of the close links that Lakshmi Mittal, its chief executive, has with the UK. Britain’s richest man, with a personal fortune of £19 billion, Mittal has his office and home in London. The spokesperson for Unite’s TGWU section, speaking after revelations in the Sunday Times about Mittal’s Kazakh working conditions, said: “You don’t continue such exploitation, especially when it puts lives at risk. It is a stain on our society when a company with strong UK connections is linked to this in any way, shape or form.” Last September 41 miners were killed in a gas explosion at the Lenina mine ([Risks 277](#)) and two years earlier 13 workers were killed in an explosion at the nearby Shakhtinskaya mine. The Lenina blast triggered a strike by the miners, which was settled when Mittal agreed to safety improvements and substantial pay rises. Those working in the Lenina mine endure conditions not seen in Britain since the 1930s, the Sunday Times reported on 10 June. Miners describe a daily shift as a “suicide mission”.

- [The Times](#). [The Sunday Times](#).

OTHER NEWS

Payout ‘will give me time with my family’

A woman who contracted a terminal asbestos-related cancer by hugging her dockyard worker father says she will use a compensation payout to spend quality time with her family. Plymouth mother-of-three Debbie Brewer has received an interim compensation amount of £25,000 from the Ministry of Defence, which admitted liability in February ([Risks 295](#)). The 47-year-old, who has been told she may not live to 50 years of age, said: “It’s about quality of life; just spending time with my family enjoying each other’s company. Being able to give that to the children and build memories for them - that’s what it’s about. I want to have many more of them.” She plans to use the cash to take her husband David Brewer and children - 10-year-old Kieran, 17-year-old Richard and Siobhan, aged 20 - to Disneyland in Florida. She also hopes to travel to Egypt with her sister Jacqui Northmore. Mrs Brewer said she was shocked at the size of the interim payout, saying: “I didn’t expect that much to go on holiday”, adding however, “I would give up the money tomorrow” to have the cancer removed. Mrs Brewer applied for the interim payment from the MoD a month ago, pending the final payout, which is still under negotiation. Phillip Northmore, Mrs Brewer’s father, worked as an asbestos lagger at the MoD’s Devonport dockyard in Plymouth between 1961 and 1966 and she says her only contact with asbestos had come in repeatedly hugging him when he returned from work. In November last year, 45-year-old Michelle Campbell, who developed mesothelioma as a result of exposure to asbestos from her grandfather’s work clothing, was awarded a £145,000 MoD payout ([Risks 282](#)). She used to sit on granddad Charles Frost’s knee and enjoy a chat when he popped in to visit on his way home from his job at Portsmouth dockyards.

- [Plymouth Herald](#). [Mesothelioma and me](#), Debbie Brewer’s website.
- [TUC asbestos webpages](#). [Hazards asbestos](#)

[news and resource. Action Mesothelioma.](#)

Unhealthy bosses bad for site workers

Disinterested and unconcerned site bosses are risking the health of construction workers, a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) backed study has found. And contrary to ‘macho’ stereotypes about workers in the construction industry, site workers – unlike many site managers - are very concerned about their health and working conditions. The report on the Constructing Better Health (CBH) pilot scheme, which worked with more than 360 employers and was financed by HSE and industry contributions, has shown how involvement by construction workers far exceeded the expectations of organisers. The report’s authors, experts from the Institute for Employment Studies (IES), describe how more than 1,700 workers attended voluntary health checks, and 2,600 went along to ‘toolbox talks’, providing training on occupational health issues. By contrast, site bosses “rarely” took advantage of courses aimed at managers. Claire Tyers, lead author on the report, said: “CBH has been ‘myth busting’. There was a preconception that workers in the industry are irresponsible or not interested in looking after their health. The popularity of the scheme amongst workers clearly contradicts such a view.” She added: “There are some managers within the industry who do not want to scrutinise their work practices, and who are unwilling to accept the need for organisational-level change. The research showed, for example, that the training that CBH offered which was aimed at managers was rarely taken up. These same managers, however, were often very supportive and proactive in putting forward their workers for training.” A third of the site workers screened had work-related health problems, the study found.

- [IES news release. Constructing Better Health Pilot: Final Evaluation Report](#), HSE Research Report RR565 [[pdf](#)].

It’s bad jobs that make us sick, says PCS

Attacks on driving examiners, job cuts leading to increased workloads and stressful work conditions are the true story behind sickness absence in the Department for Transport (DfT) and its agencies, the union PCS has said. Responding to a new National Audit Office (NAO) report into the management of sickness absence in the DfT and its agencies, the union pointed to a 41 per cent increase in the number of attacks on driving examiners since 2002, which totalled 348 in the last year alone. With mental ill-health, including stress-related problems, accounting for a large portion of long-term sickness absence, the union claimed that job cuts leading to increased workloads, as well as stressful and confrontational interactions with the public involving frontline staff, were major contributing factors. Norina O’Hare, PCS national officer for the DfT, said: “Rather than a knee jerk draconian approach, the DfT and the rest of its agencies should follow the lead of the Highways Agency by introducing a well-being at work programme which includes health checks as well as advice and workshops on recognising and coping with stress.” Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, added: “Job cuts resulting in increasing workloads combined with an unacceptable rise in attacks on driving examiners is the real story here. If the DfT and its agencies are serious about tackling sickness absence then there needs to be a concerted attempt at recognising the causes and dealing with them in a proactive and positive manner.” The NAO report makes recommendations on how DfT should better manage sickness absence. These include making line managers more aware of responsibilities when it comes to sick leave, making earlier use of occupational health services and ensuring better quality standards for recording sickness absence.

- [PCS news release. NAO news release.](#) The management of staff sickness absence in the Department of Transport and its agencies, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC 527, 2006-2007. ISBN:

9780102945461. Full Report [[pdf](#)] and [Executive summary](#).

Britain takes lead on journalist safety

The British government has challenged the international community to end impunity for the killers of journalists and other media professionals. In an answer to questions in parliament, the Foreign Office also reaffirmed that the deliberate killing of a journalist in conflict is a war crime. Liberal Democrat spokesperson for media affairs Don Foster posted a series of written questions to the Foreign Office following consultation with the Brussels-based International News Safety Institute. INSI is seeking to ensure states follow the recommendations of UN Resolution 1738, passed by the Security Council last December, on the safety of journalists in conflict and the ending of impunity ([Risks 287](#)). In written answers, Foreign Office minister Kim Howells said journalists “must be provided with the protection that they need under domestic and international law.” The minister’s answers continued: “UK military forces are already required to act in compliance with the provisions of international humanitarian law relating to the protection of civilians, including journalists, to which the resolution refers,” adding: “Funding is available to support measures to protect journalists in armed conflict through a new human rights strand of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Global Opportunities Fund. For example, we have funded work in Colombia, with the International News Safety Institute, aimed at creating a culture of safety in journalism and reducing the risks journalists face at work.”

- [INSI news release](#) and [website](#). [FCO Global Opportunities Fund human rights programme](#).

BP explosion report ‘toned down’

BP’s internal investigator admitted in sworn testimony released this week that his final draft report on the UK company’s management responsibility for the 2005 Texas refinery explosion was toned down. The admission came less than a week after another contract worker died at the Texas City plant. Wilhelm Bonse-Geuking, BP’s European refining group vice-president, was charged with leading a team to determine management responsibility for the explosion, which killed 15 contract workers. In his deposition, taken by plaintiffs’ lawyers in civil lawsuits filed against BP, Mr Bonse-Geuking said early drafts of his report found “negligence” and BP executives “ignored process safety”. Yet, he said, in the final draft, “inattention” replaced “negligent” and “failed to appreciate” replaced “ignored”. Mr Bonse-Geuking said: “We found that our paper would be more convincing if we took some, let me call it, emotional elements out.” He said he signed off on the final version without observing all the changes or determining who made them. The Financial Times reports that the changes are important because they appear to limit BP’s legal liability. BP has taken responsibility for the blast but has not agreed that it withheld funds from the refinery knowing that they were needed to improve safety. The latest fatality at the plant came on 5 June, when a worker employed by contractor AMEX Electrical Services Inc was electrocuted while working on an idle unit that was being reconditioned for a restart. The March 2005 explosion killed 15 people and injured 170.

- [Financial Times](#). [Boston Herald](#).
- [More BP safety news](#).

Poor training led to disfiguring injuries

A Rotherham man has been awarded £15,000 in an out-of-court settlement after suffering a serious workplace injury to his face which has resulted in permanent disfigurement. Sean Blanchard, 35, a married father of two, had been employed by Avery Berkel based in Sheffield, for 16 years. The accident occurred as he was

attempting to repair platform scales at Bedford Steels in Sheffield. His solicitor, David Urpeth of Irwin Mitchell solicitors, said Mr Blanchard attempted to lift the scales with a crane but, due to inadequate training from his employer, did this in a manner which resulted in the lifting equipment failing and Mr Blanchard being struck in the face by the lifting hook. He sustained deep lacerations to lip, chin and tongue requiring 45 stitches. “Mr Blanchard was seriously injured in circumstances that should never have been allowed to occur,” the solicitor said. “Companies owe a duty of care to staff and must ensure employees are adequately trained to carry out their jobs safely. In this case, Avery Berkel showed a blatant disregard for Mr Blanchard's health and safety with the result that Mr Blanchard has suffered significant pain and suffering and been left with permanent facial disfigurement.”

- [Irwin Mitchell solicitors news release](#). [TUC compensation webpages](#). [Hazards compensation news and resources](#).

Firm fined after forklift worker is paralysed

A Berwick upon Tweed firm has been fined £20,000 after a worker was paralysed in a forklift truck incident. Silvery Tweed Cereals Ltd was fined and ordered to pay costs of £5,397 at Berwick upon Tweed Magistrates' Court after pleading guilty to breaching workplace safety laws. Steven Rogers, 29, suffered the injuries in June 2006 after was pinned to the floor when a bin he was attempting to empty fell from the forks. Commenting on the case, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector Martin Baillie said: “In this case Silvery Tweed Cereals Ltd did not ensure the load was adequately secured, nor did they make a suitable risk assessment and they did not ensure that all of their operators received adequate forklift truck training.” He added: “The tragic result was that one of the employees, Steven Rogers aged 29 of Berwick, sustained injuries which have left him permanently paralysed after a downgrade bin which he was attempting to empty fell from the forks of a

forklift truck and pinned him to the ground.” The HSE inspector said forklift trucks were responsible for just under 2,000 reportable incidents last year, including seven deaths. “Risks include being struck by a moving truck, crushed by an overturning vehicle, becoming trapped between a truck and an object or, as in this case being crushed by a falling load,” he said. “Employers must ensure they assess the risks involved in any use of these vehicles and take appropriate steps to counter those risks. They must also provide adequate health and safety training for any employees operating forklift trucks.”

- [HSE news release](#).

House manufacturer fined £65,000 for death

A Birmingham firm manufacturing new build homes has been fined £65,000 after a worker was crushed by a machine. Space 4 Limited, the timber frame manufacturing subsidiary of house building giant Persimmon Homes, was fined £65,000 with costs of £60,000 at Birmingham Crown Court following a prosecution by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The case was brought after the death of Philip Macken, who was killed on 10 December 2001. Following a problem with an automated foam injection machine, he entered the enclosure to make an adjustment. While he was inside the enclosure the machine started automatically and Mr Macken was trapped against the machine and received fatal crush injuries. Speaking after the case, HSE investigating inspector Tony Mitchell said: “Companies need to ensure that all safety devices are fully operational. In this case properly fitted interlocks would have prevented access to the enclosure, and saved Mr Macken's life.” He added: “Guarding and fencing of automated machinery is a basic requirement and the standards are well known. Simple checks should be carried out to ensure workers are protected from dangerous parts and that safety features are fitted and in good order.”

- [HSE news release.](#)

Butcher fined after schoolboy loses arm

The owners and manager of a butcher's shop where a 15-year-old boy lost his arm have been fined for illegally employing a child. Sam Ashworth's arm became trapped in a mincer at Fitton's butchers where he was employed as a Saturday worker ([Risks 275](#)). He was trapped for two hours and surgeons had to amputate his arm at the scene. At the time, the owners of the shop were J & B Fitton Ltd, and the shop's manager was Daryl Lees. He has now bought the shop. Both were prosecuted by Oldham Council because the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and Oldham Council's by-laws ban schoolchildren from working in butcher's shops. At Oldham Magistrates' Court, both pleaded guilty and were each fined £750 with £200 costs. Oldham Council's child protection officer, David Devane, said: "We are committed to taking action against employers who illegally employ children of school age. They are allowed to work from the age of 13 as long as they are working within the law, and their employer has applied for, and been issued with, a licence for them to work, via the local authority." He added: "Had Sam's employers applied for a licence for him to work, they would have been told that they could not employ him, therefore it would have safeguarded him from this incident."

- [Oldham Chronicle.](#)
- [TUC young workers webpage.](#) [Hazards young workers news and resources.](#)

Faults led to factory death

A Tyneside factory worker killed by faulty machinery lay undiscovered for up to 24 hours, an inquest has heard. Colleagues told how Michael Joyce, 51, was on an early shift and may have climbed inside the machine after it became jammed. It was not until 90 minutes after the

next shift arrived the following morning that his body was found. The machine, at Freudenberg Technical Products in North Tyneside, coated metal car seals in rubber. Special latches on the door should have made it impossible to enter the machine while the power was switched on, the inquest heard. But health and safety reports showed latches on the eight-year-old machine were broken due to sticky residue and a missing part. New locks would have cost £30. Reports also suggested faulty wiring to a control panel could have triggered the machine into action while Mr Joyce was inside. Coroner Eric Armstrong said: "The purpose of Mr Joyce's entering the machine is unknown. He had a task to do and if the machine didn't work he may have felt he would get in and try to sort it himself." A jury of five men and two women returned a narrative verdict. The foreman said: "An access panel to the machine was not adequately locked through faults in the machinery. The machine was activated, causing Mr Joyce's death." It is possible civil proceedings could be brought against the company. Health and Safety Executive inspector Dr David Shallow said after the inquest: "We are still waiting for a reply from the company." A search of HSE's prosecutions history database, which records cases over five years old, reveals the company was fined £12,000 in 2000 after another fatality at the same site. These older records were removed from the HSE database last year, but were reinstated after a campaign spearheaded by Hazards magazine and the National Union of Journalists ([Risks 262](#)).

- [Newcastle Evening Chronicle.](#)
- [HSE prosecutions history database.](#) [HSE prosecutions database.](#)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australia: Substance abuse tests of 'minimal' use

An Australian union body has welcomed a new report by a federal government agency that concludes workplace drug and alcohol tests are of little use. Brian Boyd, secretary of the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC), said the report's finding that "the advantages of implementing testing regimes for the general working population could be quite minimal" is "an overdue piece of common-sense research". The report comes after an Australian employers' association this year announced it wanted to be "free to attack drug use," a stance described by VTHC as "feudal". Brian Boyd said: "If employers really want to make positive improvements to workplace health and safety, they should be adopting the Charter of Workers Rights for OHS and Compensation [[Risks 309](#)], encouraging the election of more OHS reps, fixing up their own back yard and forgetting about John Howard's harsh and unfair industrial laws." The report from the Australian Safety and Compensation Council (ASCC) found there is little clear evidence on the links between drug use and absenteeism, low productivity, poor performance and accidents at work. It added: "The implications of consumption patterns, the timing of the consumption and the effects of withdrawal also need to be considered in any decision to implement an alcohol and illicit drug testing regime. The advantages of implementing testing regimes for the general working population could be quite minimal."

- [VTHC news release](#). [ASCC publication alert](#).
- Work-related alcohol and drug use - A fit for work issue, ASCC, June 2007. Full report [[pdf](#)] and executive summary [[pdf](#)].
- [TUC drugs and alcohol webpages](#). [Hazards drugs and alcohol news and resources](#).

Global: Move to end to child labour on farms

A new high powered partnership to eliminate child labour in agriculture was announced this week. Launched during the 2007 International Labour Conference in Geneva, the partnership

brings together UN, industry and union groups, including the global farm and agriculture union federation, IUF. Commenting on the initiative, IUF president Hans-Olof Nilsson said: "It is another shocking fact that agricultural workers – those workers who produce the world's food - often have the least resources to feed themselves and their families. Children work because their parents are poor." He added: "We must also recognise that there is a lack of decent work in agriculture. In many countries agricultural workers are denied even the basic human right to belong to and be represented by a trade union. Improving living and working conditions for adults in agriculture is for IUF a key part of the struggle against child labour." Speaking on 12 June, World Day Against Child Labour – which this year has an agriculture theme - the IUF president called on governments to ratify ILO Convention 184 on safety and health in agriculture as part of the campaign to improve living conditions for all in the sector. The new partnership includes the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) and IUF. ILO estimates that worldwide 126 million children are involved in hazardous child labour.

- [IUF news release](#) and [president's speech](#). [ILO news release](#), [video and transcript](#) and [child labour webpages](#). [ICEM news report](#).

USA: Workers locked in burning store

The owner of a New York supermarket has been accused of violating city codes after a blaze last week in which firefighters rescued five workers who had been locked inside the store and were found in the basement, huddled, crying and blackened by smoke. A spokesperson for District Attorney Richard A Brown said the owner, Yunes Doleh, was issued a summons for having

a locked exit, a misdemeanour that could result in a fine. Having a locked gate also violated the city building code, said Kate Lindquist, for the Department of Buildings. A construction contractor who supervised the five workers, Jose Correa, was charged with reckless endangerment, a more serious misdemeanour under state law that could lead to a jail sentence. The fire, which firefighters said appeared to have been started by a propane torch, erupted as the five workers, all believed to be immigrants, were renovating the Met Foods supermarket in Queens. They were working at night when the store was closed, and the authorities said Mr Correa, who was not present, had the key they needed to open a security gate and escape. None of the men was seriously injured, but the fire prompted criticism of the practice by a number of supermarkets in recent years of locking workers in at night so that outsiders do not enter and the workers do not steal merchandise. “We would like to see a programme of inspections, hefty fines and, where appropriate, criminal charges,” said Artemio Guerra, director of organising for the Fifth Avenue Committee, an advocacy group that has documented many examples of the practice involving food store janitors and stocking clerks. In 1991, 25 workers burned to death in the Imperial Foods chicken processing plant in Hamlet, North Carolina, after a deep fat fryer caught fire. The owner had locked all the exits.

- [New York Times](#).

RESOURCES

TUC tuberculosis briefing for reps

TUC has produced an online briefing for safety reps, outlining occupational infection risks posed by tuberculosis (TB). It says there has been a large increase in TB, with around 9,000 new cases every year, mainly in inner city areas. Around 40 per cent of all cases are in London. The guide says although TB is unlikely to be an occupational risk in most workplaces, “there are

some occupations where trade union members are likely to be at risk. These are particularly in health care, or any occupation that involves close contact with other people or visiting people in their homes. This means that teaching and other education staff, social care workers, many voluntary sector workers, and anyone working in overcrowded conditions could be at risk.” The guide outlines the law and provides a prevention checklist for safety reps, covering notification of risks, provision of infection control advice, routine and post exposure screening and vaccination. TUC says where workers are at higher risk, “consideration should be given to prevention through immunisation for those not yet vaccinated.”

- [Tuberculosis – a TUC briefing for safety representatives](#).

EVENTS AND COURSES

National stress conference, 10 November, Birmingham

The UK National Work Stress Network's 2007 conference will be on the theme of 'Enforcing the stress management standards.' The event will feature a speaker from the groundbreaking 'Whitehall II' research programme, the UK's biggest ongoing occupational health study and the one that has turned up links between job insecurity and lack of control to increased risks of heart disease, depression and long-term sick leave. An HSE stress person will also speak, and there are plans to feature an employer's experiences implementing the stress management standards.

- [National Work Stress Network conference](#) , Saturday 10 November 2007, Hillscourt Conference Centre, near Birmingham. Delegate fees are £50 (£17 unwaged). Accommodation can be provided for an additional cost.

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR JUNE TO SEPTEMBER 2007

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

USEFUL LINKS

- **Visit** the TUC http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/ website pages on health and safety. See what's on offer from [TUC Publications](#) and [What's On in health and safety](#).
- **Subscribe** to [Hazards](#) magazine, supported by the TUC as a key source of information for union safety reps.
- **What's new** in the [HSC/E](#) and the [European Agency](#).
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