

# Risks

TUC 

*e-bulletin*

Number 381 – 8 November 2008

**HAZARDS  
MAGAZINE**



**Asbestos -  
The hidden killer**

**Hazards at Work**

updated second edition  
now available

**Risks** is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 16,000 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](#)

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

## Contents

### Union News

*HSE injury investigation levels fall further*  
*Scottish dismay at loss of safety protection*  
*'Shameful' increase in NHS violence*  
*Protest at plaques lawyer award nomination*  
*Pleural plaques protest hits parliament*  
*Network Rail funding 'wholly inadequate'*

### Other news

*Concerns surface about safety watchdog*  
*Firms fined £130,000 after work death*  
*Serious injury leads to £10,000 fine*  
*Forklift fall leads to fine*  
*Polish worker in machine horror*  
*MEPS vote to scrap work hours opt-out*  
*Groups call for asbestos database*  
*Worker dies after inhaling anthrax*

### International News

*Australia: Truckies union moves government on safety*  
*Global: Treaty wreckers protect toxins*  
*Ireland: Union says deaths dwarf official figure*  
*New Zealand: Mines need worker inspectors*  
*Philippines: High-tech industries hurt health*

### Resources

*Corporate accountability portal online*

### Events and Courses

*TUC courses for safety reps*

### Useful Links

## **HSE injury investigation levels fall further**

Official investigations into major workplace injuries have dropped dramatically, a Unite report has revealed. Research for the union found investigations into major injuries declined by 43 per cent between 2001/02 and 2006/07. In 2006/07, the most recent year for which statistics are available, only 1-in-10 major injuries (10.5 per cent) reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) were investigated. Over the same five-year period, there was a 69 per cent reduction in the number of 'over-three day' injuries investigated, a 31 per cent decline in the number of 'dangerous occurrences' investigated, and a 68 per cent drop in the number of investigations of work-activity related injuries to members of the public. Unite says a decision to not investigate can result in failures both in relation to prevention and in securing criminal accountability. Unite joint general secretary Derek Simpson said: "This report highlights the need for the government to address the problem accordingly and admit that the HSE needs more money, more resources, and more inspectors. We believe the most fundamental right for workers is that they return home from work to their families, healthy and safe." Mr Simpson added: "The significant reductions in the level of investigations and prosecutions together with less HSE inspectors, goes to the heart of the question of levels of adequate HSE resources."

- [Unite news release](#). Incidents reported to the Health and Safety Executive: Lack of investigation 2001-2007 [[pdf](#)].

## **Scottish dismay at loss of safety protection**

Unions in Scotland have expressed concern at cutbacks in Health and Safety Executive frontline inspectors at a time when work injury levels are remaining stubbornly high. Grahame Smith, general secretary of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), said: "It is extremely disappointing that these statistics reveal no improvement whatsoever at a time when our government and the HSE espouses the message that health and safety should be at the cornerstone of any civilised society." He added: "The sad fact is that yet again 32 families lost loved ones as a result of work related incidents, exactly the same figure as last year and two more than in 2006/07. In addition, very little progress has been made in reducing major injuries in three years." Frontline HSE operational inspectors in Scotland had dropped in recent years, he added: "The number of HSE inspectors has fallen from 182 to 158 since 2004, ironically the same years as the ICL explosion, the worst loss of life in an onshore industrial accident since 22 workers lost their lives in the upholstery factory in James Watt Street 1968." Nine workers died in the ICL Stockline explosion – but the number of HSE inspectors in Scotland has fallen every year since the tragedy. According to the STUC leader: "If the government genuinely believes that health and safety is at the cornerstone of our civilised society then we challenge them to forget the deregulatory pleadings of business organisations and resource the HSE to ensure that workplaces are adequately inspected and not wait until death and injury occur before taking action."

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

### **'Shameful' increase in NHS violence**

Health service union UNISON is calling for tough action to cut down on NHS violence, following new statistics showing that 55,993 NHS staff were physically assaulted in England in 2007/8. Commenting on the figures from the NHS Security Management Services, which revealed physical assaults were up by 284 on the previous year, UNISON head of health Karen Jennings said: "The catalogue of assaults is shameful. What sort of injury do we have to wait for before tough action is taken against violent offenders? Health care workers are four times more likely to be the victims of assault than any other workers." She said an all night drinking culture and a lack of respect for paramedics, nurses and health staff was fuelling the violence, adding penalties and action against offenders were inadequate. "Despite the best efforts of the Security Management Service the level of prosecutions is pitifully low. UNISON would like to see the number of prosecutions doubled and tough penalties meted out to those found guilty of assault," she said. "Many of these assaults are preventable and the NHS needs to look at a raft of measures and new ways of working to protect staff. In some places that might mean more police and security staff working in A&E, in others staff training, more CCTV, alarms, better co-ordination between police and ambulance staff, flagging up dangerous areas or building safety features into hospitals and wards."

- [UNISON news release](#).

### **Protest at plaques lawyer award nomination**

Union representatives and asbestos and safety campaigners protested this week outside a Café Royal award ceremony, where a lawyer was nominated for an award for his work in blocking compensation to those with pleural plaques, an asbestos related lung scarring. Although the condition is usually symptom free, it is associated with a heightened risk of developing asbestos related cancers and its presence can cause considerable stress to those diagnosed. Lawyer David Pugh of Sheffield law firm Halliwells was shortlisted for the defendant's award at the Eclipse Proclaim Personal Injury Awards 2008, although on the night the award went elsewhere. Those entering the plush £150 a head ceremony on 4 November were greeted by placard waving protesters and a coffin emblazoned with a skull and cross bones. Alan Ritchie, general secretary of construction union UCATT, said: "These awards show that the insurance industry has no shame. If any decent person had denied compensation to thousands of people whose health has been damaged by asbestos, they would struggle to sleep at night. But in the insurance industry they are rewarded by their peers." GMB general secretary Paul Kenny said: "The sheer cold bloodedness of this shortlisting beggars belief," adding: "It says a lot about the immoral culture that predominates in parts of professional circles in the UK today." Stephen Hepburn, Labour MP for Jarrow, tabled an early day motion demanding that Mr Pugh's nomination be withdrawn. He said: "Hundreds of my constituents' lives have been blighted by asbestos and many have died. To find out that one of

the people responsible for making their quest for justice more difficult is set to receive an award at an up market restaurant in London is sickening.”

- [GMB news release](#). [Personal Injury Awards 2008 shortlist](#). [The Telegraph](#).

### **Pleural plaques protest hits parliament**

Hundreds of campaigners packed a House of Commons meeting to protest at a House of Lords decision to deny compensation to workers with asbestos related pleural plaques. The 28 October event, organised jointly by the unions Unite, GMB and UCATT, saw MPs in a packed Grand Committee Room urged by trade unionists, asbestos victims and members of asbestos support groups to reinstate compensation for the asbestos related condition. The campaigners were supported by leading medics. Chest consultant Robin Rudd told the meeting that “pleural plaques are an injury in themselves” and “can be as large as dinner plates.” Psychiatrist Rajiv Menon spoke of the patients he had seen who had been “overwhelmed” by a diagnosis of pleural plaques. Labour MP John Battle said reversing the House of Lords decision would not cost the taxpayer a thing. “The insurers are the ones who should be forced to pay,” he said, as they received the premiums. Another Labour MP, Tony Lloyd, who was exposed to asbestos when he worked at a Turner & Newall factory and in the demolition industry, spoke of the “management recklessness” which put profit before safety and the “contemptuous” insurers who are refusing to pay plaque claims. Communications union CWU is one of many that have made submissions urging the government to reinstate pleural plaques compensation. National health and safety officer Dave Joyce said: “In far too many cases it's a sure indication that more serious and fatal asbestos-related illnesses will follow and inevitably anxiety often accompanies the diagnosis and that anxiety about the possibility of a fatal condition developing at a later stage can be disabling in itself.”

- [International Ban Asbestos Secretariat report](#). [GMB news release](#). [Unite news release](#). [CWU news release](#). [North West Evening Mail](#).

### **Network Rail funding ‘wholly inadequate’**

Network Rail’s funding for the next five years is “wholly inadequate” and could jeopardise safety, rail union RMT has said. Commenting on the Office of Rail Regulation’s funding announcement last week, RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: “The £26.7 billion package ordered by the ORR represents a £2.4 billion shortfall on the £29.1 billion requested by Network Rail – a massive funding gap which can only hamper proposals to enhance the system.” He said the latest call for “efficiency savings” added to cuts for the previous five years would amount to a budget reduction of “a colossal 51 per cent over 10 years.” Mr Crow said: “That the ORR thinks it possible to develop the railways over the next five years on such a budget, amid projected increases in demand for passengers and freight, defies belief.” He added: “RMT will resist any resulting job losses and any cuts which might compromise rail safety. We will not be

pushed back into a situation where another Hatfield, Paddington, Potters Bar or Grayrigg tragedy occurs." The union leader continued: "Network Rail will attempt to make up the shortfall by piling pressure on a workforce which is already working excessively long hours, increasing concerns over health and safety at work. This is especially worrying in the wake of last week's Rail Accident Investigation Branch report into the Grayrigg derailment, which blamed a lack of resources and imposition of unrealistic workloads for the tragedy" ([Risks 380](#)).

- [RMT news release](#). Office of Rail Regulation Periodic Review 2008 [[pdf](#)].

## *Other news*

### **Concerns surface about safety watchdog**

Concerns about the condition of Britain's shrinking workplace safety watchdog have been raised by campaigners and safety professionals. Commenting after figures released last week by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) showed the workplace fatality rate had barely changed for six years, safety professionals' body IOSH said more workplace safety inspectors were needed. Ray Hurst, the president of IOSH, said: "I think these figures reinforce the need for the HSE to continue to bolster the number of inspectors they have. We need to keep reminding business to ensure health and safety is on their agenda. We cannot, and must not, take a backward step to the days where 1,000 people were killed in British workplaces each year." The national Hazards Campaign, a coalition of union and safety groups, criticised HSE's presentation of the injury figures as "drastically misrepresenting" the cost of work. Spokesperson Hilda Palmer said the figures played down deaths from occupational diseases and omitted entirely work-related road traffic accidents and workplace deaths in coastal waters or in aircraft incidents. She also warned that a trend away from inspection and enforcement was extremely damaging. "As we head for global economic meltdown largely due to an uncritical acceptance that financial business could be trusted to do the right thing, we can see that deregulation and light touch regulation has brought us to the brink of disaster. We urgently need to learn those lessons from the financial sector and look far more critically at what's really going on in our workplaces where more workers are being killed, injured and made ill than the HSE headline figures suggest and we need more health and safety law and enforcement rather than less."

- [Hazards Campaign news release](#). [IOSH news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).

### **Firms fined £130,000 after work death**

Two firms have been fined a total of £130,000 after a worker died in a 23 metre fall on a Maidstone construction site. Lentjes UK Ltd (formally known as Lurgi (UK) Ltd) and Rafako SA were fined last week at Maidstone Crown Court after pleading guilty to health and safety offences. Lentjes UK Ltd, the principal contractor, was fined £45,000 and ordered to pay costs of £25,000. The manufacture and

installation of boilers on the site was sub-contracted to Rafako SA, who pleaded guilty to a breach of the Work at Height Regulations 2005. It had previously pleaded guilty to another breach of these regulations, and was sentenced for both breaches, receiving fines totalling £85,000 and a costs bill of £35,000. The fatality occurred on 19 July 2005 during installation of three industrial boilers. A worker installing floor gratings fell when a grating that had been displaced by pipefitters gave way, plunging 23 metres to his death. Earlier that day, a health and safety manager from another sub-contractor has expressed concern about the gratings not being properly secured, and about the number of people working on the boilers and the work practices in general. He was in the process of taking his concerns up with Rafako's site management when the incident happened. HSE inspector Peter Collingwood said: "This death could easily have been avoided." He added: "Another life has been lost because of the inability to plan and implement simple and basic precautions and employers need to understand that this is simply not acceptable."

- [HSE news release](#) and [falls webpages](#).

### **Serious injury leads to £10,000 fine**

A firm has been fined £10,000 after a driver was seriously injured when he fell down an unguarded and unlit stairwell. Logistics company TDG UK Ltd was also ordered to pay £2,400 costs, after pleading guilty at Halton Magistrates Court to a safety offence. On 30 November 2007 a driver arrived at the company's Runcorn premises and was sent to collect a trailer from a nearby site, arriving at approximately 4.30am. After reversing his cab onto the trailer, he was checking the vehicle when he fell down an unguarded and unlit stairwell. There were similar stairwells on the site with steel railings to guard the opening and with operational lights. The driver was taken to hospital and underwent surgery to repair lung damage. He was off work for 10 weeks. Health and Safety Executive inspector Gill Chambers said: "Falls from height remain one of the main causes of workplace injuries and the driver suffered serious and avoidable injuries. This incident would not have happened had proper monitoring and maintenance been carried out on site. Since the incident the company has introduced new systems of working."

- [HSE news release](#).

### **Forklift fall leads to fine**

A Halifax company has been fined £10,000 after an employee fell from the raised forks of a forklift truck while transferring waste to a skip at the company's premises. Lynwood Products Ltd was also ordered to pay full costs of £2,089.50 at Halifax Magistrates Court after pleading guilty a safety offence. The prosecution followed an incident on 14 January 2008 in which an employee was transferring waste from a metal cage into a skip whilst standing on the raised forks of a forklift truck alongside the cage. The employee fell over two metres to the ground and the cage landed on top of him,

causing fractures to both of his shoulders. After the hearing HSE inspector Geoff Fletcher said: "This incident caused serious injuries and could have been much worse. Moreover, it need never have happened if some basic thought and planning had taken place. Work at height must always be properly planned, appropriately supervised and carried out in a safe manner. The company had allowed a practice to develop of employees standing on the raised forks of the forklift truck to transfer materials into skips, and had failed to consider the potential problems by carrying out a risk assessment." The inspector added: "The consequences could have been life-threatening. HSE will not hesitate to prosecute in situations where people's lives are put at risk in this way."

- [HSE news release](#).

### **Polish worker in machine horror**

A food firm has been fined £30,000 after a Polish worker lost a finger after being told to help clean a machine with which she was unfamiliar. Natures Way Foods Ltd received the fine at Chichester Crown Court and was also ordered to pay costs of £16,282 after earlier pleading guilty to breaches of the management and the work equipment regulations. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) prosecution followed the incident on 27 July 2007, when the employee was asked to leave her regular duties to help with a thorough cleaning of the production lines, but was only given brief instructions on how to clean the machine, with which she was unfamiliar. As a result, her hand was drawn into the machine and one of her fingers was cut off. HSE inspector David Swaite commented: "This prosecution highlights both the importance of having properly guarded machines and the need to ensure employees are given appropriate training. In this case the combination of the ability to access dangerous parts of the machine, and the lack of training and information given to the employee, caused a preventable accident." The inspector added: "Machinery should be effectively guarded so that employees cannot gain access to dangerous parts. If the duty holder had made a suitable risk assessment, they should have identified that it was possible to gain access to a dangerous part of the machine and then taken appropriate control measures. In addition, employees should be given sufficient information and training to ensure they are fully aware of the risks they face whilst at work and how they should safely use work equipment."

- [HSE news release](#) and [food manufacturing webpages](#).

### **MEPS vote to scrap work hours opt-out**

The TUC has welcomed a decision by the employment and social affairs committee of the European Parliament to scrap the Working Time Directive opt-out within three years. Commenting after MEPs on the committee voted on 5 November by 35 votes to 13 to end the option for workers to sign away their right to a 48 hour ceiling on the working week, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "Workers across the UK will be heartened by the committee's vote to end the opt-out from the 48 hour week. Our long hours culture,

which has been shored up by the opt-out, has risked the health of many workers. Regularly working more than 48 hours increases the chance of suffering from heart disease and stress related illness, as well as diabetes and other ailments." Mr Barber added: "The vast majority of long hours workers want to move to a better work-life balance and are hungry for change. Today's vote is a welcome step towards ending the opt-out and the pressure will now be on the European Parliament to ratify the decision next month." The amendments proposed by the committee will be considered at a plenary session at the European Parliament's December meeting, and will need an absolute major vote to be adopted.

- [European Parliament news release](#). [TUC news release](#). [ETUC news release](#).

### **Groups call for asbestos database**

Campaigners have called for a nationwide survey of all public buildings amid concerns that growing numbers of teachers, doctors and nurses are dying from asbestos-related diseases. Unions and support groups also want a national database so that employees and the public can check how much asbestos their workplaces contain. Adrian Budgen, head of asbestos disease litigation for the law firm Irwin Mitchell, said he is seeing a new generation of people who have developed asbestos illnesses but have not worked in heavy industry. "I've sadly represented a consultant surgeon who developed mesothelioma in his mid 40s, and other healthcare professionals who have been affected, and similarly we're seeing teachers who have been exposed in schools as well," he said. Michael Lees, whose wife Gina was a teacher before she died from mesothelioma eight years ago, said asbestos poses a risk to both teachers and pupils. He is calling for the government to conduct a national survey of asbestos in public buildings. The campaigner said: "If cumulatively you're exposed to low levels and I do mean, even drawing pins, if that happens on a frequent basis, then there is a risk. But at the moment they don't know who is at risk and who isn't." According to statistics gathered by the HSE, 183 teachers and lecturers died from mesothelioma between 1980 and 2000, but the cancer claimed 76 deaths in the four year period between 2002 and 2005. There is a similar increase in the smaller number of nurses' deaths, from 49 between 1980 and 2000 to 25 in the four years between 2002 and 2005. Construction union UCATT and the National Union of Teachers (NUT) both want central government to survey all public buildings and remove any material that might present a risk.

- [The Independent](#). [BBC News Online](#).

### **Worker dies after inhaling anthrax**

A drum maker from London who inhaled anthrax spores while handling imported animal skins at his workshop has died in hospital. Fernando Gomez, 35, died from inhalation anthrax rather than cutaneous anthrax, which is contracted through the skin. Eight other people have been given antibiotics as a precautionary measure. The Health Protection Agency (HPA) said it was

attempting to trace where the infected skins originated. HPA chief adviser, Professor Nigel Lightfoot, said the risk of coming into contact with anthrax came from the making of animal skin drums not playing or handling them. "We are, however, keen to reiterate to all individuals who make drums from imported animal skins that there is a risk of coming into contact with anthrax and that they should ensure they are aware of this and take precautions to protect themselves when making these drums," he said. The tragedy is the second occupational anthrax fatality in Britain in just over two years. In 2006, Christopher Norris, 50, a craftsman from Stobs, near Hawick in Scotland, died after inhaling anthrax ([Risks 271](#)). Mr Norris made artworks and also musical instruments, including drums. A fatal accident inquiry into his death is due to take place on 18 November at Edinburgh sheriffs court.

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

## *International News*

### **Australia: Truckies union moves government on safety**

A transport union campaign to stop abuses including a pay-per-mile system that induced drivers to drive at unsafe speeds has led to a government investigation. The Transport Workers Union had warned that wage pressure on drivers and increasing costs were compromising safety. It says the transport industry is a tough and hyper-competitive sector that can be extremely dangerous. Last year, Australia's transport industry recorded a 5.4 per cent increase in fatalities from heavy vehicle incidents, while wages across the industry were driven down by the non-unionised sector by 5.6 per cent. The National Transport Commission (NTC) this week announced it will investigate and report on options for implementing a national system of safe rates for employees and owner-drivers. TWU national secretary Tony Sheldon: "This commitment is a real opportunity and a step in the right direction for transport workers to get a national system of safe rates for employees and owner drivers right across the country. Drivers are crying out for a national system that gives drivers the ability to obtain a safe rate of pay and seek full cost recovery from the powerful transport clients like the major retailers to get relief from rising costs of living, rising costs of maintaining a safe truck and fuel spikes." The union blames unsafe driving practices on powerful retailers who it says sets dangerous deadlines and inadequate rates for the trucking industry. TWU is pushing for a new method of remuneration which means drivers are not pushed to their limits.

- [TWU news release](#). [Northern Star](#).

### **Global: Treaty wreckers protect toxins**

Governments doing the dirty work of toxic exporters have succeeded in blocking listing of chrysotile asbestos and the pesticide endosulfan on a global safety warning system. In Rome last week, over 120 countries party to the Rotterdam Convention agreed to add the pesticide tributyltin to a global trade "watch list".

However, a handful of governments ignored dire health problems linked to the other two candidate substances, and vetoed their including on the "Prior Informed Consent" list, which would require importing nations to be given notice of the dangers posed by the product. Under Convention rules, listing of any substance requires consensus. Unions and environmental groups – as well as the Convention's own scientific panel – had supported listing of both chrysotile and endosulfan. Commenting on the failure to list chrysotile, Canadian Member of Parliament Pat Martin, who attended the treaty conference, said that Canada - a top exporter of white asbestos - had pressured major clients such as India, Pakistan, the Philippines and Vietnam to join opposition to the listing. "Canada should hang its head in shame," Martin, a former asbestos miner and a deputy in the House of Commons with the opposition socialist New Democratic Party, told the Canadian Press news agency. The Rotterdam Convention is jointly supported by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

- [Rotterdam Convention news release](#). [International Ban Asbestos Secretariat report](#). [HESA news release](#). [The Dominion](#). [Toronto Star](#).

### **Ireland: Union says deaths dwarf official figure**

Work-related deaths in Ireland are over 20 times the official figure, a union has said. SIPTU safety and health adviser Sylvester Cronin criticised official record keeping and enforcement and called on the Irish government to officially acknowledge all work-related deaths in Ireland. "According to International Labour Organisation statistics these amount to approximately 1,400 per year, yet Ireland's official statistics average around sixty fatalities per year," he told a Health and Safety Authority (HAS) conference in Dublin this week. "Ireland's official statistics count only those workers killed as a result of an accident inside the workplace. They omit to count deaths caused by work-related illnesses and diseases. They also exclude work-related deaths caused by road traffic accidents." He added that there were far too few workplace inspections and employers were often pre-warned. "In a recent survey conducted by SIPTU almost two-thirds (65 per cent) of our safety representatives said that their employer was aware in advance that the HSA was going to carry out a workplace inspection. Yet under current occupational safety and health (OSH) legislation there is no requirement for the HSA to give prior notice of workplace inspections. We want to know why so many employers are getting prior notification of workplace inspections and whose interest is being served by such prior alerts?" He pointed out that with 200,000 workplaces and only 14,000 inspections a year "a work place in Ireland can expect a visit, on average, once every 14.5 years."

- [SIPTU news release](#). [Irish Times](#). [The Corkman](#).

### **New Zealand: Mines need worker inspectors**

A New Zealand union has called for the reintroduction of elected worker safety inspectors in mining, to improve the industry's safety record. The Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU) was commenting after a government announcement that it will develop further measures to improve mine safety and expects that to include legislation for "health and safety check inspectors." EPMU has been campaigning for the re-introduction of check inspectors, who would be democratically elected from frontline mine workers, for several years now. EPMU acting national secretary and head of the union's mining section Ged O'Connell said check inspectors are the best form of worker participation in mine safety. "Underground mining is a dangerous job which requires all frontline workers to rely on each other and work as a team and when it's their lives at risk it's wholly appropriate that they get to choose one of their own to mind their safety," he said. "Nobody is more aware of the dangers and the need for proper safety procedures than the people at the coalface because they have the most to lose if things go wrong. That experience and incentive for decent safety procedures needs to be the driver for any further safety standards and the best way to do that is through check inspectors."

- [EPMU news release.](#)

### **Philippines: High-tech industries hurt health**

High-tech firms who claim to be "going green" are being far from frank, an expert on microelectronics health and safety has said. Ted Smith, a founder member of the San Jose, USA, based Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, was speaking at a Quezon City forum on electronic waste, organised by the EcoWaste Coalition, an alliance of Philippine NGOs that focus on environmental issues. "The production of electronic and computer components contaminate air, land and water around the globe. Unfortunately, the people who suffer the consequences are largely poor, female, immigrant and the minority," Smith said. He added that plenty of toxic materials go into the manufacture of computers, among them solvents, toxic metals and plastics. "Over 1,000 chemicals are actually used in computer production," he said. Smith noted that there is evidence suggesting semiconductor workers in the US experience illness rates three times greater than manufacturing workers in other industries. "In three epidemiological studies, women who worked in fabrication rooms were found to have rates of miscarriage of 40 per cent or more above non-manufacturing workers," he said. Clean room workers could be exposed to chemicals including glycol ethers, chlorinated solvents, xylene, epoxies, arsenic, cadmium, chromium and nickel compounds.

- [Manila Times.](#)

## *Resources*

### **Corporate accountability portal online**

The Business & Human Rights Resource Centre has launched a free online portal, pulling together information on lawsuits across the world alleging human rights abuses by companies. The portal

summarises in non-legal language over 35 cases and the positions taken by each side, with more cases to be added soon. There's also commentaries by experts. Occupational and environmental health abuses feature prominently among the initial collection of cases. There are details of the case against AngloGold Ashanti, the mining firm sued in South Africa over miners suffering from the dust disease silicosis. The legal action in India and the US against Dow/Union Carbide following the industrial disaster in Bhopal is also featured.

- [Business & Human Rights Resource Centre news release](#). [Corporate legal accountability portal](#).

## *Events and Courses*

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

COURSES FOR SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2008

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

## *Useful Links*

- Visit the TUC [www.tuc.org.uk/h\\_and\\_s](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.
- HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA. Tel: 01787 881165; fax: 01787 313995