

Risks

TUC 

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**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](#)

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TUC calls for work cancer action

Employers who risk the future health of their employees by exposing them to cancer-causing chemicals at work should be prosecuted under UK safety laws, the TUC has said. The call came as the union body launched a campaign to raise awareness of the toxic chemicals and substances such as wood dust and diesel fumes that can make workers ill sometimes years after leaving their jobs. A new TUC guide aims to help union safety reps keep up the pressure on employers to make workplaces safer, and stop them from taking unnecessary risks with their employees' lives. Over 250,000 people are diagnosed with cancer every year, and TUC estimates that work is the reason behind tens of thousands of these cancer diagnoses. Sometimes safer chemicals exist, but cost is often the reason why employers stick with the more carcinogenic ones, says the TUC. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "Workplace cancers kill around 15,000–18,000 people every year compared with the 229 workplace fatalities caused by injury last year. Every one of these workplace cancer deaths is avoidable and far more must be done to both increase awareness of the risks and also to remove employees' exposure to carcinogens." He added: "Many people simply do not know the risks from substances such as wood dust, silica and diesel particles and even if they do develop cancer later in life often do not associate it with work exposure. As a result there is far less pressure on employers to take action to remove the risks. That must change. The TUC wants to ensure that no worker comes into contact with a cancer-causing chemical and any employer who does expose their workforce to the risk of cancer should be prosecuted."

- [TUC news release](#). TUC occupational cancer guide [[pdf](#)].
- [Global Unions cancer prevention campaign](#) and [prevention kit](#).

Lift worker gets cancer payout

A GMB member diagnosed with the asbestos related cancer mesothelioma has received £140,000 in compensation. The man from Derbyshire, who does not wish to be named, was diagnosed with the cancer of the lining of the lung in January this year. Mesothelioma is caused by exposure to asbestos and there is no cure. Often sufferers have just months to live following diagnosis. He was exposed to asbestos dust while working as a lift engineer for Evans Lifts in Leicestershire between 1962 and 1968. He installed lifts in hospitals, factories and commercial premises and worked alongside other trades who used asbestos based materials. He was also exposed to asbestos while working for James Oakes & Co (Riddings) Limited, based in Derbyshire. He said: "The doctor told me I only have seven to 14 months to live and one of my biggest concerns was making sure my wife would be financially secure when I am gone. It was a big relief when the case was settled." GMB regional secretary Andy Worth said: "Asbestos has affected the lives of many of our members who were unwittingly exposed to the dangerous dust by negligent employers. We are pleased to have supported this member with his claim for compensation. The swift settlement means he can enjoy peace of mind that his family will be provided for in the future."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

Public service violence up in Scotland

Violent incidents against Scottish public service staff have risen again, underlining the need for further action, according to a union report. UNISON Scotland says new figures reveal a total of 32,263 violent incidents against public service workers, more than half of which were NHS employees. It adds that "these are only the formally recorded incidents." UNISON says its extended annual Freedom of Information questionnaire is the most comprehensive survey of violence against public service workers in Scotland. Scottish organiser Dave Watson commented: "It is completely unacceptable that thousands of dedicated staff providing services on behalf of the community are being assaulted at work. All those affected deserve stronger legal protection and better protective measures." The figures show assaults against people working in local government have risen by nearly 3,000 in the last year, up to 9,121. The health service has the largest number of assaults, although there was a fall from 18,860 in the previous year to 17,693. UNISON says it is concerned that too many employers are not properly recording violent incidents and as a consequence not taking appropriate action. Dave Watson added there was a need for "stronger legislation including an extension of the Emergency Workers Act to cover all those at risk. Discussions are underway on this point with the Scottish government and we are looking for legislative action next year." Recorded incidents in the new sectors surveyed by UNISON included an horrific brick attack on two Scottish Water workers attending an emergency call-out. One of the assailants was carrying a machete.

- [UNISON Scotland news release](#). Violent assaults on public service staff in Scotland – Follow up survey 2008 [[pdf](#)] and [related resources](#). [UNISON news release](#). UNISON violence at work poster, It's not part of the job [[pdf](#)]. [The Scotsman](#). [Glasgow Evening Times](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Union warning on dirty needles

Construction union UCATT has warned workers involved in housing maintenance to be vigilant for dirty needles when entering or working on properties. The union has received reports from several parts of the country of workers being placed at risk. It says in some cases anti-social tenants have booby-trapped light switches and sockets with needles. Workers cleaning and refurbishing empty properties have also suffered needlestick injuries when clearing rubbish. UCATT is urging local authorities, housing associations and other maintenance companies to develop training and guidance to ensure that the potential danger from needlestick injuries is kept to an absolute minimum. This advice should include what to do if a needlestick injury should occur, the union says. Alan Ritchie, general secretary of construction union UCATT, said: "Workers who experience needlestick injuries can experience devastating psychological consequences as well as the genuine threat of infection. It is imperative that all companies whose workers could potentially be exposed to dirty needles provide training to minimise

potential injuries. If an injury should occur it is essential that the company provides advice and counselling to the affected worker.”

- [UCATT news release](#)

Print payout leads to safety review

A major print company has reviewed its safety procedures after paying out £140,000 in compensation to an injured worker. Unite member Kenneth Blair was knocked off a ladder when working on a machine with which he was unfamiliar at Trinity Mirror’s printing press in Oldham. He suffered a broken wrist requiring three operations, including a bone graft from his hip and the insertion of a metal plate. He has now retired from printing on the advice of his consultant. The 58-year-old had worked as a reelman for Trinity Mirror for 18 years. The night he was injured he was told to work for the first time on a different type of press, but was not given any safety briefing. A ladder he was using as he attempted to fix a problem was knocked over by an automated guided battery forklift truck (AGV), throwing him to the floor. Trinity Mirror settled the claim for £140,000, accepting 85 per cent liability and has now reviewed its health and safety protocol. Kenneth said “I enjoyed my job,” but added: “I have a new wife and young children to support but I can no longer earn an income. I’m angry that I have been put in this position. I should have been warned about the risks involved.” Unite regional secretary Kevin Coyne said: “It is vital businesses have very clear health and safety procedures in place in the workplace and that staff are briefed before they start work on a job that is new to them. If Kenneth had been given even the simplest of briefings on the machinery this accident would never have happened.”

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Blame admitted in road worker death

A family’s fight for justice has come to a close after the insurer of the driver of a car that hit a road worker accepted the driver was partly responsible for his death. GMB member Tony Gate from Hartlepool suffered a severe traumatic brain injury after he was hit by a car in 2003 as he put out signs for road works ([Risks 360](#)). The Hartlepool Borough Council highways employee later died aged 52, after spending three years in a nursing home in a persistent vegetative state. His family felt let down by the system when an inquest found Tony had died an accidental death. The insurers of the car’s driver have now accepted she contributed to the accident and have agreed an out-of-court settlement. Tony’s sister, Linda Hughes said: “When we began civil proceedings we were not interested in compensation, this has always been about apportioning liability.” Andrew McDonald from Thompsons Solicitors, who the union brought in to act for the family, said: “The family lost Tony twice - once at the time of his accident and, after visiting him every single day that he remained in a persistent vegetative state, on his death. We owed it to Tony to try and find out exactly what happened and to find out who was responsible.” GMB’s Maxine

Bartholomew commented: "Local council highways workers face very serious dangers on a day to day basis and we want to work with the councils to ensure the safety of our members."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#). [Hartlepool Mail](#).

Other news

HSE chair wants more reps

The benefits of trade union safety reps are beyond all doubt, the chair of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has said. Judith Hackitt told the worker involvement conference of TUC's Southern and Eastern Region (SERTUC) last week: "Throughout my working life it has always been the case that the workforce has been fully involved in health and safety and the importance of safety representatives has never been questioned - because it's never been in any doubt." She added: "In some ways, I am surprised that we continue to have to promote the benefits in worker involvement in health and safety given that in my own personal experience I find it hard to imagine how one could ever put in place an effective workplace health and safety system that did not include real participation and engagement of the workforce." Trailing the December launch of a consultation on HSE's new strategy, Judith Hackitt said: "HSE will make it clear that worker involvement and consultation is important in every organisation - where trades unions are present and where they are not and in all organisations irrespective of their size or dispersal of work locations." HSE will launch the consultation on 3 December at venues in London, Edinburgh and Cardiff. In October, TUC launched a safety reps' charter, calling for more safety reps with more rights in more places ([Risks 379](#)).

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

Just who is really shirking at work?

Employers should sort out unhealthy jobs before they start lecturing workers about their lifestyles, according to a new report in a trade union health and safety journal. Hazards magazine notes: "They'll weigh us, keep tabs on our bad habits and ask questions when we are sick," but adds "when we fall short of perfection, they label us shirkers, sickos and slobs." The report questions whether all this attention from employers is really for workers' own good. It points to studies showing lifestyle initiatives at work are on the increase. 'Working well: A global survey of health promotion and workplace wellness strategies', published in November 2008 by Buck Consultants, found in the UK 40 per cent of those surveyed now offer a 'workplace wellness strategy' - approximately double the percentage the preceding year, with 16.4 per cent of UK respondents now having a fully implemented a health promotion and wellness strategy and 34.5 per cent a partially implemented strategy. Only 3.6 per cent reported that that they had no plans at present for a wellness strategy. The Hazards report says these approaches, instead of addressing job insecurity, long hours, monotony, work hazards, staffing shortages, sedentary work and

excessive workload, increasingly look exclusively at modifying workers own personal habits. It adds: "Strapping on a pedometer or signing up for a lunch-time diet programme will be of limited use if the worker is still spending 10 hours a day working frantically in front of a computer or a production line."

- [You big fat liars](#), Hazards magazine, number 104, 2008.
- [Promoting health at work: Guidance for safety representatives](#), TUC, September 2008.

RMT urges greater effort to counter piracy

Maritime union RMT has called on the government to lead the way in marshalling greater international co-operation to counter the "growing threat" of piracy faced by seafarers in international waters. The union call followed the seizure last week of a Saudi super-tanker whose 25-person crew includes two British seafarers. RMT is urging ministers to push for expansion of patrolling and escorts. "The growth of piracy is a threat faced by the shipping industry on a global scale, and it requires a global response," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said. Commenting on 18 November, four days after the boat was seized, he said: "The most important immediate task is to get the Sirius Star, and the many other vessels already being held by pirates, released with their crews unharmed. Like all workers, seafarers should be able to work without the fear of imminent attack, and the ordeal faced by seafarers held to ransom is unimaginable." He added: "One problem is that some shipowners, particularly those flying flags of convenience, will gamble with their crews' safety by taking short cuts outside the patrolled safe zone. Britain is already contributing to international patrolling efforts, particularly off east Africa, but there is clearly a need to extend the existing patrolled zones, and to ensure that merchant vessels are escorted in convoy if need be to ensure safe passage."

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

Shopworkers welcome Co-op knife move

The shopworkers' union Usdaw has welcomed a decision by Midcounties Co-op to remove knives from open sale. The union says the move follows its campaign urging retailers to only sell knives in a restricted area. Midcounties Co-op has announced that it will remove knives from open sale by 1 December 2008. Kitchen knives will be displayed using dummy packs with product cards that customers take to the kiosk where the item can be purchased. Usdaw general secretary John Hannett commented: "We are delighted that Midcounties Co-op is leading the way in taking knives off our shelves. Knife crime is a growing problem, and one that, with the help of retailers, we intend to tackle." He said the union's retail trades conference this year had agreed to campaign for the removal of all knives from open sale, with their sale allowed only in a restricted area such as a kiosk. "I hope that this initiative will be taken up by other retailers," the union leader said, adding: "We

congratulate Midcounties Co-op on their proactive approach to tackling knife crime.”

- [Usdaw news release](#). [Retail Bulletin](#).

Pesticide reductions edge closer

A top European Parliament committee has resisted pressure from agribusiness and industry and has approved proposals for bans on toxic pesticides. Earlier this month members of the parliament’s environment committee voted on two legislative proposals from the European Commission, one on approval of pesticides and the other aiming to reduce their use across the EU. The committee backed a cross-party compromise that would create an EU-wide list of approved chemical ingredients. Certain highly toxic substances - those that cause cancer, are toxic to reproduction or negatively affect the hormonal, nervous or immune systems - would be banned where they pose a significant risk. A clause would allow these substances to be used in cases of serious danger to plant health, however. Legislation on the reduction of pesticide use was approved with a substantial majority. A key change introduced by MEPs is a requirement that national action plans to reduce pesticide use include quantitative targets. For particularly dangerous substances, their use must be halved. The proposals still have further legislative hurdles before they become European-wide law. Negotiations will take place on several points before a vote of the whole parliament in December or January. In the UK, environmental campaigner Georgina Downs this week won a landmark victory against the government in a long-running legal battle over the use of pesticides. The high court ruled that she had produced “solid evidence” that people exposed to chemicals used to spray crops had suffered harm. It said the environment department, Defra, must reassess its policy and investigate the risks to people who are exposed.

- [ETUI-HESA news report](#). [The Guardian](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- Campaign group HEAL has launched a new [Pesticides and cancer \(sick of pesticides\) campaign website](#).

Pesticide linked to Parkinson's

A widely used fungicide has become the latest pesticide linked to elevated rates of Parkinson’s disease. Researchers have found a strong connection between the debilitating neurological disease and long-term exposure to pesticides, particularly to the common fungicide Ziram. The link was found by researchers from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) who looked at 400 people with Parkinson's in the state’s San Joaquin Valley. “People exposed over a 25-year period to ziram have about a threefold increased risk of developing Parkinson's,” said Jeff Bronstein, professor of neurology and head of the UCLA Movement Disorder Center. The research showed the fungicide kills certain brain cells, and their death has been associated with Parkinson's, Bronstein said. Now that researchers have a better understanding of what happens when exposure occurs, the information could lead to

treatments to prevent or slow the progression of Parkinson's disease, he said. The association between a fungicide and Parkinson's could help explain why the disease appears to be more common among people in the agriculture-rich Valley than elsewhere in California. "We're not trying to get rid of pesticides," Jeff Bronstein said. "We're just trying to get rid of the bad ones or minimise exposure." Results of this study appeared online in the Journal of Biological Chemistry.

- [Fresno Bee](#).

International News

Canada: Video nasties miss the point

Hard-hitting and sometimes gruesome videos are being used in a Canadian province in a drive to cut injuries to young workers. But unions and safety experts in Alberta have warned the initiative misses the point, blaming "unengaged" and "unmotivated" workers for their injuries, rather than unsafe and poorly supervised work. Barrie Harrison, a spokesperson with Alberta's employment department, says the point of using such graphic examples — which are based on actual workplace incidents in the province — is to grab the attention of young workers and get them thinking and talking about the dangers they face at work. However, Mark Wells, a communications officer with the Alberta Union of Public Employees, says that the whole campaign falls short because it doesn't give young workers the right information they need to stay safe at work. "Young workers need to know that they've got the right to refuse unsafe work and that they have the right to refuse that work and not fear any disciplinary action from their employer," Wells said. "You don't have to choose between unsafe work and no job at all." Kevin Flaherty, the executive director of the Alberta Workers' Health Centre, agrees the approach is flawed. "The director of the videos chose to try to engage the target audience by having the actors reflect and reinforce stereotypes of youth behaviour: distracted, unengaged, unmotivated, resentful of work, and this takes the viewer away from the background elements of the story which may provide clues to what is really going on — the 'root cause analysis' if you want to use the health and safety term." Flaherty says it's important to realise that a worker's behaviour in any situation happens in the context of things the worker can't change: how the work is structured, the pace of work, the tools used at work and other decisions which are under the control of employers, who, Flaherty points out, are absent from the scenarios depicted in the ads.

- [Vue Weekly](#). [Bloody Lucky campaign](#).

Turkey: Prada and Mulberry ignore abuses

High fashion brands Prada and Mulberry have been accused of ignoring labour rights abuses by Turkish supplier Desa in the production of their high cost merchandise. Unions say scores of workers have been fired for seeking improvements in working conditions. Incensed after their employees turned to the Turkish

leather workers' union, Deri İş, for assistance, Desa declared war on the union and its members, began firing suspected union sympathisers and intimidated many others into resigning their membership. Neil Kearney, general secretary of ITGLWF, the global union federation for the sector, branded Desa the "unacceptable face of the leather fashion industry" and lashed out at Prada and Mulberry, two of the company's biggest buyers, dubbing them the 'see no evil, hear no evil' twins of high fashion. He said problems began six months ago, when workers began joining the union, Türkiye Deri İş Sendikası. "Desa embarked on a daily set of dismissals aimed at eliminating unionisation efforts", he said. "The 'worker of the month' award-winner for outstanding productivity was among those fired for 'unsatisfactory work'. Union members were described as 'Kurdish terrorists' and an army colonel was called in to intimidate suspected union members. To date, 43 union members have been dismissed under intense verbal and physical pressure and a further 53 workers have been forced to resign their union membership". Poor safety conditions in Turkish workplaces have been the subject of ongoing union campaigns and protests. The government is now drafting a workplace safety law, although unions safety the measures proposed do not go far enough.

- [ITGLWF news release. Hurriyet.](#)
- Action: [Send off a message to DESA's customers](#) - the luxury fashion brands - telling them that you support the DESA workers in their struggle.

Italy: Murder charges follow factory blaze

An Italian judge has ordered murder and manslaughter charges to be brought against managers of a ThyssenKrupp plant where seven workers died last year in a blaze. The fire at the German steelmaker's plant in Turin prompted widespread calls for improved safety in the workplace ([Risks 336](#)). The trial is slated to begin on 15 January. Prosecutor Raffaele Guariniello called Turin Judge Francesco Gianfrotta's decision to order the trial an "historic" ruling because for the first time workplace deaths in Italy have led to trial on murder charges. A lawyer for ThyssenKrupp AG, Ezio Audisio, called prosecutors' contentions that some in company management were responsible a "rash theory." Reports say ThyssenKrupp's CEO for Italy, Harald Espenhahn, is to stand trial on murder charges and five others from management will stand trial on charges including manslaughter and criminal omission of anti-accident measures. Espenhahn, who prosecutors believe could face at least 21 years in prison if convicted, denies any wrongdoing, Ezio Audisio said. One worker died immediately in the fire, while the other six died in hospital days or weeks later. FIOM metalworkers' union leader Giorgio Cremaschi hailed the trial indictment and especially the murder charge. "We hope an exemplary verdict will be obtained, which will bring justice for all that happened and resound as a warning to those who don't carry out their duties to impede deadly workplace accidents from happening again," Cremaschi said in a statement.

- [International Herald Tribune.](#)

South Africa: Manganese poisoning scandal exposed

A US medical expert drafted in by a manganese processing giant accused of poisoning its workers resigned a prestigious post after it was revealed he was a major recipient of industry cash, a South African government inquiry has heard. The ongoing inquiry, which reconvened this month, heard Dr Warren Olanow, who was brought in by Assmang in May 2008 to provide medical reassessments when the company disputed the poisoning diagnoses, resigned from his chair at New York's Mount Sinai Hospital around the time a US judge disclosed industry payments to medical experts related to manganese litigation. The revelation was made by Richard Spoor, a lawyer retained by the union Numsa to represent the affected South African workers. A breakdown of 'In camera submission of privileged payments' made public in a US court identifies almost \$1.1m of "Payments for time spent consulting with Defendants on issues related to welding fume litigation after Dr Olanow ceased being identified as a testifying witness." Other payments, often of tens of thousands of dollars a month, came from other industry-linked sources. Numsa, concerned at Dr Olanow's pro-industry pedigree, are refusing to let him undertake new medical tests on workers already diagnosed with manganism. According to Numsa health and safety officer Puleng Mminele: "Companies will do everything in their power to hire product defence lawyers and doctors to prove their innocence. Any negative report about the product is withheld from the public and the workers." The union says the company is embarked on a last ditch attempt to duck responsibility for the ruined lives and to evade prosecution in the courts. By creating doubt about the health effects of inhaling high levels of toxic fumes, the company's directors can breathe easy for another day. After all, Numsa says, if Assmang can manufacture "reasonable doubt" the disease does not exist, its directors can hardly be held responsible for it.

- [Hazards magazine](#). [The Mercury](#).

South Africa: Twenty-three die in danger truck

The death of at least 21 forestry workers in South Africa when travelling in an unsafe open truck has been condemned by trade unions. National union federation COSATU said it is "shocked and angry" at the death of the workers when the open truck on which they were being transported to work collided with a KFC truck. The union body says 21 forestry workers and both drivers are known to have died and nine are seriously injured in hospital. "We send our condolences to the families and friends of those who lost their lives and best wishes for a full recovery to those in hospital," a union statement said. "This tragedy highlights once again the scandal of workers being taken to and from work on the back of open trucks, with no protection. In this case forestry workers were standing in the vehicle and police say that local villagers told them that this truck usually carries 60 and that more bodies might be hidden under the wreckage." The statement concludes: "When the passengers are workers, they have no alternative means of getting to work and cannot risk their livelihood by refusing to travel on the trucks. That is why COSATU demands that the law must be changed and rigidly enforced, so that employers are forced to use safe forms of transport." The union call was echoed by global building and woodworkers' union federation BWI. "Loading workers on to open

trucks is completely unacceptable. In many countries, animals are transported better than forestry workers and it is now time for forestry companies to provide safe and suitable transport," said Anita Normark, BWI general secretary.

- [COSATU news release](#). [BWI news release](#).

Resources

Safety reps get Hazards

The UK's only union health and safety magazine comes along once every three months – and the hotly awaited new issue is out now. Hazards magazine's latest edition includes the usual mix of news, features and resources. There's also 'Souped-up safety reps', a centrepiece special feature highlighting TUC's plans for new, improved safety reps. It provides a pin-up-at-work summary of the new TUC charter for safety reps and the thinking behind it.

- [Hazards magazine](#). [Souped-up safety reps](#). [Contents page, issue 104](#).
- Subscribe online or for more information [email](#) or call the Hazards subscription hotline on 0114 201 4265.

PCS online bullying guidance

Civil service union PCS has published new online bullying guidance. The resource covers the definition of bullying and harassment, information on bullying behaviours and effects, a guide to relevant law and action points. According to the union: "PCS believes that all employees have the right to be treated with dignity and respect in a working environment free from bullying, harassment or discrimination. Any actions or behaviours that interfere with that right could be classed as bullying. Where the treatment is given because of the gender, age, disability status, colour, race, sexual orientation or religion of the recipient, it could constitute harassment. Whether or not harassment is intentional, it is the effect upon the recipient that is important."

- [PCS online bullying guidance](#).

New chemicals at work portal

The Health and Safety Executive has created a new "chemicals portal" webpage. "The page provides a simple signpost and direct link to the different parts of the website covering health and safety in chemical manufacturing, marketing and supply, carriage or use of chemicals as well as latest news," says HSE.

- [HSE briefing](#) and [chemicals at work 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 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

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