

Risks

TUC 

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**HAZARDS
MAGAZINE**



**Asbestos -
The hidden killer**

Hazards at Work

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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

Small worker suffers serious strain injury
MEPs vote to end working time opt-out
Forty-eight hour opt out must go
Union ballot on imposed rosters
Rail unions to fight job cuts and zero hours
Royal Mail slammed for exhausting post haste
Concern at silence on pleural plaques
Higher education stress way above normal levels
HGV worker driven to claim compensation
Christmas cancelled due to slippery platform

Other news

Don't treat claimants like scroungers
Unions concerned at welfare reform
Blood and feathers firm pays for gassing
SITA fined after baling machine death
Safety warning on seasonal stress

International News

Australia: Groundbreaking asbestos project takes off
Europe: Stress agreement makes a difference
USA: Starbucks payout for victimised barista
USA: Report derides nanotech risk strategy

Resources

Redundancy advice from the TUC
TUC secret Santa emails some seasonal cheer

Events and Courses

TUC courses for safety reps

Useful Links

Small worker suffers serious strain injury

A petite shopworker has successfully sued her employer after developing a strain injury caused by reaching for the till and the shop's chip and pin device. Usdaw member Jill Hyndman, 51, who is only four feet nine inches tall, claimed her employer, the Co-op in Cinderford, did not take her small stature into account when they redesigned their till areas a few years ago. As a result Jill, who has worked for the shop since the early 90s, found she had to stretch to reach both the chip and pin machine and the touch screen of the till. Several staff complained, but Mrs Hyndman took her case to her union, Usdaw, when the company did not alter the tills. An investigation found the new layout breached health and safety guidelines because the chip and pin machine was 23cm too far from her reach. An ergonomics report found the pin machines were outside the comfortable reach of 95 per cent of women. Mrs Hyndman's solicitor, Julie Roberts of Thomson & Bancks, who was brought in by Usdaw and who arranged the ergonomic assessment, said she found it extraordinary that no account was taken of Jill Hyndman's size, especially as many of the other women who work at the store are also under five feet tall. She said other employees are considering claims, including for eye strain from sun shining on till screens. The solicitor added "when the tills were redeveloped, the touch screen was on the edge of her work area and it was hard for her to stretch to reach it. The chip and pin machine was on a pole some distance away from her and, as many customers are elderly, they needed her to operate it for them. Nobody risk assessed the situation or looked at the size of the ladies involved. Hopefully now this matter has come to light the result will be a much better working environment for all the staff." Mrs Hyndman still works at the store, which has now redesigned the layout of its tills.

- [The Sun](#). [The Citizen](#). [The Telegraph](#). [Personnel Today](#).
- [Usdaw healthy checkouts guide](#).

MEPs vote to end working time opt-out

The European Parliament voted decisively to end the UK's opt-out from Europe's 48 hour average working week. MEPs voted by 421 to 273 to remove the opt-out from a revised working time directive approved by EU employment ministers in June. The European Parliament will now open negotiations with the Council of Ministers to seek agreement with them on the issue. The TUC welcomed the vote. TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: 'This is an early Christmas present for Britain's hardest workers, and for the families who see too little of them. Members of the European Parliament have courageously defied the abusers and the slave-drivers over the loss of the 'right' to work people till they drop. Britain's workers will still be working hard to get the British economy back on its feet, but they will now be protected from the stress, heart disease and accidents that result from persistent long hours. And their families will get their mums and dads back. Now we need to tackle the low pay and poor productivity that were kept alive by long hours working. No one should have to work more than 48 hours a week all year round to put food on the table or a roof over their heads.'

- [TUC news release](#)

Forty-eight hour opt out must go

Ending the UK's opt-out would cause business little difficulty, the TUC has said. A TUC report published on 15 December, ahead of the vote at the European Parliament, said the move would also improve the health and safety of long hours workers and reduce the risks of accidents caused by overtired and stressed workers. The report, *Ending the opt-outs from the 48 hour week- Easy steps to decent working time*, said the UK is still the long hours capital of Europe, with one in eight workers (12.7 per cent) regularly working more than 48 hours a week. However, well over one in three workers (37.6 per cent) only work one or two hours more a week, said TUC, adding small adjustments to these jobs would easily allow a 48 hour limit to be introduced. Commenting ahead of the European Parliament vote this week on the working hours rule, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "Our report shows that the impact on business of ending the opt-out is much exaggerated. Many workers only work a few hours over the limit and employers would get plenty of time to adjust." He added: "Long hours working makes people ill and it is no surprise that most long hours workers want to reduce their hours, relieving the pressure on their families. The government's own research shows that individuals are not given a real choice about opting out, and that the law is hardly enforced. What the government describes as an individual opt-out is in reality no choice at all for many long-hours workers." STUC general secretary Grahame Smith said: "If people are having to work for long hours to make ends meet – a problem that all trade unionists understand only too well – then the answer is to ensure they are being paid a living wage."

- [TUC news release](#) and report, *Ending the opt-outs from the 48 hour week - Easy steps to decent working time* [[pdf](#)]. [NUJ news release](#). [PSI news release](#). [Socialist Group in the European Parliament news release](#). [The Guardian](#).

Union ballot on imposed rosters

Members of rail union RMT working in the control room of Docklands Light Railway are being balloted for industrial action over the imposition of new rosters. The RMT ballot, which closes on 22 December, follows Serco Docklands' unilateral decision to replace 12-hour weekend shifts with eight-hour duties, which the union says will deprive around 30 staff of 24 rest days a year. "This is a straightforward and unacceptable attack on our DLR members' working conditions which will have a massive impact on their ability to balance their working and family lives," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said. "Serco Docklands can hardly be surprised at our members' anger when it intends to impose the disputed rosters without agreement on January 5. We have urged our members to vote for industrial action, and if Serco Docklands wants to avoid industrial action it should withdraw the new patterns."

- [RMT news release.](#)

Rail unions to fight job cuts and zero hours

Rail unions have pledged to fight job cuts and plans to introduce zero hours contracts at the Deutschebahn-owned railfreight company EWS. Condemning the firm's plan to sack 530 workers, RMT challenged EWS to confirm that there will be no compulsory job losses and that the firm will end the "disgraceful" practice of employing people on zero-hours contracts. "We have made it quite clear to EWS that we intend to fight these job losses and defend an industry that is vital to the future health of the environment and the economy," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said. "EWS is even trying to use a legal loophole to sidestep its obligation to undertake a 90-day consultation, so we can only assume that it wants to avoid constructive dialogue on how to avoid these cuts and weather the worst of the recession." Mr Crow said the union has asked transport secretary Geoff Hoon to intervene, adding: "We have told EWS that these cuts are unacceptable to our members and their families and we will fight to stop them." Gerry Doherty, leader of the TSSA rail union, said it was seeking urgent talks with the transport secretary to "make sure our rail freight industry survives this deepening recession".

- [RMT news release.](#) [TSSA news release.](#) [ASLEF news release.](#) [Lloyd's List.](#) [Road Transport.](#)

Royal Mail slammed for exhausting post haste

Postal workers are facing pressure to complete unrealistic delivery routes at a breakneck pace, according to the communication workers' union CWU. Workers say they are being told to complete rounds at an impossible 4 miles an hour – a brisk walking pace even without lugging mailbags, posting mail and leaving notes for absent householders. CWU national officer Bob Gibson said Royal Mail was misusing its Pegasus software system to impose unrealistic deadlines on delivery staff. He said: "Royal Mail is using this system to meet financial savings without considering the physical realities of delivery rounds. This is putting pressure on delivery workers and leading to bullying and harassment." He added: "CWU has an agreement with Royal Mail to jointly review all aspects of Pegasus, but the business has reneged on this and is pushing ahead with damaging changes without input from the union. This is having disastrous consequences on services in some parts of the country. We're receiving high volumes of complaints and seeing a deterioration in both industrial relations and service standards. We need Royal Mail to see sense and review this system with the CWU." The union says two staff were recently sacked in Evesham for failing to complete their rounds on time. It adds it is being "inundated" with complaints from workers across the country about the speed they are being told to walk. Royal Mail denied that a 4 miles per hour speed was being required and added that it does not tolerate any form of bullying or harassment.

- [CWU news release.](#) [Royal Mail statement.](#) [BBC News Online.](#) [The Guardian.](#)

Concern at silence on pleural plaques

A construction union is urging the government to act promptly to sort out compensation for the victims of an asbestos related condition. UCATT says it is concerned at the Ministry of Justice's failure to take action on pleural plaques, a scarring of the lungs caused by exposure to asbestos. It says those with the condition are more likely to develop asbestos-related cancer. In October 2007 the Law Lords overturned 30 years of common law when they ruled in a case brought by the insurance industry that pleural plaques should no longer be compensated. Following a concerted campaign by unions and asbestos campaigners the government launched a consultation that closed in early October. UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie said: "We are becoming concerned that the government has not yet set out a way forward on this issue which is vital for so many of my members. I hope that the delay is due to the government making the detailed changes needed to bring forward a Bill to overturn the Law Lords decision." UCATT points out that the Scottish parliament is pressing ahead with a new law to reinstate the right to compensation. It says if the UK government does not follow suit "then a postcode lottery will be created with pleural plaques victims north of the border receiving full compensation and those south of the border being denied recompense." According to the UCATT general secretary: "This issue is simply about justice. Workers were needlessly exposed to asbestos by bosses who knew the risks but did not care. The insurance industry was happy to accept the premiums but now they do not want to pay the compensation that victims deserve. It will be unjust if we end up in a situation where pleural plaque sufferers in Scotland get compensation while those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland don't."

- [UCATT news release. The Mirror.](#)

Higher education stress way above normal levels

The stress experienced by workers in higher education greatly exceeds levels laid down in the Health and Safety Executive's management standards, according to the college union UCU. Its report, *Tackling stress in higher education*, lists individual institutions' stress scores. The union says it paints a worrying picture of a higher education sector that is failing to meet standards of psychosocial working conditions set out by the HSE. UCU ranks the institutions on each of the seven HSE key stress indicators - demands, control, managerial support, peer support, relationships, role and change. It says on all of the stressors, apart from control, higher education institutions on average reported lower well-being than the levels recorded in the general workforce in the HSE report *Psychosocial working conditions in Britain in 2008*. HSE says that "organisations should strive to ensure their employees achieve the level of those currently in the top 20 per cent of the distribution for each of the standards," says UCU, adding: "It is clear from the UCU report that the higher education sector is far from achieving the HSE aspiration." UCU general secretary Sally Hunt said: "Universities need urgently to do more to address the worrying levels of stress in higher education. It is unacceptable that so few

institutions are reaching the levels recommended by the Health and Safety Executive. Harassment and bullying can play no part in academic life." She added: "An important factor contributing to stress among our members is a mismatch between demands and control. We have genuine concerns that if the problems are not properly addressed then staff will be subject to burn-out at earlier stages in their careers, and the most talented and dedicated staff will never be attracted in the first place."

- [UCU news release](#). Tackling stress in higher education, UCU survey findings [[pdf](#)]. 2008 occupational stress survey - responses by HEI [[pdf](#)].

HGV worker driven to claim compensation

Employers are being urged by UNISON to clean up their acts after a labourer was awarded thousands of pounds for injuries sustained in a fall. Gary Harper, 41, who worked for Quadron Services in Leicester, was forced to take a year off work after tearing cartilage in his knee. He sustained the injury while collecting cement from a warehouse in 2005, when he tripped over a piece of timber that had not been cleared away. He has returned to work as a HGV driver, but will suffer long-term knee pain. UNISON helped Mr Harper obtain £12,000 compensation for his injuries. Mr Harper said: "My employers had been warned time and again about the risks of this type of accident, but they did nothing to make sure our working environment was as safe as it could be." He added: "It was a silly accident, but I ended up with intensive surgery, in a lot of pain and off work for a year." UNISON health and safety officer Hope Daley commented: "Employers must be aware of the dangers of a messy environment. Procedures like risk assessment may seem tedious, but they prevent accidents like this from happening. In busy workplaces like building sites there should be thorough training to ensure that staff understand the importance of keeping the workplace tidy. The money cannot make up for the unnecessary pain suffered by Mr Harper." Brendan Quinn, from Thompsons Solicitors, who acted for Mr Harper in the UNISON-backed case, said: "This claim shows the importance of risk assessments and making sure staff are fully trained in health and safety. An accident that could easily have been avoided has led to a painful injury and has wasted both time and money."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

Christmas cancelled due to slippery platform

A GMB member who was forced to cancel Christmas when she broke her leg on a slippery train station platform has received compensation, thanks to her union's legal support. Margot Keats, 61, broke her leg when she slipped on a wet platform at Nottingham train station on November 2006. At the hospital she underwent an operation to insert a metal plate in her leg, meaning she spent Christmas on crutches. She wanted the train station's operator, Central Trains, to accept responsibility for the injury. She also wanted them to address the state of the station's platforms to

make them less slippery in wet weather. Central Trains admitted liability and settled the claim for an undisclosed sum. Margot said: "I decided to contact the GMB after I wrote to the company to complain about the accident. The reply I received was in my view totally unreasonable and I felt that something needed to be done to make the station's platforms safer." She added: "The accident meant I had to cancel Christmas because I couldn't get out to do any shopping. This year however I have been able to get my Christmas shopping completed and everyone should receive their gifts on time." GMB regional secretary Andy Worth commented: "We are pleased we have been able to support our member in this claim. Union legal services are available to all our members free for accidents at or away from work."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Other news

Don't treat claimants like scroungers

The TUC has said the government should provide support for workers losing their jobs instead of treating all claimants like would-be scroungers. Responding to the government's welfare reform white paper, published on 10 December, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "At a time of rapidly rising unemployment the government needs to stop talking as if every benefit claimant is a potential scrounger. People losing their jobs need practical help as quickly as possible. That should be the focus of the employment benefit services." He said the TUC welcomed a recognition by the government that people with illnesses or disabilities should not be forced to be available for work and to accept job offers – a point raised repeatedly by the TUC. "While they may benefit from more personalised support, they should not be penalised because employers are unwilling to take them on," said Mr Barber. He was critical of the government's workfare work-for-benefits drive which "will unfairly stigmatise unemployed people without having any impact on their chances of finding jobs. Everyone in work should be paid a fair rate for the job and, as the government's own review admitted, requiring people to work for their benefits for prolonged periods of time has little impact on their chances of finding paid employment." Announcing the new welfare rules, work and pensions secretary James Purnell said: "I believe that for the majority, work is part of the path to that better life which is why our reforms put the individual, and their needs, at the heart of the welfare system." He added: "We will give people the support they need and in return we will have higher expectations on people to take up that support. We must have a system where the rules are fair for everyone, and everyone knows what the rules are. I believe it is wrong to have a welfare system which doesn't encourage people to prepare for or get back to work. In future virtually everyone will be expected to do something in return for their benefits."

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

Unions concerned at welfare reform

Telling the unemployed they have to take jobs that don't exist and handing over control of the system to private companies looking to make a profit are both big mistakes, unions have said. Commenting on the publication of the welfare reform bill, GMB general secretary Paul Kenny said: "Over the past number of years GMB has produced mounting evidence that the problem is a lack of demand from employers for these workers not the other way around. Repeated analysis of the government's own figures demonstrates this beyond doubt." He added: "The government has simply refused to face up to this evidence... proposals to find non-existent jobs for workers employers do not want to employ represent a total waste of time and energy. Labour MPs should vote these measures down." Civil service union PCS branded the plans "regressive" and warned that the proposals would create a private sector monopoly of welfare provision whose motives would be profits and not people. General Secretary Mark Serwotka said: "This commercialisation of the welfare state and payment by results will inevitably lead to contractors concentrating on more job ready clients, whilst ignoring those who require more support in order to hit their targets." The welfare proposals are closely linked to the government's health and work agenda, which aims to move sick and disabled workers off benefits and into the workforce. The government says measures including employment advisers and more rehabilitation advice and support will make this possible, however unions and welfare groups have warned adequate support structures do not exist.

- [GMB news release](#). [PCS news release](#).

Blood and feathers firm pays for gassing

A firm that processes blood and feathers has received a six figure fine after a near fatal gassing incident. JG Pears (Newark) Ltd was fined £100,000 and ordered to pay £38,052.44 costs at Nottingham Crown Court after pleading guilty to safety offences. The breaches occurred on 26 February 2006, when two workers at the firm's Newark plant were attempting to clear a blockage in a condenser that was connected to a storage vessel. The employees, who were working 25 feet up in a cherry picker, had not been informed that the vessel was likely to contain either hydrogen sulphide or carbon dioxide, a by-product of the rendering process. A risk assessment had not been carried out. Gas had built up behind the blockage and when it was cleared the gas was suddenly released, overcoming the two workers. Neither of the victims, who were covered in foul waste, was breathing or had a pulse, and workers had to perform life-saving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. One of the men was on a ventilator for four days. Another employee, who was standing nearby when the incident happened, was also treated in hospital after inhaling the gas. HSE inspector Francine Clarke said: "In this case the company did not ensure a risk assessment was done before the job, nor did they ensure the staff were skilled for the task. When safe systems are not in place it is only a matter of time before something goes wrong."

- [HSE news release](#). [The Star](#).

SITA fined after baling machine death

A major waste management firm has been fined £180,000 after a worker died at one of its recycling centres. SITA UK Limited pleaded guilty to a criminal breach of safety law. In addition to the fine, SITA was ordered at Swindon Crown Court to pay costs of £38,000. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) prosecuted the company following an incident on 16 August 2005 in which an employee, Paul McGuire, was fatally injured while using a baling machine at the Kingshill Recycling Centre at Cricklade, Wiltshire. The court heard Mr McGuire, 33, was neither formally trained nor authorised to use the baler but was, nevertheless, left alone to operate the machine. When the material being fed into the baler became jammed, Mr McGuire attempted to clear it. The baler had not been isolated and locked off before attempts to clear the blockage and so Mr McGuire was killed by the mechanism of the baler after falling into the chamber. Speaking after the hearing, HSE principal inspector Andrew Kingscott said: "The company failed to ensure that the plant was safe and that written safe working practices were relevant, clear and understood by site staff. Additionally, management and supervision were not adequate and did not ensure that blockages were handled in a safely controlled manner." He added: "It is important that all risks are adequately assessed and controlled in all areas of recycling and particular attention should be given to the safeguarding of fixed plant, especially balers."

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

Safety warning on seasonal stress

With worries over the Christmas credit crunch, job security and the late shopping rush during the festive season, employers are being warned to keep an eye out for seasonal stress in their staff. The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), the professional health and safety body, has singled out those working in shops, pubs and restaurants as particularly likely to be under greater pressure than normal. Nattasha Freeman, IOSH's president, said: "The last few weeks before Christmas are traditionally busy times as people go out to buy last minute presents. This rush places extra demands on employees who are already likely to be working at capacity, so employers need to watch out for signs that their employees are unable to cope." She added: "This extra pressure, coupled with fears over their personal finances and, in some cases, job security, could leave some people more susceptible to excessive pressure and the illnesses that can result from this. Employers should remember that personal stress factors can also impact on performance at work and this increases the potential for accidents." She said simple solutions could make a big difference. "To help relieve the situation, employers should look at what minor adjustments they can make. These could include ensuring staff take proper breaks and have someone they can talk to. It might also mean offering a bit of flexibility in their working hours, particularly for those with parental responsibilities who need to arrange childcare." Employers should pay particular attention to temporary workers taken on over the holiday period, she said, ensuring they are properly supervised and supported.

- [IOSH news release](#).

International News

Australia: Groundbreaking asbestos project takes off

In what they describe as “a first of its kind”, the Australian Workers' Union and construction materials giant Cement Australia have embarked on an investigation into the health of current and former employees at a cement plant that once produced asbestos cement products. Some of Australia's top researchers will look at health screening, the history of the plant and research into the wellbeing of the workforce over time. Tasmania's Railton cement plant housed a factory that produced asbestos cement products from 1947 to 1986 at the then Goliath Cement Company. Former employees of the Railton plant will also be invited to participate in health screening. “With a comprehensive lung health assessment process already in place for current employees, we will focus on former and retired Goliath company employees who will be invited to participate as the study gauges the number of people who have been affected over time,” said Cement Australia operations manager, Steve Brass. AWU expects the study to have a knock-on effect. “The results of this study will progressively trigger relevant and accurate action, which may be medically-based, environmentally-related, local or state-wide,” said AWU workplace health and safety expert Dr Yossi Berger. Unions Tasmania secretary Simon Cocker welcomed the project and said: “Every piece of asbestos is a time bomb and it's time we stopped talking about risk assessment and started planning prioritised removal of this carcinogen from our worksites.” He added a union survey had revealed a massive asbestos problem in workplaces across the state. “I hope these employers will use the Cement Australia project as inspiration to step up to the plate and take their responsibility to protect their employees from asbestos exposure much more seriously,” he said.

- [AWU news release](#). [AWU Tasmania news release](#).

Europe: Stress agreement makes a difference

A European Union-wide workplace stress agreement between business and unions has led to real improvements, a report has concluded. The report was presented this week in the presence the EU employment commissioner by the key signatories, business organisations CEEP, BUSINESSEUROPE and UEAPME and union federation ETUC, who said the initiative has been “a catalyst for action.” The joint report on the implementation of the autonomous framework agreement on work-related stress, adopted at EU level in 2004, concludes: “The existence of the European agreement and the obligation to implement it clearly created momentum to step up efforts and make progress towards the establishment of (more) appropriate rules and mechanisms to identify, prevent and manage problems of work-related stress. It is very doubtful whether this would have been the case without the European agreement, particularly in those member states where the topic was unknown territory, and where there was previously a lack of awareness on the issue (e.g. Romania, Portugal, Czech Republic).” The report

adds: "In several countries work-related stress or attention to psychosocial problems at work at large has become (again) a priority in OHS strategies and policies (e.g. Denmark, Germany, Hungary). Where work-related stress was already a hot topic and awareness is high (e.g. UK), partly due to existing rules or national measures on health and safety, the implementation of the European framework agreement was timely, as it gave social partners a framework within which to discuss the issue bilaterally and triggered debate." At the core of the agreement is an obligation to identify, prevent and manage problems of work-related stress.

- [ETUC news release. Implementation of the European autonomous framework agreement on work-related stress.](#)

USA: Starbucks payout for victimised barista

Global gourmet coffee chain Starbucks has been ordered to reinstate an employee who was fired after raising safety concerns and to pay him back wages. Starbucks was found to have unlawfully terminated the barista in retaliation for filing a complaint about a perennially leaking roof. The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration MIOSHA ruling regarding the member of the IWW Starbucks Workers Union came less than a month before Starbucks faces a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) hearing in Grand Rapids regarding anti-union retaliation. The union says the NLRB had earlier requested Starbucks re-hire Dorsey, compensate him for loss of wages, rescind two disciplinary warnings and post notices in the store saying workers have the right to unionise. "Two federal agencies are holding Starbucks accountable in Grand Rapids for wantonly trampling employee rights. Without the IWW Starbucks Workers Union they may have gotten away with it," said Cole Dorsey, the fired barista. The union says members employed as baristas, bussers and shift supervisors have fought successfully for improved scheduling and staffing levels, increased wages and workplace safety. "Workers who join the union have immediate access to co-workers and members of the community who will struggle with them for a better life on the job," it says.

- [Grand Rapids Starbucks Workers Union news report.](#)

USA: Report derides nanotech risk strategy

The US government's plans to research the potential health and environmental risks from engineered nanomaterials are woefully inadequate, an expert panel of the National Research Council has said. The highly critical report describes serious shortfalls in the Bush administration's strategy to better understand the environmental and health and safety risks of nanotechnology and to effectively manage those potential risks. The report, *Review of the federal strategy for nanotechnology-related environmental, health and safety research*, calls for a significant revamp of the national strategic plan. "Industry wants to run with it," said Andrew D Maynard, chief science adviser to the Project on Emerging Nanotechnology at the Woodrow Wilson Institute, who was chair of the panel. But he added, "one of the big barriers at the moment is

understanding how to use it safely." The panel analysed the risk research strategy of the National Nanotechnology Initiative, the programme to coordinate federal efforts in nanotechnology research and development. Its report concluded that the initiative's strategy "does not present a vision, contain a clear set of goals, have a plan of action for how the goals are to be achieved, or describe mechanisms to review and evaluate funded research and assess whether progress has been achieved." The panel's vice chair, Martin Philbert, a toxicologist at the University of Michigan, said that assessing the risk of nanomaterials was crucial because the materials would not be accepted if people lacked confidence that they were safe. In its assessment of gaps in existing research, the panel found the plan overstates the degree to which already funded studies are meeting the need for research on health and environmental risks. For example, the report says more than half of the currently funded projects on nanotechnology and human health are aimed at developing therapies for diseases. It says while this research is important, it will not shed light on health risks that may be posed by nanomaterials. Moreover, the plan does not note the current lack of studies on how to manage consumer and environmental risks, such as how to manage accidents and spills or mitigate exposure through consumer products, the report says.

- [National Research Council news release. Review of the federal strategy for nanotechnology-related environmental, health and safety research.](#)
- [The Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies news report. ENS newswire. New York Times.](#)

Resources

Redundancy advice from the TUC

A comprehensive package of advice for workers who have been made redundant, or are at risk of redundancy or of losing their homes due to the economic downturn, has been published online by the TUC. The package includes two new free booklets – *Coping with the Economic Downturn* and *Facing Redundancy* – as well as updated information about redundancies, how to use JobCentre Plus, how to look for a new job, and what training and benefits individuals are entitled to. The resources are all available on workSMART, the TUC's website for people at work. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "With unemployment due to exceed two million and possibly hit three, more than 1,500 people a week are losing their jobs. Many will be facing redundancy and unemployment for the first time in their lives. But these are not the only victims of recession. Many others are losing pay as they lose overtime or face lay-offs. Millions more fear unemployment as benefits set at levels designed to deter 'scroungers' are way below what most people need to pay back debts and meet regular outgoings. All these are reasons why now, more than ever, people should consider joining a union." Mr Barber added: "Unions are experts at handling the threat of redundancy, and can often win the argument for alternatives or at least negotiate a package better than the legal minimum."

- TUC [workSMART redundancy advice pages.](#)

TUC secret Santa emails some seasonal cheer

With many employers cutting back on workplace festivities this Christmas, the TUC has developed a recession-busting online secret Santa to help ensure the spirit of Christmas is not entirely lost from the UK's factories and offices. Becoming a secret Santa and buying anonymous gifts for colleagues has become commonplace in many workplaces. The TUC online tool allows individuals to register their workmates to be Santa, and it will then pair individuals with colleagues, so no-one knows who is buying for the next person. All you have to do is visit workSMART – the TUC's working life website - input the team's email addresses and the TUC secret Santa will then contact them all, indicating who they need to buy a present for and the spending limit for each present. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "This Christmas many people will be worrying about their jobs and about how far their family budget is going to stretch. The online secret Santa can be a fun, inexpensive way of keeping the Christmas spirit alive in workplaces that haven't had much to smile about recently."

- [TUC secret Santa](#).

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