

# Risks

TUC 

*e-bulletin*

Number 384 – 29 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](#)

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## Contents

### Union News

*Union victory on asbestos payouts*  
*Widow receives six figure meso payout*  
*Fight over grenade injuries goes on*  
*Injury costs harbour master his job*  
*Plater shocked by faulty equipment*  
*Nautilus condemns "rustbucket" ship*  
*Unions press driving hours concerns*  
*Action call on sex harassment cover-up*  
*BT's crude performance slammed by union*

### Other news

*Ministers back 'fit note' plans*  
*TUC wants more prevention*  
*Docs won't police sick system*  
*Bad bosses are bad for your heart*  
*Study finds solvent cancer link*  
*Insurers check Facebook in compo claims*  
*Firm fined £3,000 for severed finger*  
*Sellafield fined after demolition death*

### International News

*Global: ETUC welcomes EU-China safety accord*  
*Global: Deadly price of the fight for rights*  
*USA: Hateful tactics to deny death payout*  
*USA: Obama signals tougher line on regulation*

### Events and Courses

*India's asbestos timebomb photo exhibit, 1-5 December, London*  
*TUC courses for safety reps*

### Useful Links

### **Union victory on asbestos payouts**

A union-backed legal case has successfully defended the rights of asbestos victims from an insurance industry attempt to evade liability. The High Court last week ruled that employers' liability insurers remain liable to pay compensation for mesothelioma caused by workplace exposure to asbestos if they insured the employer at the time the asbestos exposure occurred. In what has become known as the mesothelioma "trigger issue" test case a number of insurers argued the policies they sold, to provide cover against compensation claims from workers who were injured or suffered illness due to work, were "triggered" by the development of the disease rather than by the exposure to asbestos. The decision comes after a nine-week court battle in June and July 2008. Unite joint general secretary Derek Simpson said: "Thousands of men and women across the UK have been negligently exposed to asbestos by their employers but insurers have tried and failed to use legal technicalities to escape their responsibility to pay compensation under the policies they sold to employers. They sought to avoid their liabilities while pocketing the money." He added: "Without trade unions many of these cases would never have been fought." UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie said: "The insurance industry was happy to receive the premiums but never seem to accept the need to pay compensation. This decision must be a line in the sand. The erosion of worker's right to compensation will not be tolerated."

- [Unite news release](#). [UCATT news release](#). [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#). [Irwin Mitchell Solicitors news release](#). [The Times](#). [The Mirror](#). [BBC News Online](#).

### **Widow receives six figure meso payout**

The widow of a UNISON member who died of the asbestos cancer mesothelioma has received £276,000 in damages. The member, who has not been named, was exposed to the dust while working for WL Miller and Sons, a food manufacturer, based in Poole, Dorset. The firm is now known as Blackmoss Ltd. He joined the company in 1968 as a trainee assistant production supervisor and left in 1991 as a production manager. He was exposed to asbestos used to insulate pipes in the factory and was never given protection from exposure. UNISON regional secretary Ian Ducat said the settlement "should act as a strong warning to employers that they must ensure the safety of their workers. Our member didn't work directly with asbestos but was nevertheless exposed to this dangerous dust during the early years of his employment." Eamonn McDonough of Thompson Solicitors, who dealt with the claim on behalf of UNISON, said: "While compensation will never replace a loved one, we realise that many mesothelioma sufferers want to ensure their family are provided for financially. We are pleased that with the support of UNISON's legal service we have been able to achieve this."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

## **Fight over grenade injuries goes on**

Journalists' union NUJ has released video and photographs that show a British photojournalist being blown up by a stun grenade thrown by a Geneva police officer. The images will form part of an appeal by photographer Guy Smallman against a Swiss court ruling that police were not to blame for the injuries he suffered while covering protests outside a G8 summit in June 2003. The appeal was formally lodged with the Swiss authorities this week. In the video Guy is seen running from a group of police officers throwing the grenades - similar to those used by the SAS to storm buildings. One of the grenades explodes on his leg. Guy, aged 37, has permanent damage to his left leg. He has attended over 100 related doctor and hospital appointments since June 2003 and has regularly been unable to work due to muscle strains related to the injury. In January 2007 a court ruled that the State of Geneva - which runs the police - was liable for Guy's injury, but the decision was overturned on appeal. Guy must now take his case to the federal court, the highest judicial body in Switzerland. NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear said: "Anyone who sees the video will find it hard to believe the latest court ruling that police were not responsible for Guy's injuries. He was clearly running for cover when the grenade was thrown at him. It is totally unacceptable that journalists covering protests should be attacked in this way."

- [NUJ video clip and news release](#). Photographs - NUJ warns the content is "extremely graphic" and shows Guy Smallman's "horrific" injuries [[pdf](#)].

## **Injury costs harbour master his job**

A harbour master had to take early retirement after seriously injuring his back when he slipped on dangerous stairs that staff had complained about for years. UNISON member Michael Leggett, 58, held the post with Waveney District Council for 21 years. While working at Southwold harbour, he went outside to throw away a carton of milk and fell on stairs that were slimy from decades of exposure to the sea. The stairs did not have any tread and the handrail had been removed when a colleague fell on it, causing it to give way. Michael was forced to take six weeks off work and was later told that his injury exacerbated the onset arthritis by two years. He returned to work, but decided to take early retirement after it became clear his back was causing him too much pain to continue in his job. With legal support from UNISON, he secured a £6,000 payout. He said: "My colleagues and I had reported our concerns about the stairs to Waveney District Council several times over about four or five years but they did nothing to make them safer. I decided to pursue compensation because I felt strongly that the council had been negligent towards its employees." UNISON regional secretary Greg Grant said: "It should never have taken an accident like this to make the council take action and remove the stairs. They should be doing all they can to protect the health and safety of their staff."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

## **Plater shocked by faulty equipment**

A plater who received a massive electric shock at work has received a "substantial" sum in compensation. GMB member William Vaughan, 55, could have been killed in the 2005 incident at Boulby Mine near Saltburn by Sea. He was welding a section of metal flooring when a fault with the equipment saw him experience a 30 seconds-long shock before the power was switched off. Although he recovered from his injuries he was left with post traumatic stress disorder. Now he can no longer work in his trade and is scared to switch on electrical appliances in the home. Mr Vaughan said: "I can't work as a plater anymore, a trade I have been in since I was 15. I never would have expected to be electrocuted in this way. When working on a job you trust that you are being provided with well maintained equipment." GMB regional officer Jimmy Skivington said: "Mr Vaughan should never have been in a situation where he was using faulty equipment. This accident could easily have been avoided if Cleveland Potash had taken adequate steps to ensure the safety of their equipment." Andrew McDonald from Thompsons Solicitors, who represented Mr Vaughan for GMB, said: "Electrical maintenance is vital in the workplace to ensure highly dangerous accidents like this do not occur. Mr Vaughan could easily have been killed. Fortunately his injuries are not life threatening but the psychological effects of the accident have had dramatic affect on the quality of his life." The claim was settled out of court and the company accepted liability.

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

## **Nautilus condemns "rustbucket" ship**

Seafarers' union Nautilus UK has condemned the "appalling" conditions discovered by ship inspectors on a "rustbucket" detained in the port of Liverpool. Some of the crew members onboard the Panama-flagged bulk carrier Pistis complained of the condition of the murky brown drinking water they were forced to use en-route to Liverpool from South America. Some have complained of kidney and stomach problems, and three of the crew have been signed off the vessel sick since arriving in the port. The Russian and Ukrainian crew of the bulk carrier, currently under detention by Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) in Liverpool, requested assistance from the London-based International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) as a result of the conditions on board the vessel. The 24-year-old Pistis was detained following a port state control inspection, on the grounds that crew quarters were found to be in a very unsatisfactory condition. Deficiencies indicating a lack of proper maintenance of the ship and equipment were also cited. Nautilus/ITF inspector Tommy Molloy commented: "The accommodation and living conditions on board are appalling." He added: "Anyone involved in the industry will be aware that the MCA very rarely detain a vessel due to breaches of International Labour Organisation (ILO) requirements. It is a clear indication of how bad things are on board."

- [Nautilus UK news release.](#) [MCA news release.](#)

## **Unions press driving hours concerns**

Abuses of working time regulations in road transport amount to a 'Charter for long hours', unions have warned. As part of the ongoing review of the implementation of the Road Transport Working Time Regulations, a TUC delegation met last week with Transport department parliamentary under secretary Jim Fitzpatrick MP to press home the ongoing concerns. A particular point of contention is the transport industry's interpretation of what constitutes a "period of availability" (POA). The unions are seeking a review of the regulations so they provide effective health and safety protection. The union delegation received a government commitment to revisit the subject at a meeting early next year. Bob Monks, a member of the union delegation and general secretary of the United Road Transport Union (URTU), said he believed ministers fully appreciated "the dangers associated with professional LGV drivers working long hours over lengthy periods and recognised the shortcomings in the current legislation, which allow professional drivers to be encouraged to class all non-driving duties as POAs. This is just a crude attempt to maximise the length of the working week." He added: "A review of the legislation, during the spring of 2009, will give the opportunity for tightening of the regulations to eradicate systematic abuses of POAs."

- [URTU news release.](#)

## **Action call on sex harassment cover-up**

A health service union has demanded an external investigation into a hospital trust's failure to address complaints of sexual harassment of staff over a period of years. GMB, the union that represents NHS staff at both Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals in Berkshire, said a series of complaints against Barry Gisbourne went ignored by hospital management. Mr Gisbourne recently pleaded guilty to 14 related charges. Staff employed at the hospitals had made a number of complaints of sexual harassment against Mr Gisbourne. The union says the behaviour went unchallenged from 2000 to 2007 "until one individual finally plucked up enough courage to make a formal complaint to the police." This resulted in the court action where he was found guilty. GMB regional officer Paul Grafton has written to the chief executive of Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Colin Hayton, saying evidence presented at a meeting with the union "should demonstrate to you that an independent external enquiry should now take place." In the correspondence, copied to health secretary Alan Johnson, he added: "It is imperative that the staff who have been off work for a year can return to their posts and feel they can do so in a safe environment knowing that if any issue arises it will be dealt with in the most appropriate manner."

- [GMB news release.](#)

## **BT's crude performance slammed by union**

British Telecom workers have been penalised for going sick and discouraged from reporting accidents as a result of the company's "crude" approach to productivity assessment, the union CWU has said. Scores of CWU members gathered outside BT offices in the centre of Coventry last week to protest at a raft of issues relating to management style and performance management. CWU branch campaigns officer Margaret McGinn said: "Workers with decades of exemplary service to the company have been targeted and tagged as under performers! Others have had pay increases withheld or reduced for the crime of being sick. Some workers have been discouraged from reporting accidents at work and others have been singled out as poor performers and threatened with dismissal." She added: "The CWU supports BT's vision of getting it 'Right First Time' and improving the service to the customer – however the current approach is being applied in a punitive rather than supportive manner and is having the opposite effect. With the current job cuts that are planned in BT it is vital that the company manages its employees in a professional and supportive manner. CWU members report that the processes are based on crude statistical data and appear to institutionalise failure."

- [CWU news release.](#)

### *Other news*

#### **Ministers back 'fit note' plans**

Employee "fit note" are to be brought in as part of government efforts to cut the amount of money lost to the economy from workplace absenteeism. The idea is for GPs in England to spell out those tasks workers can perform rather than the traditional "sick note" focusing on what they cannot do. Ministers have accepted recommendations made by government health adviser Dame Carol Black that the system of GPs issuing sick notes, in place since 1948, should be overhauled. Trials replacing paper notes with electronic fit notes are underway and, if successful, the new system could be in place by 2010. The new fit notes, outlining what duties an employee could do, would be passed on to employers if he or she agreed. The notes are intended to form part of a package of support offered by employers and health professionals to help staff with problems stay in work or return to the workplace as soon as possible. Other proposals include a pilot scheme for those newly off sick to be allocated a case manager to tailor a back-to-work programme for them with the help of physios, counsellors and other health professionals. Health experts could also be present at job centres in the future to assess the particular needs and problems of job applicants. There will also be a new National Centre for Working-Age Health and Wellbeing, a pilot occupational health helpline for smaller businesses, a fund to encourage local initiatives that improve workplace health and wellbeing and a review of the health of the NHS workforce.

- [DWP news release](#) and [Improving health at work: Changing lives](#), full document [[pdf](#)]. [Working for Health news release](#). [IOSH news release](#). [CIPD news release](#). [BBC News Online](#). [The Times](#). [Personnel Today](#).

## **TUC wants more prevention**

The TUC has said the government's proposals on work and health should have been more ambitious, with a greater focus on prevention and on the needs of the worker. Commenting on the government's response to the Dame Carol Black review of the health of Britain's working age population, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "This goes some way towards addressing the health problems faced by people at work, and by those unable to work because of ill-health, but it could have gone much further. Workers made ill by their jobs need early access to rehabilitation and better support to help them get back to work as soon as they are able to. While the 'Fit for work' pilots go some way towards achieving this, they will have little relevance to the vast majority of workers who fall ill or are injured through work." The TUC leader added: "More must be done to stop employees from becoming ill or injured in the first place. This report shows that ministers recognise the importance of enforcement in improving health and safety in workplaces. But without additional resources to the Health and Safety Executive and local councils, there is unlikely to be any increase in the number of safety inspections. In addition, while the response strongly emphasises the role of small businesses in reducing ill-health, there is far less about empowering and supporting workers and those on benefits themselves."

- [TUC news release.](#)

## **Docs won't police sick system**

Top doctors have had said government proposals on work and health may be a step in the right direction, but have warned GPs should not be used to police sick leave. Commenting on the government's response to Dame Carol Black's review of the health of the working age population, Dr Laurence Buckman, chair of the BMA's GP committee, said: "The new 'fit note' has potential, but we would like to see the findings of this evaluation because it's crucial GPs can continue to act as the patient's advocate and don't end up policing the system for the Department for Work and Pensions." Dr Paul Nicholson, chair of the BMA's occupational medicine committee, added: "We're glad the government has recognised more needs to be done to help small and medium sized businesses deal with employee health, though we would have liked to have seen a commitment to making sure every worker has access to basic occupational health services. Employers do need to take more responsibility, particularly in difficult economic times like now, as work-related ill health problems may well become more common."

- [BMA news release.](#)

## **Bad bosses are bad for your heart**

Badly behaved and incompetent bosses not only make work stressful, they can increase the risk of heart disease for their employees, new research suggests. A Swedish team found a strong link between poor leadership and the risk of serious heart disease

and heart attacks among more than 3,000 employed men. And the effect may be cumulative - the risk went up the longer an employee worked for the same company. The study, published in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, concluded feeling undervalued and unsupported at work can cause stress, which often fosters unhealthy behaviours, such as smoking, that can lead to heart disease. Researchers from the Karolinska Institute and Stockholm University tracked the heart health of the male employees, aged between 19 and 70 and working in the Stockholm area, over a period of nearly a decade. During this time 74 cases of fatal and non-fatal heart attack or acute angina, or death from ischaemic heart disease, occurred. The staff who deemed their senior managers to be the least competent had a 25 per cent higher risk of a serious heart problem. And those working for what was classed as a long time - four years or more - had a 64 per cent higher risk. The researchers, which included experts from University College London and the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, said that if a direct cause and effect was confirmed, then managers' behaviour should be targeted in a bid to stave off serious heart disease among less senior employees. They said managers should give employees clear work objectives and sufficient power in relation to their responsibilities.

- [BBC News Online. Personnel Today.](#)
- A Nyberg and others. Managerial leadership and ischaemic heart disease among employees: the Swedish WOLF study, *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 2008, doi:10.1136/oem.2008.039362 [[pdf](#)].

### **Study finds solvent cancer link**

Exposure to the industrial solvent benzene increases a person's risk of developing multiple myeloma, according to new research. Adele Seniori Constantini of Italy's Center for Study and Prevention of Cancer and her colleagues also found an increased risk of chronic lymphoid leukaemia with benzene exposure. Two other common workplace solvents in the same aromatic hydrocarbon group and often used as substitutes for benzene, xylene and toluene, were also tied to greater chronic lymphoid leukaemia risk. Benzene, a known carcinogen, is used in the manufacturing of plastic, synthetic rubber, dyes and drugs. It is understood to cause acute myeloid leukaemia, but its association with multiple myeloma and chronic lymphoid leukaemia risk "are still under debate," Constantini and her team explain in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*. Overall, her team found medium to high levels of benzene exposure nearly doubled the risk of these two blood cancers. The more intense exposure was and the longer it lasted, the greater the risk. Being exposed to medium to high levels of benzene for more than 15 years increased a person's chronic lymphoid leukaemia risk 4.7-fold, while the same degree of exposure to xylene more than tripled risk. Similar exposure to toluene boosted chronic lymphoid leukaemia risk 4.4-fold. However, the increased risk for multiple myeloma was only seen with benzene, not with exposure to the other two chemicals.

- [Reuters.](#)

## **Insurers check Facebook in compo claims**

A personal injury law firm is warning injured workers that insurers are now trawling social networking sites in a bid to discredit compensation claims. Insurers have previously been caught using video surveillance and private eyes to monitor claimants, but probing personal webpages is through to be a new strategy. Camps Solicitors said one of its clients has had his claim for compensation put at risk by the comments he made on a social networking site. These comments were viewed by the solicitors representing the other party in the claim, and a screenshot was then passed on to Camps Solicitors. It added that insurers are increasingly turning to popular websites such as Myspace, Bebo and Facebook. The firm says many people may be unaware that comments they make on such websites can be used to undermine legitimate claims. Even if the comments were meant to be light-hearted, they can be interpreted differently by insurers and the courts. "Our advice to anyone considering making a compensation claim would be to be aware that your words and actions could be recorded and used as evidence against you in court," the law firm says.

- [Camps Solicitors news release.](#)

## **Firm fined £3,000 for severed finger**

A Yorkshire firm has been fined £3,000 after a worker's finger was sheared off by an unsafe machine. Napier Brown & Company Ltd was also ordered to pay costs of £2446 at Wakefield Magistrates Court after pleading guilty to breaching the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations. The prosecution followed an incident on 5 March this year, when a worker was investigating a blockage on a packaging line. The electrical engineer placed his arm in an inspection opening and his index finger was sheared off below the first knuckle by a rotating valve. The valve should not have been accessible. The company's efforts to remedy the problem were inadequate, so HSE issued an improvement notice on 20 March 2008 requiring further action to prevent access. HSE inspector Geoff Fletcher said: "An assessment of the risks associated with this process should have indicated what the appropriate safeguarding methods should have been." He added: "In this instance the company failed to ensure that a risk assessment was carried out for the maintenance activity and that the appropriate procedures were in place and so relied upon inadequate and informal systems. The injured person will now have to live with the consequences of these failures for the rest of his life."

- [HSE news release.](#) [Building.](#) HSE [work equipment](#) and [risk assessment](#) pages.

## **Sellafield fined after demolition death**

Nuclear firm Sellafield Ltd and a demolition contractor have received six figure fines after a worker died when he fell almost 100

metres. The Cumbrian firm and sub-contractor PC Richardson & Co (Middlesbrough) Ltd (demolition contractors) were fined after pleading guilty at Carlisle Crown Court to charges brought by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) following the death of 36-year-old Neil Cannon on 9 January 2003. The incident happened whilst work was taking place to decommission one of the pile chimneys on the Sellafield site. The Richardson employee was removing steelwork inside the chimney when he fell approximately 95 metres and suffered fatal injuries. Sellafield Ltd (then operating under the name of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd) was fined £150,000 and ordered to pay £50,500 costs. PC Richardson & Co (Middlesbrough) Ltd was fined £100,000 and ordered to pay £25,000 costs. HSE principal inspector Mark Cottrill said changes in the safe work method over the life of the project "resulted in workers, including Mr Cannon, having to work on an unprotected ledge inside the chimney approximately 95 metres above ground level." As Mr Cannon removed a girder from the ledge, it tipped upwards, slicing through his safety lanyard and causing him to fall through the gap between the ledge and the working platform. "Ongoing monitoring of the work in progress should have identified the changes and the increased risk," said the inspector. "If this had been done it is almost certain that a way could have been found to do the work without leaving the safety of the platform. As this case sadly illustrates, any changes to planned work methods must be identified and properly assessed to ensure that they are safe."

- [HSE news release.](#) [NW Evening Mail.](#)

## *International News*

### **Global: ETUC welcomes EU-China safety accord**

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has welcomed a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on health and safety at work between the European Union and China. ETUC general secretary John Monks commented: "Ensuring proper health and safety at work is one of the great challenges facing the People's Republic of China (PRC), notably in the mining sector. We are pleased that the EU will be helping to meet it as part of expanding cooperation in employment and social affairs. The MoU should contribute to adherence to international standards on decent work which, of course, include International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining. I look forward to their ratification and implementation in the PRC." ETUC said it is expected that work with particularly high risk industries in China, including mining, construction, chemicals, transport and fireworks, will be the first priorities. It added discussions had also been taking place with the ILO to establish training for worker safety representatives. Signing of the MoU was scheduled to take place this week, but has been postponed.

- [ETUC news release.](#)

### **Global: Deadly price of the fight for rights**

Nearly one hundred trade union members were murdered in 2007 for daring to campaign for better working rights, according to a survey by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). According to the ITUC's 2008 survey of trade union rights violations, 91 trade unionists met violent deaths last year - 39 of them in Colombia, once again the most dangerous place in the world to belong to a union. Guinea is the next most deadly location for trade unionists, with 30 killed by President Lansana Conte's regime. An increasingly hostile attitude to trade union members saw four people killed in Guatemala. Elsewhere there were fatal attacks on people active in unions in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Murders were also reported in countries including Argentina, Chile, Peru, Cambodia and the Philippines. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber commented: "In countries where governments take a highly unfavourable view of anyone who stands up for decent pay and safe working conditions, trade unionists are putting their lives at risk on a daily basis." He added: "Some governments are colluding with corrupt and unscrupulous employers to deprive working people of even the most basic employment rights. These same employers are likely to use the worsening global economic situation as an excuse to squeeze workers even harder. Working men and women will be relying more and more on these brave trade unionists to speak out for them in future." ITUC general secretary Guy Ryder said: "Governments have failed to do enough to protect workers' rights, either at home or in their international diplomatic, economic and trade relations."

- ITUC [global](#) and [Europe](#) news releases and [YouTube pages](#). [ITUC Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights Violations](#). [TUC news release](#).

### **USA: Hateful tactics to deny death payout**

The 11-year-old son of a US woman who was stabbed to death at her retail clerk's job is being denied his mother's workers' compensation death benefits by the store's insurance company. The insurer claims the woman was killed because of her race, not her job, so her dependants should receive nothing. Taneka Talley was stabbed while at work in a Dollar Tree Store in Fairfield, California, on the morning of 22 March 2006. The suspect in the case, Tommy Joe Thompson, is due to stand trial next month on a charge of murder. Police say Thompson entered the store shortly after 9am and stabbed the 26-year-old Talley once in the chest. She died a short time later. Talley left behind a son, Larry, who was 8 years old at the time. California workers' compensation law entitles the son to death benefits, according to Moira Stagliano, the attorney representing Carol Frazier, Larry Talley's grandmother and legal guardian. However, the Dollar Tree Stores' insurance carrier, Specialty Risk Services, is denying the Talley family's death benefit claim, said Stagliano. In a press release about the dispute, Stagliano said the attorney representing the insurance company, Charles Kempton Letts, informed Stagliano that, "Mr Thompson's motivation in stabbing Taneka Talley was purely race motivated. As such, it is our belief that our denial in this matter is proper." She called the insurance company's decision "really reprehensible," adding: "It's shocking that Dollar Tree and its insurance carrier are using the alleged racist motivation of a killer as an excuse to get out of paying benefits to the orphaned son of an employee who was murdered at work. They would pay the benefits if she was killed for a non-racist reason. They're basically trying to benefit from a hate

crime." Stagliano said: "Taneka Talley was at work, doing her job, when she was killed. If she had not been in that store, she would not have been available to him (Thompson) and she would still be alive to care for her son."

- [Contra Costa Times](#).

### **USA: Obama signals tougher line on regulation**

US president-elect Barack Obama has signalled his administration will toughen regulations and support enforcement by federal agencies that oversee consumer products, environmental policy and workplace safety. He has already named a number of people to his transition teams for regulatory agencies who favour a firmer government hand in overseeing industry behaviour. In addition, Mr Obama has indicated in letters to a major federal employee union that he intends to take a more pro-union approach on employment questions than his predecessor. In a series of letters to members of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) in the weeks prior to the election, he said he is in favour of a more robust government approach to a variety of regulatory issues. AFGE president John Gage said Linda Chavez-Thompson, a former executive vice president of national union federation AFL-CIO and a member of the transition team, has been discussed as a possible Secretary of Labor. The Department of Labor (DoL) oversees OSHA, the national health and safety watchdog. Workplace safety regulations will be up for an overhaul, Mr Obama and his advisers have suggested. In the letters to AFGE union employees at federal agencies, Mr Obama wrote: "My Labor Secretary will support DoL civil servants as they work to enforce our labor laws." The letter added: "In my Department of Labor, the Administrator of Mine Safety and Health will be an advocate for miners' safety and health, not for the mining companies' bottom lines."

- [Letters from Obama to AFGE](#). [Wall Street Journal](#).

## *Events and Courses*

### **India's asbestos timebomb photo exhibit, 1-5 December, London**

A photo exhibit revealing the asbestos timebomb facing India as a result of massive and increasing imports of white asbestos opens at the TUC's London HQ on 1 December. GMB general secretary Paul Kenny will open the exhibition of images that "graphically illustrate the gruesome reality of the immense expansion of the asbestos hazard as it is experienced by workers and the public in the Indian subcontinent." The exhibit, which comprises an explanatory panel and a series of 15 photographs, each 41cm x 51cm, can be booked for use elsewhere for distribution costs only. It is hoped union and campaign groups around the country will use this excellent resource to highlight problems posed by asbestos in both the developed and developing world.

- Further information: [India's asbestos timebomb photo exhibit](#), 9.30am - 7.00pm, 1-5 December, TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS. Free. For more information on the photo exhibit, contact [Eve Barker](#), tel: 0207 485 0476.
- See the book behind the exhibit, India's asbestos timebomb [[pdf](#)].

### **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