



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 14,000 subscribers and 1,500 on the TUC website. To receive this bulletin every week, click [here](#). Past issues are [available](#). This edition contains [Useful links](#) [TUC courses for safety reps](#) [Disclaimer](#) and [Privacy statement](#).

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UNION NEWS

Bus workers demand respect and toilets

London's bus workers took to the streets of the capital on 23 August to demand proper toilet facilities on bus routes and at their workplaces – and immediately won support from the mayor of London. The workers, members of Unite, are threatening a full strike ballot if Transport for London (TfL) and London's local authorities don't unblock planning obstacles and speed up action to provide facilities. "We know the issue can be good for a laugh," said Unite organiser Peter Kavanagh. "But the lack of facilities for these essential London workers is no joke. It is a disgrace that a workforce who keep this city moving and carry 5.4 million passengers every day are being denied basic facilities." He added that this week "one of our drivers contacted me to say he'd been operating a bus service between North Woolwich and Stratford. There was no toilet at Woolwich, and the unsavoury public toilets at Stratford were closed. He arrived at Stratford at midday after being on the bus for more than three hours. He needed to use a toilet, and eventually had to use the facilities at the local shopping centre. When he returned to his bus, his supervisor had reported him for delaying the service. Some drivers have been so desperate for a toilet break they have had to relieve themselves in public places and been arrested." The campaigners had begun drawing up a list of London's worst bus routes for driver toilet facilities. "But we gave up, because there are just so many routes where there is no proper provision," said Peter Kavanagh. "This represents a serious health and safety issue for our drivers. Serious health problems arise from not being able to go to the toilet when you need to, especially bladder, kidney and prostate conditions." In a letter to the protesting drivers mayor of London Livingstone said he has told Transport for London to solve the problem as soon as possible, and has allocated funds to enable it to do so. "I fully support the goal of providing adequate toilet facilities for bus drivers on every route in London," the letter says. "Almost 23,000 bus drivers provide an invaluable service to London, day and night, and I want to ensure that they have access to proper

working conditions." It adds: "I can assure you that I allocated the funds and asked Transport for London to do everything in their power to solve this problem as rapidly as possible and I am committed to working with you to overcome whatever other obstacles we confront outside of the direct control of myself or Transport for London."

- [Unite news release](#). [BBC News Online](#). [TUC/Hazards toilet breaks campaign](#)

Company films toilets on the job

A union has told a firm it must remove CCTV cameras after they were discovered filming workers in the factory's toilet blocks. ThyssenKrupp Automotive (TKA) Tallent Chassis, in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, was accused of a "horrendous breach of employee privacy." The company is said to have taken the decision after several incidents of vandalism in the facilities, and has agreed to suspend the use of the cameras until 3 September, pending a review. The union Unite said the cameras were "completely unacceptable" and warned industrial or legal action against TKA Tallent was being considered by the 1,300 workers if the CCTV system is not removed. Ian Davies, regional officer for the Amicus section of the Unite, said: "As far as I'm concerned, I find it a horrendous breach of employee privacy that the company has installed these cameras. It shows a total disregard for privacy and human rights at work. The members will have my full support whatever form of action they decide to take - that could well be holding a ballot for industrial action or looking at taking legal action." The union officer added: "The company needs to realise that if there is a problem with vandalism, it can be monitored in many other ways. To install this CCTV should be the absolutely last resort - and as they have done it without consulting the trade unions initially, that is not the case." Excessive scrutiny while working has been linked to reduced productivity and increased ill health.

- [Northern Echo. Hazards workplace privacy webpages](#) and [toilet breaks webpages](#).

Tube workers win on ill-health pensions

London Underground union RMT has won an agreement that guarantees pension rights of Tube employees forced to leave their job through ill-health. The deal, which involves companies covered by the Transport for London (TfL) Pension Fund, came after RMT members last month voted by a 15-to-1 margin to strike against moves that would have dramatically affected qualification for ill-health pensions. Under the current rules, these pensions are granted to workers in the TfL fund whose ill-health makes them unfit to do their particular job, including those affected by work-related health problems. RMT said the proposed changes would have meant that anyone capable of earning an income, regardless of how small, would probably not qualify for or retain an ill-health pension. “Our members showed with a massive majority that they were prepared to strike to defend their hard-won ill-health pension rights, and they have won a significant victory,” RMT general secretary Bob Crow said. “We have now received the guarantees we were seeking that no attempt will be made to introduce cost-cutting changes that would deprive most people who leave work through ill-health of their pensions.” The union leader added: “Our members have shown once more that collective strength can successfully defend pension rights when they come under attack.”

- [RMT news release](#).

Second underground strike in safety row

Staff on the Bakerloo Tube Line have gone on strike for the second time in a row over safety. In July services were disrupted when members of rail union RMT took part in the first 24-hour

walk out ([Risks 314](#)). RMT is protesting at changes it says will leave staff working alone and vulnerable to assault as they move passengers from trains at stations north of Queen's Park. RMT members returned a 94.5 per cent vote for strike action. Bob Crow of the RMT said: “This dispute is purely and simply about the safety of our members and the travelling public. Having a minimum of two station staff involved in detraining passengers is not a luxury, it is a necessity, not least given the levels of crime at the stations involved.” Speaking ahead of the 22 August work stoppage, he said London Underground management LUL's plans to reduce staff “will expose more of our members to greater risk of assault.”

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

Civil servants suffer from overwork

Excessive workloads are forcing over half of full-time civil servants to work excessive hours just to keep up, a study has found, with many now working while sick. Research for the union PCS found 45.8 per cent of workers surveyed put in between 40 and 48 hours. The study concluded 1 in 20 workers was breaking the working time regulations – introduced as a health and safety measure - by working over 49 hours per week. A total of 1,792 civil servants took part in the survey conducted by the Centre for Industrial Relations at Keele University in conjunction with PCS. The union says the 24/7 report supports its claim that workloads are increasing as the government ploughs ahead with 84,000 civil and public service job cuts. Half of all those working additional hours do so in order to keep control of their excessive workloads, the study found. This compares to a third in the private sector delivering civil service contracts. Nearly 40 per cent had attended work when ill to keep up with workloads. More than half are experiencing difficulties balancing work and their family and private life. Mark Serwotka, PCS general secretary, said: “This report clearly illustrates that the government's drive to slash jobs is leading to increasing workloads and embedding

a long hours culture in civil and public services. With fewer people to do the same amount work, staff are under increasing pressure leading to corners being cut, which in turn damages the quality of service delivery.” He added: “It smacks of double standards, with the government promoting work-life balance policies, when over half those surveyed experienced difficulty in balancing their work and family/private life. Excessive workloads resulting from job cuts and pay cuts in real terms are all hitting the morale of dedicated staff committed to delivering first rate service. The government as a responsible employer needs to wake up to the fact that decent public services need enough people with enough resources to deliver them.”

- [PCS news release. TUC work-life balance resources.](#)

Site deaths head for six-year high

Deaths on construction sites this year could top last year’s five year high, new figures suggest. Construction union UCATT said so far this year 29 site deaths have been reported. At the current rate, moving into the more dangerous winter months, the final death count risks topping last year's figure of 77 ([Risks 316](#)). The union said five construction workers have been killed at work in the last three weeks alone. Alan Ritchie, general secretary of UCATT, said: “Many companies remain blasé about health and safety. The whole industry must make the safety of workers a key issue. If we don't then workers will continue to be killed at this alarming rate.” He added: “It is shocking that 29 construction workers have already been killed at work this year. If this was any other profession it would be front page news. This is a national scandal. Action must be taken now to stop killer bosses. The number of workers killed must not be allowed to rise even higher than last year's astronomical level.” Tony O'Brien, secretary of the Construction Safety Campaign, criticised the government and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). “They're going into reverse,” he told

Contract Journal. “It's very distressing because if you look at some of these individual events, they are totally preventable.” Unions and campaigners have called for an increase in HSE enforcement, backed up by more resources for the beleaguered safety watchdog ([Risks 317](#)). Prospect negotiator Mike McDonald, who represents HSE inspectors, said: “Whatever way you cut this, there are insufficient inspectors to maintain current injury rates. What you need is a combination of more inspection to provide vital enforcement and to ensure that policy is developed to tackle this.” He called on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to rethink its proposed budget cuts of 15 per cent for the HSE from 2008 to 2011. Peter Hain, the cabinet minister with responsibility for the HSE, has called a safety forum for 17 September to try to reduce the number of construction worker deaths ([Risks 318](#)).

- [UCATT news release. Contract Journal.](#)

OTHER NEWS

Tory plan for red tape 'tax cut'

Tory leader David Cameron is looking at plans to cut £14bn in red tape and regulation for UK businesses – and some safety measures are in the firing line. The plans have been put forward by John Redwood - one of the most senior figures on the Tory right and chair of the party’s Economic Competitiveness Policy Group - who called them “a tax cut by any other name.” The focus is on easing regulation such as data protection laws, rules on hours, and health and safety regimes, although early indications that the Health and Safety at Work Act would be reviewed do not appear in the latest documents from the Redwood camp. The policy group’s final report, published last week, does say a Tory deregulation bill should include “improving the risk assessment regime in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, to make responses more proportionate.” The Working Time Regulations – a health and safety law – remain in his “red

tape” target list, with the report saying they should be repealed. The proposals have been criticised by trade union, safety and some business groups. TUC deputy general secretary Frances O Grady said: “Mr Redwood's proposals add up to a pretty extreme package of proposals that will hit people at work - particularly working women. Opting out of the Social Chapter would end the right for working parents to take emergency unpaid leave when a child is ill. Repealing the Working Time Regulations would end the right to take four weeks paid holiday - a measure that has mainly helped low paid working women.” She added: “You cannot support these measures and also claim to back better work-life balance. Neither of these could happen without the agreement of the EU. As it impossible to see every other EU government agreeing to these special exemptions for the UK, they could only be implemented if we left the EU. Nor should we believe the claimed savings. This would depend on mainstream employers who do not need these regulations to provide reasonable conditions for their staff cutting back to the level of the bad.” Grahame Smith, STUC general secretary, said: “Any mature analysis of the UK’s competitive position would recognise that ‘red-tape’ is a complete red-herring. The UK is not over-regulated as is clearly demonstrated by every international survey on the matter. The UK is currently sixth out of 175 countries in the World Bank’s ‘ease of doing business’ rankings and tops the OECD list of lightly regulated nations.” David Yeandle, deputy director of employment policy at manufacturers' body EEF, said that no-one had asked businesses' opinions, adding there “is not great demand to get rid of existing employment legislation”. He told Personnel Today: “I would have hoped that they would have consulted with us on this,” adding: “I am sceptical on whether it will work - and I have not heard many people saying they want these laws scrapped.”

- [TUC news release](#). [STUC news release](#). [BBC News Online](#). [UNITE news release](#). [Personnel Today](#).
- [Conservative Party Freeing Britain to compete](#)

[webpages](#) and Economic Competitive Policy Group full report [[pdf](#)].

Safety warning on Tory’s red tape cuts

The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) has called on the Conservatives to “completely re-think” before considering sweeping cuts to ‘red tape’, a move IOSH says could reduce competitiveness and end up costing lives. The safety professionals’ organisation said that it believes repealing the Working Time Regulations could lead to “a UK where worker-exploitation becomes rife.” Lisa Fowlie, IOSH’s president, commented: “This important legislation helps protect workers from being compelled to work excessive hours. Removing it could leave employees at the mercy of unscrupulous employers, creating the potential for a UK where worker-exploitation becomes rife.” She added: “At present, UK workers wishing to, can ‘opt-out’, meaning they can choose to work more than 48 hours per week. But, if we strip away this legislation completely employees, from factory to office workers and builders to mechanics, could potentially be asked by their employers to work more than 48 hours per week. This would be a backward step for us all, potentially introducing problems and inefficiencies. Workers who are simply exhausted through excessive hours or stressed due to a poor work-life balance, are unlikely to perform well and worryingly, could also endanger themselves and others.” She urged the Conservatives to recognise “that good health really is good business. HSE estimate that work-related accidents and illness costs UK society up to £31 billion a year – over double the amount the Conservatives are hoping to save.”

- [IOSH news release](#).

Stockline firms admit safety charges

The operators of a Glasgow plastics factory where nine people died in an explosion three years ago have pleaded guilty to health and safety charges. ICL Tech Ltd and ICL Plastics admitted four charges at the High Court in Glasgow last week. The court was earlier told the blast happened after petroleum gas ignited in a pipe which had been corroding for years at the Stockline factory ([Risks 315](#)). Prosecutor Angus Stewart QC told the court: “In the ICL tragedy, nine people died in the explosion and subsequent building collapse, but more were also pulled from the rubble very seriously injured. Others have been left permanently traumatised although without physical injury. It is particularly poignant that individuals are killed and maimed in the course of their day's work.” He said the companies had not done everything possible to prevent the “tragedy.” Relatives of six of the victims have renewed calls for a public inquiry. In a statement, the families of Annette Doyle, Peter Ferguson, Kenneth Murray, Tracey McErlane, Tim Smith and Ann Trench said their lives had been on hold since the explosion. The statement said: “It is now time for the concerns of the families to be taken into account and we continue to call for a wide-reaching public inquiry that provides us with answers as to why these health and safety breaches occurred.” Grahame Smith, STUC general secretary, said the union body would continue to support the affected families, adding “only a far reaching public inquiry will help to ensure that similar breaches of health and safety legislation are reduced and that other families do not suffer the pain and anguish that members of the support group have had to overcome over the last three years. This guilty plea is the latest stage in the legal process, a process that has to deliver the justice and answers that the families deserve.” Campaign group Families Against Corporate Killers (FACK) also called for a full public inquiry. Spokesperson Hilda Palmer said: “For the Stockline families to have to wait three years for answers to their questions is unacceptable in our so-called civilised society. The time for answers and the time for a full public enquiry is now and we call for immediate action.” A further two-day hearing on the case will commence on 27 August.

- [STUC news release](#). [FACK news release](#). [UNITE news release](#). BBC News Online on the [guilty plea](#) and the [families' statement](#).

Campaign pushes for crane deaths justice

An official safety investigation into a crane collapse which killed two almost a year ago should report soon so bereaved families can pursue justice, campaigners have said. On Monday 27 August at 4pm activists from the Battersea Crane Disaster Action Group (BCDAG) will gather at Putney Vale Cemetery to remember Michael Alexa, on what would have been his 24th birthday. He died along with crane driver Jonathan Cloke when a crane collapsed in Battersea, south London, on 26 September 2006 ([Risks 319](#)). A Health and Safety Executive investigation is ongoing. Michael Alexa's partner, Angela Bedy, said: “We are determined that whoever is responsible for the collapse which killed Michael and Jonathan should be prosecuted. We're also campaigning for crane safety because we don't want anyone else to suffer what we've all been through. Children shouldn't be left without fathers or mothers without sons. The BCDAG won't rest until crane deaths are stopped.” Michael's mother, Liliana Alexa, added: “It's now nearly a year since the Battersea crane collapse. We want to see the HSE's investigation concluded as quickly as possible. We won't be able to rest until we know the reasons for the crane collapse. We're in limbo and we want to move on with our lives.” BCDAG said an interim report on the disaster is expected imminently and a final report from HSE should be ready by the end of September.

- [BCDAG news release](#). Ceremonies to remember Michael Alexa and Jonathan Cloke will be held at the crane collapse site on Thessaly Rd on the first anniversary of the tragedy, 26 September, from 7.30am-8am and 5.30pm-6pm.

Corus fined £125k for latest safety breach

Steel giant Corus has been fined £125,000 after a steelworker suffered near fatal injuries when he fell into a pit containing hot toxic chemicals. David Jones suffered horrendous burns when he fell feet first into an interceptor pit at Scunthorpe's Corus works on 26 March 2005. The incident happened while he was trying to start a pump, which was being used to pipe the hot liquid into an effluent pond, Grimsby Crown Court heard. The pit, which contained chemicals including cyanide, ammonia and sodium hydroxide, was at a temperature of approximately 92 degrees Celsius. Mr Jones managed to crawl out of the pit and run to the control centre for help. Photographs showed a trail of bloody footmarks left as he ran for help. He was hospitalised for seven weeks, after suffering 52 per cent burns to his lower body. It was almost two years before he was able to return to work on light duties. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors visited the site and found the railings around the pit were badly corroded. They were also not part of a maintenance schedule and no risk assessment had been carried out. Corus admitted three breaches of health and safety regulations and it was fined £125,000, with £17,763 costs. Judge John Reddihough said: "Mr Jones suffered horrendous burns to his lower body." He added: "The direct reason for the accident occurring was the appalling state of the guard rails round the interceptor pit." Mr Jones' wife Sharon, speaking after the sentence, said: "I'm quite pleased with what they got. I don't think anything would have been enough, but there has got to be a limit." HSE inspector Helen Berry said: "Employers are not expected to eliminate risk entirely, but they are required to take reasonable control measures to protect their staff. Had this been done, the outcome might well have been different in this case." Corus has been the subject of a series of high profile safety prosecutions ([Risks 289](#)).

- [HSE news release. Scunthorpe Telegraph.](#)
- [Find out more about the Corus prosecution record.](#)

Dairy fined £5,000 for broken arm

A dairy foods company has been fined £5,000 and ordered to pay £3,599 costs after pleading guilty to breaching health and safety regulations, following an accident that left an employee off work for nearly a year. David Pennycook, 50, suffered two breaks and severe muscle and ligament damage to his left arm at Dairy Crest in Dagenham, London, in October 2005, after a milk bottle filling machine started while his arm was inside an open hatch. Mr Pennycook required major reconstructive surgery to the ligaments and muscles in his arm to restore full use of his hand. A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found that if an interlocking device had been working properly the machine would not have re-started when the hatch was open. The investigation also found that Dairy Crest Ltd did not have an adequate management system in place to ensure checks on guards were carried out properly. HSE inspector Gavin Pugh said: "This incident shows that companies must ensure all work equipment is safe for use and have an adequate health and safety system in place." He added: "Safety equipment, such as the interlocking device is there to protect the operator. It's vital that machinery is kept in full working order otherwise accidents like this could continue to happen. It was Dairy Crest Ltd's responsibility to ensure these items were kept in full working order." HSE's prosecution database shows the dairy giant has been convicted of safety offences on three other occasions in the last eight years.

- [HSE news release. Barking and Dagenham Recorder.](#)

Asbestos dumper gets his assets frozen

A Bradford man jailed in March for illegally dumping asbestos and excavation waste ([Risks 299](#)) has had his assets frozen in the first case of its kind. The Assets Recovery Agency (ARA),

working with the Environment Agency (EA), obtained restraint orders to freeze properties belonging to 60-year-old William Reidy. The prosecution against Mr Reidy was brought by the EA following the illegal activities of his demolition business Space Making Development. Officers carried out surveillance on the site and estimated that a total of 200 lorry loads of waste had been illegally dumped. A skip containing asbestos sheeting was also discovered, for which the business did not hold a licence. Mr Reidy was sentenced to 16 months' imprisonment on each of four charges relating to the keeping and depositing of waste, including asbestos. The sentences were ordered to run concurrently, as were further sentences of three months for each of nine further waste charges. His foreman, Leonard Imeson, was jailed for four months. 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. The ARA is investigating whether Reidy, the business owner, benefited from the illegal waste dumping activities and will seek to recover assets equal to a value of any benefit established. Paul Salter, environmental crime officer at the EA, said: "This is the first time that assets have been seized in a case like this and shows that businesses cannot get away with putting profits before the environment and human health - as this case shows. If you are an offender, we will track you down and take you to court. We can then refer the case to the Assets Recovery Agency which will endeavour to confiscate any monies and assets made from these ill-gotten gains."

- [Assets Recovery Agency news release. Telegraph and Argus.](#)

New Scottish schools asbestos shock

Three-quarters of the schools in Aberdeenshire and half the schools in Aberdeen have asbestos in them, official records show. Figures obtained by the Aberdeen Press and Journal under

freedom of information legislation show that most schools in the area are affected. Of the 171 educational buildings in Aberdeenshire, 115 are on the council's asbestos register, while 37 of Aberdeen's 79 school buildings were found to have asbestos of some kind in them. The full extent of disrepair and overcrowding in the region's schools was revealed last month, with just one in five of them across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire deemed to be up to standard. Only 26 of the 171 school buildings in Aberdeenshire and 21 in Aberdeen were rated 'good' or 'satisfactory' in a survey by the Scottish Executive. Recent reports have linked school asbestos exposures to asbestos related cancers in teachers and other school staff, leading one coroner in England to call for its removal from all schools ([Risks 281](#)). Teaching union NUT, releasing guidance earlier this year, said: "The purpose of this guidance is to support the work of divisions and associations in terms of seeking to bring about the removal of asbestos from all schools which contain it" ([Risks 307](#)).

- [Aberdeen Press and Journal.](#)

UK 'lags behind' on cancer deaths

Cancer survival rates in the UK are trailing behind much of the continent and in some cases struggling to stay ahead of eastern European countries despite significantly more funding, according to a study published this week. A damning online editorial published alongside the findings in the Lancet Oncology medical journal suggests the cancer plans introduced in England in 2000 and Scotland in 2001 are not working and that remedying the problem would take a fundamental overhaul of NHS services. The survey of cancer survival rates of 2.7 million people with cancer across Europe, Eurocare, shows that the gap between the highest survival rates, in the Nordic north and the lowest, mainly in eastern countries including Poland, is narrowing. But those in the UK remain stubbornly low. The authors say: "Overall, survival for all cancers combined in the UK as a whole is not only below the European average, it

is also noticeably similar to some eastern European countries that spend less than one third of the UK's per capita healthcare budget.” Addressing the problem would require “fundamental reassessment of the ways in which the NHS operates.” The cancer tsar for England, Mike Richards, suggested the shortcomings were down to late diagnosis of many cancers rather than poor treatment. Workplace health campaigners and unions earlier this year said that a failure by official UK agencies – including government departments and the Health and Safety Executive – to recognise and publicise occupational cancer risks and preventive measures was a contributory factor to the UK’s poor performance on cancer. They want the government to make occupational cancer awareness a major public health priority and for preventive measures like toxics use reduction and “sunsetting” of carcinogens to be promoted ([Risks 312](#)). The Department of Health said that a new cancer plan was being worked on.

- [BBC News Online](#). [The Guardian](#).
- Franco Berrino and others. Survival for eight major cancers and all cancers combined for European adults diagnosed in 1995–99: results of the EUROCARE-4 study, [Lancet Oncology Online](#), published online 21 August 2007. DOI:10.1016/S1470-2045(07)70245-0. [Eurocare](#).
- Cancer campaign resources: Occupational Cancer/Zero Cancer: A trade union guide to prevention [[pdf](#)].
- *Hazards* [occupational cancer webpages](#) and new [Work cancer prevention kit](#). [IMF occupational cancer webpages](#). [BWI occupational cancer webpages](#).

Injuries take the shine off working in the sun

Workers lured abroad by work in the sun should not ignore the safety risks, a leading lawyers group has warned. Denise Kitchener, the spokesperson for the SafetyWatch campaign run by APIL – the Association of Personal Injury

Lawyers – said: “Working abroad can obviously be a fantastic experience, but it is imperative that people plan properly and take some basic precautions. Every five seconds a worker in Europe is involved in a work-related accident – this should be a warning to anyone venturing abroad to take simple precautions and use their commonsense.” APIL says it is imperative those planning to work abroad take out an insurance policy which covers them for working, as many are designed purely for holidays. APIL member Nolan Mortimer, a personal injury lawyer who deals solely with cases in which people have been injured abroad, said: “It’s obviously important that holidaymakers use their commonsense and stay safe, but people who are jetting off to actually work abroad should really plan very carefully and take extra care.” He advises people make sure they have the right insurance cover, ensure someone in the UK knows they are working abroad and can get hold of them in an emergency and to be aware of local rules and regulations.

- APIL news release [[pdf](#)].

Bin workers get stab-proof trousers

Refuse collectors in a Dorset town have been given stab-proof trousers to protect them from being injured by rubbish. Christchurch Council said its refuse collectors have in the past been in danger of cutting themselves on sharp objects sticking out of bin bags. A few months ago a worker needed stitches after gashing his leg while carrying a sack to a cart, it said. The council has now invested in “ballistic trousers” with a special coating on the outside of the legs. Chris Horn, head of the council's Street Scene unit, said: “We had a case some months ago of a refuse collector who picked up a bag and didn't notice something sharp sticking out of the side of it. “As he carried it to the van, the object gashed his leg and he had to have six stitches in it. The day we introduced these trousers, another collector had a similar experience but no harm was done to him because of the reinforcement on the legs of the trousers. However, we would like

to remind people to wrap any broken glass or sharp objects carefully before putting them in plastic bags.” The Health and Safety Executive has published new guidance on ‘sharps’ risks in the waste and recycling industries, including refuse workers at risk from hypodermic needles left in black bin bags.

- [Christchurch Council news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- Handling needles in the waste and recycling industry [[pdf](#)] and [related publication alert](#).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Mexico: Strike at deathtrap copper pit

Deep drifts of powdery rock dust blocking exit routes, exposed wiring and missing machine covers and fire extinguishers are some of the sights that greet visitors to Mexico's largest copper mine. About 3,000 miners at the Cananea copper pit, who laid down their tools on 30 July in a strike partly over safety conditions, accuse mine owner Grupo Mexico of not investing in maintenance despite sky-high copper prices. “They are only interested in investments to extract more minerals, not in improving safety,” local union leader Sergio Tolano said. In many places rain water had turned the powder into mud that almost completely covered stairways and made the ground perilously slippery close to deep drops with no safety rails. Emergency switches were broken and sections of ducts attached to industrial air extraction systems were missing. Machine covers were lying on the floor, leaving moving parts exposed. Earlier this month the strike was declared illegal and the company said it was seeking to dismiss the striking miners. Daniel Chavez, Grupo Mexico's director of copper operations accepted there were some problems but blamed the union for the run-down conditions in parts of the mine. He claimed the union had obstructed attempts to clean up the dust.

- [SignsonSanDiego.com](#). [San Diego Union Tribune](#). [International Herald Tribune](#).

Saudi Arabia: Migrant domestics killed by employers

The killing of two Indonesian domestic workers by their employers in Saudi Arabia highlights the Saudi government’s ongoing failure to hold employers accountable for serious abuses, campaign group Human Rights Watch has said. The brutal beatings by these employers also left two other Indonesian domestic workers critically injured. Seven members of a Saudi family who employed the four Indonesian women as domestic workers beat them in early August after accusing them of practicing “black magic” on the family’s teenage son. Siti Tarwiyah Slamet, 32, and Susmiyati Abdul Fulan, 28, died from their injuries. Ruminih Surtim, 25, and Tari Tarsim, 27, are receiving treatment in the intensive care unit of Riyadh Medical Complex. Saudi authorities have detained the employers. “The brutal killings of these Indonesian domestic workers occurred in an atmosphere of impunity fostered by government inaction,” said Nisha Varia, senior researcher in the women’s rights division of Human Rights Watch. “Not only do the authorities typically fail to investigate or prosecute abusive employers, the criminal justice system also obstructs abused workers from seeking redress.” Approximately 2 million women from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and other countries are employed as domestic workers in Saudi Arabia. They are routinely underpaid, overworked, confined to the workplace, or subject to verbal, physical and sexual abuse, Human Rights Watch said. Despite being victims of abuse themselves, many domestic workers are subject to counteraccusations, including theft, adultery or fornication in cases of rape or witchcraft.

- [Human Rights Watch news release](#).

USA: Cintas faces record fine after dryer death

US official safety watchdog OSHA has proposed fining work uniform supplier Cintas Corp. \$2.78 million (£1.4m) after a worker in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was trapped in an operating industrial dryer and died of trauma and heat injuries. The company has said it will appeal the fine. Eleazar Torres Gomez, 46, was killed in March when he fell into the dryer. He was clearing a jam of wet laundry on a conveyor that carries laundry from the washer into the dryer. “The thought of how my father must have suffered haunts me and my family everyday,” said Emmanuel Torres, one of four of Mr Torres Gomez’s surviving children, in a statement. “We hope our loss will not be in vain, and that Cintas will fix the unsafe conditions in Tulsa and throughout the country.” This fine is more than four times larger than the previous largest penalty in the service sector for health and safety violations. Safety inspectors reported 46 illegal hazards in the Tulsa laundry - including 42 ‘wilful’ violations. At least one citation was for not protecting workers from the equipment involved in Mr Torres Gomez’s death. Wilful violations are those committed with ‘intentional disregard’ for the law or ‘plain indifference’ to worker safety. OSHA proposed an additional \$117,500 (£59,000) fine for many of the same life-threatening conditions in Cintas’s Columbus laundry - just over 80 miles from Cintas’s headquarters in Mason, Ohio. “Cintas has a shameful pattern of illegally endangering workers’ lives,” said Bruce Raynor, general president of UNITE HERE, the union that has been leading an organising drive at Cintas. “Even after this tragedy, Cintas workers say they continue to work in the same deadly conditions. Cintas should not be able to ignore its moral and legal obligation to provide a safe workplace for all employees.” On 6 March this year, Eleazar Torres Gomez was working in the Tulsa laundry’s automated washroom. He was caught on a conveyor and dragged into the industrial dryer - where he was trapped in temperatures up to 300 degrees for at least 20 minutes. He died on the scene of trauma and thermal injuries. Cintas CEO Scott Farmer issued a press release blaming Mr Torres Gomez for his own death

soon after the fatality. Members of the US House’s Workforce Protections Subcommittee led by Representative Lynn Woolsey, a California Democrat, called for OSHA to conduct a nationwide investigation into hazards at all of Cintas’s laundries after the death of Mr. Torres Gomez and a gruesome injury in Yakima, Washington, where a worker’s arm was shattered. Inspectors in Washington State cited Cintas earlier this month for a violation similar to the one that led to Mr Torres Gomez’s death.

- [OSHA news release](#). [UNITE HERE news release](#) and [Uniform justice! campaign](#). [CtW Connect](#). [Cincinnati Post](#).

EVENTS AND COURSES

ETUC strains conference, 9-10 October, Brussels

More than one in three European workers suffers from work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), and the situation appears to be getting worse. Muscle and skeletal pains are not minor twinges, but have far-reaching medical, social, economic, psychological and other consequences for millions of European workers across all sectors. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has decided to take action by hosting a joint conference with its health and safety research arm, ETUI-REHS, in Brussels on 9 and 10 October 2007. ETUC says the event, ‘On the offensive against MSDs’, will be the first in a three year programme of strains-related activities. The conference programme suggests the event is targeted more at people working at a policy or advisory level on strain injuries – union safety officers, for example – than grassroots reps, but there is a strong emphasis on “bottom up,” practical prevention measures with worker involvement.

- ETUC/ETUI-REHS [MSD conference](#), 9-10 October 2007, Brussels, Belgium. Programme [\[pdf\]](#), registration form [\[pdf\]](#) and additional information [\[pdf\]](#).

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR AUGUST TO NOVEMBER 2007

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

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