



Risks Newsletter

**HAZARDS
MAGAZINE**

Falls from vehicles
campaign 2007

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Comments to the TUC at healthandsafety@tuc.org.uk

Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 15,000 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

Postcard push for pleural plaques payouts

Unions and asbestos groups have launched a campaign to press for compensation for pleural plaques. Alan Ritchie, general secretary of construction union UCATT, presented an oversized postcard this week to secretary of state for justice Jack Straw to mark the latest push to overturn the October 2007 Law Lords decision to end compensation for pleural plaques ([Risks 342](#)), a scarring of the lungs caused by heavy and long term exposure to asbestos. UCATT says victims have a greatly increased risk of contracting the incurable asbestos cancer mesothelioma. General secretary Alan Ritchie said: “The only crime committed by victims of pleural plaques was the crime to go out and earn a living.” UCATT is also organising a series of regional launches bringing together local MPs and asbestos groups who support the campaign. A commentary by journalist Kevin Maguire in the Daily Mirror said: “Law Lords who overturned awards of a few grand each to victims have short-changed men who suffer terrible psychological damage... The only winners are insurance giants who'll save £1 billion, including the Swiss firm Zurich, now bunging Tony Blair £500,000 a year.”

- [UCATT news release](#) and pleural plaques postcard [[pdf](#)]. [Daily Mirror](#). [Contract Journal](#).
- Action Mesothelioma Day, 27 February – find out more from: Asbestos Forum [Action Mesothelioma Day webpage](#) and [events listing](#). [Action Mesothelioma website](#).

Call for schools asbestos survey

Teaching union ATL is urging the government to carry out a survey of all schools to check whether asbestos is present. It is warning that putting a drawing pin into a classroom wall or slamming a classroom door “could be enough to sign a death warrant” and is calling for asbestos

to be removed from all schools by 2010. Asbestos was used extensively as a building material between 1945 and early 1980s in new and refurbished schools. Pre-fabricated schools of the CLASP, SCOLA and Hills type commonly used asbestos, the union said. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) records over 1,400 CLASP schools in the UK, and it has been estimated there are 13,000 system built schools. At its annual conference in Torquay in March, ATL members will be asked to support a demand that the government conducts a survey of all educational establishments to determine whether asbestos is present, and to ensure all asbestos is removed by licensed contractors by 2010. ATL general secretary Dr Mary Bousted said: “We are deeply concerned about the continuing risk to teachers, support staff and pupils from asbestos in our schools. There is still too little information about asbestos. We don’t know how many schools still contain asbestos, so most teachers have little idea of whether they or their pupils are being exposed to it.” She added: “Schools should keep and maintain asbestos registers to record the locations and condition of any asbestos, and let staff know.” HSE figures suggest at least 182 people working in education died in Great Britain between 1980 and 2000 from the asbestos cancer mesothelioma alone. The figure for asbestos-related lung and other cancers is likely to be higher still.

- [HSE news release](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Building Magazine](#). [Public Servant](#).

Search for asbestos victim’s workmates

The family of a Scarborough repairman who died as a result of exposure to asbestos has launched an appeal to trace his former colleagues. Geoff Edmonds, who worked for engineering company Brogden and Wilson for almost 30 years, died aged 79 from the asbestos cancer mesothelioma last year. It is believed Mr Edmonds was exposed to asbestos dust while working for the heating and ventilation engineering company, which closed about 15 years ago. At the firm he repaired and

maintained boilers, radiators and pipework, leaving in 1969. Marion Voss from Thompsons Solicitors is representing the family. She said: “It is vital we trace Geoff Edmonds' former colleagues, not because compensation can make up for his death but to ensure that those people who forced him to work in such deadly conditions pay for what they did.” Davey Hall, regional secretary for trade union Unite, which is working with the solicitors, added: “As part of our successful extended family service, we're pleased to be able to offer support to Mrs Edmonds and her family and hope this appeal is successful in tracing some of Mr Edmonds' former workmates. There are too many tragedies caused by negligent exposure to asbestos and we hope to be able to secure justice for another innocent victim.”

- [Thompson's Solicitors news release](#). [Scarborough Evening News](#). Anybody who worked for Brogden and Wilson between 1941 and 1969 and remembers Geoff Edmonds should contact [Marion Voss](#) on 0113 2056300.

Dock leap wore out man's knee

A boatman whose right knee was wrecked by jumping on and off boats for two decades has received undisclosed damages in an out-of-court settlement. GMB member William Lively, 55, worked as a boatman on the Norman Forster passenger boat in Tyne Dock. Whenever the boat came into the dock it would bob up and down and rock backwards and forwards, so he had to jump down onto the pontoon step while the boat was moving. The step was always well below the height of the vessel so he couldn't easily step down onto it. Instead he had to jump off and often landed very heavily on his knee because of the momentum. He said: “I've clearly injured my right knee from years of having to jump down from the boat onto a narrow metal step situated on the pontoon. I did this up to 20 times per day for over 15 years. In fact I'm the longest serving boatman there. It's really unsafe because there was no handrail on the step and there are also no

posts to secure the rope to until I'm already off the boat.” GMB regional secretary Tom Brennan said: “William Lively's case proves again that employers cannot get away with poor health and safety. There was a safer system with a proper loading platform, at the same height as the boat, in operation on the other side of the river. This could easily have been installed at Tyne Dock and would therefore have avoided risk of injury.”

- [Thompson's Solicitors news release](#).

Insurers press for low payouts

The conduct of insurers who deal directly with accident victims will be investigated following accusations they put pressure on victims to waive their right to compensation or to settle claims for less than the proper rate. Trade unions and claimant lawyers have handed a dossier of evidence against the insurers to the Financial Services Authority (FSA) for investigation. A report in the Observer says the trade union, Unite, has identified insurers who tried to settle the claims of injured people before they could take independent legal advice - known in the industry as 'third-party capture' - including one accident claim where insurance company Zurich offered £4,000 in “full and final settlement”, only for the case to be settled last November for £35,000. Both Unite and the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (Apil) say they are concerned about insurance company representatives cold-calling “third-party” victims after an accident. Graham Goddard, Unite's deputy general secretary, told the Observer: “We have given the FSA compelling evidence. There is a clear case for action to bridge a gap in the regulatory regime. Accident victims lose out because if they aren't receiving truly independent advice, they don't know the true value of the claims. Our evidence is that sometimes they are being told they don't have a good case when they do.” Martin Bare, the president of Apil, said insurers are shirking their responsibilities. “It is the job of insurers to pay compensation to those who are injured. To make sure the playing field is level, it's important that the claimant gets

independent advice. That is the cost of the system.”

- [The Observer](#).

Tragedy leads to safer needles call

Health service union UNISON is calling on NHS Employers to banish needlestick injuries (NSIs) for good, by making safer needles compulsory across the health service. The call comes in the wake of the tragic death of gifted nurse, Juliet Young, who contracted HIV from a needlestick injury while working at the Maudsley Mental Health Hospital in London. A Southwark Coroner’s Court inquest earlier this month recorded a verdict of accidental death relating to the nurse’s death, aged 42, in January last year from AIDS-related pneumonia. Karen Jennings, UNISON’s head of health, commented: “Safer needles are available and Juliet’s death begs the question - how many more people have to die before NHS Employers make safer needles compulsory throughout the NHS? We need accurate data to assess the extent of the NSI problem but estimates put the number of injuries as high as 100,000 every year. Each one puts the person affected through months, sometimes years of agony.” She added: “The European Commission is currently looking at Europe-wide legislation on safer needles. If safer needles were made compulsory across Europe there would be economies of scale that would bring down the cost of safer devices benefiting everyone.” The Health Protection Agency said there had only been five reported cases of UK healthcare workers contracting HIV from patients, the last of which was in 1999.

- [UNISON news release](#). [South London Press](#). [BBC News Online](#). [HSE](#) and [Hazards](#) needlestick webpages. [TUC biological hazards webpages](#).

Mystery worker reveals temp exploitation

Agency working is being used to undercut the terms of employment of permanent workers, the union Unite has warned. The alert came after a Unite member went 'undercover' to experience the plight of agency workers. The union says he found an insecure world of work where no national insurance was paid, contracts of work did not exist and no workplace training or basic safety equipment was provided. Mystery agency worker, Simon, who spent six weeks working on agency contracts in the Midlands, said: “I am a union activist so I thought I knew what to expect in undertaking this work but what I saw shocked and depressed me. Even as a skilled manufacturing worker I barely earned above the minimum wage, I had illegal deductions taken from my pay, I had to work dangerous machinery without any training and without the legally required protective equipment and these jobs came via so-called 'legitimate' agencies.” Health and safety training was minimal, he said. In one case, his job involved handling extremely hot plastic, yet he was provided inadequate protective equipment. In another firm, there was no accident book and Simon was told the company was “laid back” about such basics.

- [Unite news release](#). [TUC news release](#). [TUC agency workers briefing](#).

Death trap sites need enforcement

News that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) this month closed 10 out of 11 construction sites visited in Aberdeen during an enforcement blitz ([Risks 343](#)) has come as no surprise to construction union UCATT. UCATT said while it welcomed the HSE’s decision to target construction sites in a series of February blitzes, it believes that “it is only a sticking plaster” that will not ensure construction bosses take safety seriously all the time. Harry Frew, UCATT’s Scottish regional secretary, said: “Time and again the HSE announce that they are going to conduct a blitz of construction sites. Each time many sites are temporarily shutdown. But in the long term safety does not improve.” UCATT said additional resources need to be spent on inspecting construction sites on a year

round basis. When sites are found to be unsafe and are breaking health and safety laws a much higher number of prosecutions should result, it said, adding it is only by creating clear deterrents that construction bosses will be forced to make sites safer. Mr Frew added: “HSE needs to stop giving construction bosses who are willing to play fast and loose with the lives of their workers little more than a slapped wrist. If health and safety laws are broken, prosecutions must follow and those responsible removed from positions of authority.”

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

TUC warning on driving hours review

The government must improve driving time rules for professional drivers, TUC has said. Commenting on the Department for Transport's review of the working time regulations for heavy goods vehicle (HGV) and coach drivers, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: “This review has identified substantial abuse of the law. This must be addressed as a matter of urgency in order to keep our roads safe.” He added: “We welcome the government's promise to improve guidance, awareness and enforcement of the law. However, the government will be making a fundamental mistake if it allows the current rules on 'periods of availability' to stand, since they are widely used by unscrupulous employers to get round the rules. The TUC will be seeking an urgent meeting with ministers calling on them to address this point following the review.” In Europe, transport unions' federation ETF is calling on European Union institutions not to bow to pressure from employers to cut coach drivers' rest periods. In a 12 February statement ETF said that European legislation on driving and rest times for drivers undertaking occasional international tours must be maintained and fully implemented.

- [TUC news release](#). [ITF news release](#).

Journalists write off nearly six grand

Media professionals are giving away £5,884 a year in unpaid overtime, according to an analysis of official statistics by the TUC. It found that people working in the media, including journalists, public relations officers, photographers and broadcasters, are 50 per cent more likely to work unpaid overtime as the rest of the working population, making the industry one of the worst offenders when it comes to unpaid overtime. Four in 10 (40.3 per cent) media professionals work an average of six hours 42 minutes unpaid overtime every week, worth £5,884 a year per person. Across the sector, 49,000 employees are working unpaid overtime, worth a total of £288 million a year. Commenting ahead of TUC's 22 February Work Your Proper Hours Day, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: “The media industry is notorious for its long hours culture and today's figures show that many employees are not getting paid for putting in all those extra hours.” Jeremy Dear, general secretary of media union NUJ, commented: “Media workers are expected to produce ever greater quantities of content against a background of dwindling newsroom resources. The result is that stresses are starting to show.” He added: “Because our members are committed to their profession they put in the hours needed to get the work done. But journalism is suffering as a consequence, to say nothing about the impact on our members' health and well-being. It's time for media organisations to give staff the time they need to do their jobs properly.” TUC's working hours analysis also found that four out of 10 single women in their 30s (39 per cent) do unpaid overtime at work – making them more likely to do unpaid overtime than any other group in the workforce.

- [TUC news release](#) and [Work Your Proper Hours Day](#) website. [NUJ news release](#). [The Guardian](#).

OTHER NEWS

Government calls for “well notes”

Health secretary Alan Johnson has said he wants to see doctors to shift away from sicknotes and instead to issue “well notes,” setting out what tasks a worker can perform instead of certificates automatically signing them off. The move has led to concern in both trade unions and the medical profession, with doctors’ leaders saying GPs should not be used to “police the system”. The secretary of state is also encouraging employers to run health clinics in a bid to cut the estimated 175m working days lost to sickness each year, at a cost of £13bn. He made the announcement in a 20 February speech to the British Heart Foundation.

The sicknote proposal, to be piloted in the summer, will require GPs to offer patients advice about what they can do to get fit for work. The announcements come ahead of a publication in March of a report by Dame Carol Black, the national director for health and work, who is looking at the issue. Mr Johnson said: “We are not asking GPs to police the benefits system and we are not suggesting that GPs shouldn't sign sick notes.” He said too many people ended up drifting on to incapacity benefit via the sick note system. “If we can stop that and help people back into work that is a good thing. That is what we are trying to do and I don't think the current sick note system helps with that.” A large body of evidence has identified a more extensive problem from “presenteeism” – the working wounded turning in when sick, when it would be in everybody’s best interested for them to keep their germs and their recuperation at home.

- [Department of Health news release](#). [NHS Employers news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Sick leave policy takes a turn for the worse

Government proposals to dramatically revamp the sick note system have been labelled a “missed opportunity” by the medical profession and trade unions. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said the proposals announced this week by health secretary Alan Johnson “rather than address the real problems, make things worse. By focusing on information to the employer rather than the employee, they may serve to undermine the relationship between the GP and the patient, and lead to accusations that doctors are being asked to police the benefits system.” He added: “Rather than focus on sick notes, the government should be looking at how to give people who have been off for some time the right to return to work on a phased or reduced basis without losing all their benefits straight away, improve access to rehabilitation services, and invest more in preventing people from becoming ill at work in the first place.” Dr Peter Holden, a lead negotiator for the BMA’s General Practitioners Committee, said: “Confirming that a patient is unwell is very different from making a judgment on whether someone is well enough to do their job. This may be determined by a host of other non-medical factors concerning the equipment they are using or the physical environment in which they work. GPs should not be there to police the system.”

- [BMA news release](#). [TUC sickness absence webpages](#).

Sick workers need sick leave and support

Trade unions have called for more efforts to ensure sick workers are allowed the time and resources to recuperate properly and for decent job opportunities for those with disabilities. Responding to health secretary Alan Johnson’s “well note” proposals to get sick workers back into work, UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis commented: “Not all work is good for you. Working in the public sector can be stressful and specific health complaints arise for certain professions. It is a sad fact that 75 per cent of ambulance staff retire at 54 due to the physical and mental demands of the job. Nurses,

cleaners, cooks, refuse collectors and homecare workers are some of the many staff plagued by back injuries in the public sector.” He added: “We want employers to adopt a rehabilitative approach, rather than taking punitive action. It is good practice to work with employees to give them sufficient time to recover, and to allow a phased return to work if they need it. It is unacceptable for people to be forced back into work and into a spiral of declining health.” Paul Kenny, GMB general secretary, said the government’s decision to shut down 28 Remploy factories would make it harder to get people with disabilities into and keep them in work. “Ministers simply need to face up to the fact that in today’s labour market able bodied and fully fit workers get jobs ahead of those who are disabled and those not fully fit,” he said.

- [GMB news release.](#)

Firms are not learning long hours lesson

The average British manager works the equivalent of 40 days a year in unpaid overtime, a survey has revealed. The Chartered Management Institute’s (CMI) survey of 1,511 managers found 89 per cent regularly worked more than their contracted hours. The proportion is almost the same as eight years ago. CMI found the average manager worked one hour and 18 minutes over contract each day. The benefit to industry and commerce was 184 million extra days of unpaid effort, but the downside was lower morale, poor health and declining productivity. About 40 per cent said it reduced morale. On a personal level, 68 per cent said working over their contracted hours limited time for exercise and 48 per cent said it stopped them developing new skills. The institute said the survey showed that efforts to reduce working hours in recent years had failed. Jo Causon, CMI’s marketing director, said: “Many organisations focus on the cost of absence to their organisations, yet are not addressing the root causes of absenteeism. Two questions need to be answered: why are employers ignoring the impact of long hours on the health and

performance of their employees, and what responsibility are employees taking for how they manage themselves? Most organisations are driven to use their assets, particularly their people, more intensively. Yet it is clearly having a negative effect and will create longer-term problems for organisations unless the UK’s long-hours culture is kept in check.”

- [CMI news release.](#) [The Guardian.](#) [BBC News Online.](#)

Garage work deafened man

A Manchester man has been awarded a £6,000 compensation payout after he developed noise induced hearing loss caused by power tool and engine noise exposure whilst working as a mechanic for North Western British Road Services Limited. Terry Howarth, 51, was exposed to noise from air tools, sledge hammers, steam cleaners, air lines, grinders, engine noise and drills. He now has difficulties understanding conversation. He said: “The majority of the work I did for North Western Road Services Limited was maintaining and servicing heavy goods vehicles. The work was noisy as there were often up to 20 men using noisy tools and I was never provided with ear defenders.” Mark Allen from law firm Irwin Mitchell, who represented Mr Howarth, said: “Mr Howarth was never warned or advised about the dangers of noise induced hearing loss or was provided with any protective equipment. This case highlights the importance of health and safety policies. Employers have a duty of care to their staff which includes ensuring full protective equipment is provided so workers’ exposure to risk is kept to a minimum.”

- [Irwin Mitchell news release.](#)

Payout after oven cleaner attack

A residential social worker who was sprayed in the face with oven cleaner has received thousands of pounds in compensation from Newport City Council. Miss Rudi Meszaros, 33, suffered long term chemical damage to her eyes after being attacked by a young person in her care. She was working at the Cambridge House residential home for young offenders in Newport, South Wales. The home housed several people with criminal backgrounds including a young man with behavioural problems and a long history of violence and abuse. During a particularly violent attack, Miss Meszaros was sprayed in the face by the male youth with 'Mr Muscle' oven cleaner, leaving her temporarily blinded and in a lot of pain. Despite a previous and similar incident, oven cleaner and other potentially damaging chemicals were not locked away, out of reach of the residents. Medical evidence showed that as a result of the attack Miss Meszaros was vulnerable to developing a "magnified psychological response" if she worked with people with similarly aggressive behaviour. Diane Davison of Thompsons Solicitors said: "This incident was very distressing for Miss Meszaros who suffered psychological injuries and very serious injuries to her eyes. The case was particularly unacceptable because of a previous similar incident. The council had full knowledge of the risk of an occurrence yet failed to take simple steps to protect their staff from serious injury."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).
icWales.co.uk.

Corus fined over worker's death

Steelmaker Corus has been fined £250,000 and told to pay costs of £43,000 after the death of a worker at its Trostre plant in Llanelli. Francis Coles, 42, known as Frank, died when he was struck on the neck by a guard plate in 2003 ([Risks 88](#)). The company had pleaded guilty to two breaches of health and safety legislation at Swansea Crown Court. Prosecuting on behalf of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), barrister Simon Parrington said Mr Coles suffered a fatal

blow to his head on 4 January 2003, adding the incident was thoroughly investigated by police and HSE but it was not known exactly what happened. "Whatever happened it was clear Mr Coles was able to gain access to dangerous parts while (the plant was) live and the system of changing the rolls on the mill was unsafe," he said. Adding that the death "was avoidable, it was foreseeable", he said the need to review risk assessments at the mill had been raised by the works safety committee the previous May but this had not been done. Passing sentence, Judge Justice John Saunders said: "The fine which I will impose is not intended in any way to reflect his worth that can never be measured in financial terms." Speaking after the hearing, Mr Coles' mother Christine Coles said: "He was only 42, in the prime of his life, with three beautiful children. For me £250,000 is nothing but at least he has had justice." HSE inspector Alan Strawbridge said: "In this case, safe systems of working were not being actively enforced. This case must serve as a warning to all employers, particularly those in higher risk industries, to comply with their legal obligations to avoid tragedies like this taking place again."

- [HSE news release](#) and [equipment webpages](#).
[South Wales Evening Post](#). [BBC News Online](#).
More on the [Corus safety record](#).

Trades alerted to youth asbestos risk

Every week 20 workers in construction trades die simply because they have breathed in asbestos fibres during the course of their work, a Health and Safety Executive (HSE) campaign is warning. The safety watchdog says its research shows young plumbers, electricians and other site tradespeople know that asbestos is dangerous but just don't believe that they are personally at risk. Launching the 'Asbestos - the hidden killer' awareness campaign, Judith Hackitt, chair of the Health and Safety Commission (HSC), said: "Every week six electricians and three plumbers die as a result of exposure to asbestos. The problem today is that we associate it with a problem that's been and

gone because asbestos is now banned. People regard asbestos as something only a previous generation were exposed to but there is a real risk that the younger generation entering the workforce will think this does not apply to them - but it does. If they work on any building built or refurbished before the year 2000 it could contain asbestos.” Exposures early in life are continuing to claim the lives of workers. An inquest last week heard that Matthew Witterick, a 35-year-old Shropshire man, died of mesothelioma in October last year after working as a chrome polisher for Birmingham-based firm A G Warren and Sons Ltd. And health and safety consultant Robert Owen died aged 61 in February last year as a result of exposures when working from ages 16 to 21 as a heating engineer.

- [HSE news release](#). [Shropshire Star](#). [Liverpool Echo](#).
- Mesothelioma deaths by region [[pdf](#)]. [Where can you find asbestos?](#) – check out the new HSE campaign tool.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Australia: Ford pays mechanic for asbestosis

A mechanic from Perth has made Australian legal history by successfully suing the Ford Motor Company for Aus\$840,000 (£396,000) after he proved that his job caused his asbestosis. The Supreme Court of Western Australia ruled that Ford was responsible for the asbestosis now crippling Antonino Lo Presti, 58, and awarded him damages. Mr Lo Presti, an Italian immigrant who struggles with English, worked for a variety of Ford dealerships between 1970 and 1987 across Western Australia, servicing vehicles that were fitted with brakes that contained asbestos in the lining. The trial, held over two months last year, heard that compressed air was used to blow the brakes out during servicing. Evidence was given by several of Mr Lo Presti's former workmates, who said the process created an

extremely dusty environment, with the asbestos dust settling on desks and getting in people's hair, mouth and nose. Mr Lo Presti did not become aware until 1994 that the method was dangerous and should not have been used. “Before that, the plaintiff did not know (or believe) that exposure to brake dust and fibres might be dangerous and that measures should be taken to reduce the generation and inhalation of dust,” judge Andrew Beech said in his judgment. He added that Ford “ought to have known that if no protective measures were taken, there was a real risk, not merely a far-fetched or fanciful prospect, that asbestos fibres released from the brake linings of Ford vehicles would cause life-threatening injury, including mesothelioma, to motor mechanics.” Mr Lo Presti's wife, Connie, said life had been a struggle since her husband was diagnosed seven years ago with asbestosis and was forced to quit work. She said the financial burden of the disease had forced her to hold down three jobs while caring for her husband.

- [The Australian](#) and [related story](#).

Canada: Temps hide the unsafe truth

Companies in Canada's most populous province that use an army of temporary workers are hiding a dirty secret behind their exemplary safety records. That's because Ontario's worker insurance programme insulates major firms from the consequences of accidents on their premises, yet gives big financial penalties to the temporary agency that sent the worker to the job. A loophole in the rules of the province's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) system is to blame. As a result, companies that use a lot of temporary workers have no incentive to clean up their act because their “experience rating” – a financial calculation based on a company's health and safety record – is not affected when a temp is hurt. Depending on company size, the firm can escape hundreds of thousands - or millions – of dollars in annual payments. The situation is “fundamentally wrong,” said WSIB chair Steve Mahoney, after the Toronto Star

presented the results of its investigation. “To allow a company that is using temp agencies to simply skip the responsibility for safety is not in the interest of the workers and that is our main focus.” One in five workers in Ontario is a temp, employed by one of the 1,300 or more agencies in the province that use them. In Ontario, most companies pay into a worker insurance system to cover medical, salary and retraining costs for injured workers. How safe a company is relative to other similar companies helps them save money. A good “experience rating” means they pay less; a bad rating they pay more. “It is outrageous that this situation even exists,” said Wayne Samuelson, president of the Ontario Federation of Labour. “If a company wants to avoid getting on the radar of the labour ministry, they can just offload their accidents onto the temp agency... that way their record gets attached to the agency.”

- [Toronto Star](#).

Global: Temporary workers are at greater risk

Contingent workers – the army of part-time, temporary and contract workers populating many workplaces – face a much higher risk of occupational injury and illness, a new report has confirmed. Researchers from the US government’s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) say the higher risk has been found in studies both in the US and Europe. Writing in the Journal of the American Medical Association they cite evidence including a study showing heightened risk of needlestick injuries among temporary nurses caring for AIDS patients in 11 US hospitals, with the risk 1.65 times higher than the rate for staff nurses working in the same hospital units. A 2004 survey of US ‘day labourers’ – workers recruited at street corners for casual manual work - found that 19 per cent reported work-related injuries that required medical attention in the previous year, compared with less than 5 per cent of workers in all private industries and about 6 per cent of all workers in construction. Black lung rates were found to be higher in coal

miners working for contractors than their directly employed equivalents. The authors note that “it is clear that demonstrating the effectiveness of interventions aimed at injury and illness prevention and health promotion for the contingent workforce is of paramount importance to the health of the nation.” They warn: “Even if the influence of contingent arrangements on health at the individual level is modest, the sheer size of the contingent workforce indicates that the magnitude at the population level may be substantial.”

- Kristin J Cummings and Kathleen Kreiss. Contingent workers and contingent health: Risks of a modern economy, JAMA, volume 299, pages 448-450, 2008 [[extract](#)].

Panama: Union rep killed for safety action

A Panamanian trade unionist has been shot dead after demanding safety improvements at construction sites. The construction union SUNTRACS says police shot Hiromi Smith in the province of Colon during a confrontation with workers on 12 February 2008. Workers clashed with police after the shooting. The union says the police fired tear gas and water cannon to disperse the crowd. At least 26 were injured and around 500 were arrested. In recent months, SUNTRACS members have taken to the streets to protest at lax safety standards on building sites. Global construction union federation BWI is supporting SUNTRACS. Its Panama office has written to Panamanian President Martín Torrijos protesting at the death of Hiromi Smith. In his letter to the president, BWI regional representative, Carlos Salguero, calls for a thorough investigation. BWI is also calling for others to send protest letters – an online letter can be sent via the BWI website.

- [Take action! BWI news release and protest letter](#).

EVENTS AND COURSES

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2008

- [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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