

Risks

TUC 

e-bulletin

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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 warning on unpaid overtime

More than five million people worked unpaid overtime in 2008, bringing its total value across the UK to a record £26.9 billion, according to a new analysis of official statistics published by the TUC. The union body warned a recent trend to shorter hours has been reversed and says the economic downturn could increase the pressure to work for free. TUC has calculated that 5.24 million people worked unpaid overtime in 2008 - the highest number since records began in 1992. The previous record was five million in 2001. Employees who work unpaid would receive an extra £5,139 a year if they were paid for the additional hours they are putting in, the TUC calculated. The average amount of unpaid overtime is seven hours and six minutes - the same amount as last year. TUC's figures show if everyone who works unpaid overtime did all their unpaid work at the start of the year, the first day they would get paid would be Friday 27 February. The TUC traditionally declares this 'Work Your Proper Hours Day' and makes a light-hearted call for staff to work their proper hours for at least one day a year and for employers to thank their staff for regularly putting in the extra hours at work. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "After years of progress, the numbers doing unpaid overtime has increased for the second year in a row. This is disappointing. But while some of this is due to the long-hours culture that still dogs too many British workplaces, the recession will now be making many people scared of losing their job in the year ahead and joining the ever-growing dole queue. Inevitably people will be putting in extra hours if they think it can help protect against redundancy or keep their employer in business." He added: "This is not the year therefore for our usual light-hearted 'Work Your Proper Hours Day'. But this does not mean people should ignore excessive working. Friday 27 February should still be used to think through working hours. Long hours are bad for people's health, and employers should never forget that each extra hour worked makes people less productive once they are over a sensible working week. The recession should instead provide a spur to make workplaces more productive, and for managers to get staff to work together, not compete for who can stay the latest."

- [TUC news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- [Work Your Proper Hours Day, Friday 27 February 2009](#).

Unions welcome EU working time action

Trade unions have welcomed last month's decisive vote by the European Parliament to end the UK's opt-out from Europe's 48 hour average working week ([Risks 387](#)). To demonstrate the consequences of excessive working hours, GMB published a dossier of recent public and workplace deaths linked to overwork, including the Clapham Junction rail crash in which 35 died, road traffic fatalities related to excessive work driving hours and suicides related to over work. GMB general secretary Paul Kenny said this was a "sad list of some of our fellow UK citizens who were killed because of excessive working hours. We are going to hear siren voices telling us that this has nothing to do with health and safety. GMB's answer is to try telling that to the families of the people who were killed." Alan

Ritchie, general secretary of the construction union UCATT, said: "In construction the long hours culture literally kills workers. People who are tired are at much greater risk of injury. If companies are serious about safety and about improving productivity then long hours have got to be eradicated." The union said the current system, under which British workers have the right to sign away the requirement that they should not on average work in excess of 48 hours per week, led to many workers being coerced by management into signing the opt-out. The European Parliament and the Council of Ministers are now discussing the way forward on the working hours issue. A decision is expected early this year, although it will be three years before any changes take effect.

- [GMB news release and dossier](#). [UCATT news release](#). [PCS news release](#).

Union rep tells PM to cool it

A union rep is calling on the prime minister to introduce a maximum workplace temperature. Ben Baldwin, the chair of an Usdaw branch at the supermarket chain Tesco in Norfolk, has launched an e-petition on the No.10 website calling for a change in the law to introduce a workplace temperature ceiling. His union Usdaw commented: "It might seem odd to some members to run a petition for a legal maximum temperature, especially if you are working in a store where the heating has broken down and everyone is feeling the cold. But high temperatures in workplaces are an increasing problem - particularly in summer months when the weather is warm. Ben works in a bakery and points out that, when the ventilation isn't working, bakers can be expected to carry on working in very high temperatures." The union says the current law does provide for a minimum reasonable temperature. In the Approved Code of Practice to the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations, the normal minimum reasonable temperature is 16 Celsius (61 degrees Fahrenheit) or 13 Celsius where the work is physically strenuous. "But the law does not mention a maximum reasonable temperature and the absence of such a standard can make it difficult to negotiate improvements in hot workplaces," the union says, adding: "For some years now it has been Usdaw policy to campaign for a legal maximum temperature. You can show your support by signing up to Ben's e-petition."

- [Usdaw news release](#). [Sign the maximum temperature petition](#).

Union presses for dangerous dogs action

Postal workers' union CWU has criticised police for not taking dog attacks seriously enough, claiming that many officers do not have a good enough grasp of the law relating to dangerous animals. The union's comments come in the wake of an attack that left a postman with serious arm injuries. Keith Davies, 54, was savaged by two rottweilers while delivering Christmas mail in Cambridge, and had to have a six-hour operation following the attack. CWU national health and safety officer Dave Joyce said postmen and women wanted a change in attitude - and a change in the law. "We want to see the police taking dog attacks more seriously - too often

they don't, although some forces are better than others," he said. "Too often we are pushing for action and giving police advice on what the law is and what they can do." The union safety specialist added: "The fact is that the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act has failed. It hasn't stopped attacks by dangerous dogs and we need new legislation. Police and councils must have the power to act at an early stage - possibly with some form of dog anti-social behaviour order." The union is giving its backing to Dangerous Dogs (Scotland) Bill which is to put forward in the Scottish parliament by MSP Alex Neil and says similar bills should be introduced elsewhere in the UK. Under the proposed law, control orders - dog ASBOs - would be issued by courts to the owners of dogs who are in the eyes of police or local authorities out of control or dangerous. The dog would be micro-chipped to track its future behaviour and the owner would be instructed to carry out a range of measures to improve their pet's behaviour. CWU's Dave Joyce said: "We are calling for cross-party support when the Bill comes before the Scottish Parliament in order to facilitate the swift passage of the Bill on to the statute book and want the rest of the UK to follow. We want to see more realistic penalties handed down by the courts when prosecutions take place with owners of aggressive dogs being held to account." Royal Mail records about 5,000 animal attacks on postmen and women a year, with the vast majority involving dogs.

- [CWU news release on the Scottish Bill](#) and related consultation on the Proposed Control of Dogs (Scotland) Bill [[pdf](#)]. [BBC News Online](#).

Work injury ends football career

A printer who also played semi-professional football has been forced to retire from the game after he was injured at work. Neil Yapp, 27, seriously hurt his knee when he fell after a faulty stair gave way at Trinity Mirror Printing in Watford. The accident left the former Milton Keynes City striker with a seriously sprained knee and ankle. Neil contacted his union, Unite, following the injury because he was concerned the stairs had not been properly maintained. Trinity Mirror accepted liability for the accident and settled the claim out-of-court for £9,500. Neil, who is now self employed, said: "I was devastated when I was told I would have to give up football. I was having a successful career as a semi-professional player and it was all destroyed because those stairs were not well-maintained. My knees can be in a lot of pain. I know in my later life my knee will cause me even more problems." Steve Hart from Unite commented: "Avoiding falls like this one should be a major priority for employers and their health and safety advisers. Those stairs should have been maintained regularly to ensure an accident like this never happened."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

Hospital fall leads to retirement

Health service union UNISON is calling for a crackdown on workplace hazards after a carpenter was forced to retire after a workplace fall. Michael Perrin received a five-figure payout at

Swansea County Court after he lost the full use of his ankle as a result of a trip at Morriston Hospital, Swansea, in 2003. The 51-year-old had been climbing a staircase, which was badly lit and full of litter and debris, when he slipped and fell heavily. The resulting injury to his right ankle required major surgery. He still suffers constant pain and has had to retire from his job. "The rubbish should have been cleared up as a matter of course," Mr Perrin said. "The accident has caused me no end of problems since it happened. At first I thought it would simply get better and I would be able to return to work, but it just became worse. Doctors eventually took away parts of my ankle and I had bone grafts from my hip to repair it. A framework of steel plates and bolts were inserted. At one point I was told that I might even lose part of my leg." Dave Galligan, UNISON's head of Health for Wales, said: "We are pleased that Michael Perrin has been awarded these damages, as this money will be desperately needed after he lost his career at the hospital. However, the money can never make up for the pain he suffered at the hands of the employer, who failed to check the stairs were clear or that they were lit properly." He added: "Employers should take this issue very seriously and work to reduce potential hazards in the workplace. Hopefully, this will make more employers become extra vigilant about putting employees at risk."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Four ton weight leaves mark on head

A Unite member has been left with a deep 7cm scar on his forehead after machinery weighing four and a half tonnes fell on him. The 46-year-old from Pontnewydd in Wales, whose name has not been released, was helping to remove machinery from the disused Penalta colliery for resale. He was trapped under a huge coal cyclone, a piece of machinery used to remove fine particles of coal, after it fell as he helped load it on a lorry. Unite legal advisers from Thompsons Solicitors said the coal cyclone had extremely sharp edges "and he was fortunate to avoid being cut in half as the heavy machine fell either side of him. Instead the man, who was working for Morspan Limited at the Penalta Colliery, received nasty cuts as well as severe bruising to his forehead, shoulder, elbow and hip." The cut on his head needed internal and external stitches, leaving him with an unsightly black scar. Morspan Limited admitted 75 per cent responsibility for the injury and settled the claim for £13,300. Unite regional secretary Andy Worth commented: "Our member had a lucky escape in what was a nasty and dangerous accident. A thorough risk assessment should have flagged up potential problems with moving this heavy piece of equipment." Clare Nash from Thompsons Solicitors added: "It is only right that this member's employers should pay compensation for his injuries. He has been left with serious long term scarring and continues to suffer from the psychological effects of this accident."

- [Thompson Solicitors news release.](#)

GMB secures £1m a week in payouts

The union GMB is recovering personal injury compensation at a rate of £1 million a week for its members. Latest figures show the union's Birmingham and West Midlands Region alone helped its members recover £5,333,523.82 in personal injury payouts last year. Recent settlements include a GMB member who hurt his back in two separate workplace incidents and received a £7,000 payout. David Ogden, 54, felt forced to find less physical work with another employer after he was left with long term back problems. He first hurt his back while lifting heavy trays of packed ready meals which he sent to the lab for testing when working as a quality auditor for Kettleby Foods in Melton Mowbray. The nine kilo trays were stacked in an awkward position in metal cages and David felt his back go as he was pulling them towards him. A few months later his back condition was aggravated when he was lifting a 25 kilo bag of tortilla wraps. He decided to leave his job six months later because his back problems were flaring up regularly and he did not want to put himself at further risk of injury. GMB member Paul Thomas, 34, from Carlisle lost partial sight in his right eye after he was provided with unsuitable safety glasses while working for Clark Door Limited. He was fitting sound proof doors in the BBC buildings in Glasgow when he had to drill into concrete above his head. The goggles he was wearing had ventilation holes in the top and the concrete dust fell into his eyes causing alkali burns. His eyes were so badly damaged they swelled up and he was forced to take four months off work. Paul, who is now retraining to become an electrician, received a £5,000 out-of-court settlement with the union's legal support.

- Thompsons Solicitors news release on the [annual compensation figure](#) and the [bad back](#) and [safety goggles](#) settlements.

Scots schools fail sick stressed staff

Teaching union the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) has challenged Scotland's local authorities to improve staff wellbeing and occupational health policies in order to reduce sickness and stress-related ill-health. EIS general secretary Ronnie Smith said: "Councils are extremely zealous in applying absence management policies to staff, including teaching staff. What they are less good at doing is considering how best to develop preventative health policies. A number of councils do provide support of this type but those with highly structured health strategies are unfortunately few and far between." Mr Smith added: "Nowhere is the failing of councils clearer than in dealing with occupational stress. Stress is still too often stigmatised as an individual failing and in many cases a failure to intervene timeously will result in a psychiatric condition." EIS said last year Scotland's education authorities and educational establishments paid out over a quarter of a million pounds in compensation and legal expenses as a result of industrial accidents or attacks against teaching staff. Ronnie Smith said: "Sadly, yet again the EIS is drawing public attention to failures of employers to take health and safety matters sufficiently seriously." EIS is also calling on local authorities to improve their treatment of teachers with disabilities. The union says some have been slow, "arguably even negligent", in making reasonable adjustments to schools in order to support employees with disabilities.

- [EIS news release](#).

Employers ignorant of deadly silica risks

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has vowed to step up its 'Clear the Air!' campaign warning workers against the dangers of silica exposure after it concluded that smaller companies still know very little about the potentially fatal health risks. Inhalation of crystalline silica dust can lead to the severe breathing disorder silicosis and to cancer. HSE estimates that more than 500 construction workers lost their lives to lung cancer and even more suffered from silicosis as a result of exposure to silica, which can become airborne when cutting stone, concrete kerbs and paving blocks. The health and safety body launched a multimedia campaign last year with free DVDs, leaflets, and online forums showing workers how to protect themselves from inhaling Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS). However, late last year a succession of industry contributors to an HSE online forum on silica risks complained a failure of HSE inspection and oversight was leading to widespread abuse of safe practices and substantial exposures to the cancer causing dust. HSE's Dr Robert Ellis from the Chemicals Risk Management Unit, the coordinator of the silica forum where the concerns were raised, said he had noticed an increase in staff awareness and improved compliance, but added that ignorance among small contractors were still a major concern. The safety watchdog says more than 240,000 leaflets and 3,000 copies of the DVD had been requested by the industry. HSE says using plastic kerbs to avoid creating dust is an alternative that's gaining wide support in the industry. The Highways Agency recently triumphed at the Building magazine awards, winning 'Client with the Best Commitment to Health and Safety in 2008' for its use of plastic kerbs.

- [HSE news release](#). [Contract Journal](#). [Building](#).

Lafarge recalls cancer risk cement

Construction materials multinational Lafarge has recalled 280,000 bags of cement after discovering a batch contained high levels of cancer-causing chromium VI. In total, about 2,500 tonnes of the Blue Circle cement have been recalled. As well as being a cancer risk, chromium VI is a sensitiser that can cause occupational dermatitis and asthma. Lafarge has contacted builders' merchants and DIY stores, to ask them to remove stock supplied before 4 December last year. The high chromium cement was produced at its Westbury Works in Wiltshire. The company says the Environment Agency, Trading Standards and the Health and Safety Executive have been informed. Lafarge managing director Erdogan Pekenc said: "We have taken this precautionary measure to be proactive and transparent with our customers, and to ensure that the products we supply are of the highest quality." Lafarge said it is unsure when the problem started, and is carrying out an internal investigation.

- [Wiltshire Times](#). [Contract Journal](#).

Dockworkers win asbestos test case

Two former Liverpool dockworkers have won compensation from the government for asbestos-related diseases contracted under the auspices of the then National Dock Labour Board (NDLB). At the High Court in London last month, Mr Justice Silber ruled that the NDLB had materially increased the risk of the claimants suffering harm and that this was foreseeable. He said the failure to supply the men with respirators created a material increase - if not an enormous increase - in the risk of them suffering the injuries. The family of the late Edward Rice, of Ormskirk, who died of the asbestos cancer mesothelioma in 2000 aged 67, will receive £138,965. Robert Thompson, 67, of Scarisbrick, near Southport, who has diffuse pleural thickening, will receive £25,329. The judge said that if the warning had been given, and the two men had been provided with respirators, neither would have run "any risk of suffering any asbestos-related injury." If the NDLB had complied with its duty of care, workers should have received a reassurance that if they refused to come into contact with asbestos dust without adequate precautions, they would not be disciplined. Solicitor Neil Fisher said: "This will help other dockers and their families to bring claims without having to identify individual shipping companies, many of which no longer exist." In 2006, the High Court ruled the government was responsible for dockers' health and safety in the 1950s and 60s ([Risks 259](#)). The government appealed in a bid to block compensation claims, but lost the case.

- [John Pickering and Partners news release](#) and [full judgment](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Workers wary of compensation claims

Many workers avoid making compensation claims for workplace injuries, new research suggests. Reasons for this wariness include a fear of losing their job, according to the study for personal injury solicitors Hubbard Pegman & Whitney (HPW). The poll also found that the majority of people have modest expectations for compensation following injuries at work, "casting doubt on the widely-made claim that Britain has developed a compensation culture." HPW said the findings confirm its own experience, with people often stoically avoiding seeking compensation for injuries, even for modest amounts, in case they are made redundant as punishment by their employer. The research, undertaken by YouGov and based on a representative sample of nearly 2,000 adults, found that while over 90 per cent expect some form of monetary compensation after an injury at work, people typically under-estimate how much they would receive and very few over-estimate, even though the firm says awards can be surprisingly modest. Typical payouts are £8,650 for a broken leg and £31,000 for permanent blindness in one eye. Charlotte Pegman, managing partner of HPW, said "our experience is that British people are often too stoic - failing to claim compensation as they are worried about losing their job, even in the case of injuries causing permanent disablement." She added: "This trend is likely to increase in the current economic environment as workers, often those in low income manual jobs, worry that they will not get a replacement job if they are made redundant as punishment for claiming compensation for an injury."

- [HPW news release \[pdf\]](#).

Taylor Woodrow fined for Welsh assembly death

Construction giant Taylor Woodrow has been fined £200,000 over the death of a worker during the building of the Welsh assembly's debating chamber. John Walsh, 53, was a supervisor at the Cardiff Bay building site in March 2004 when a cavity wall he was filling with concrete collapsed, causing him to fall from near the top of a 10ft ladder. Mr Walsh, who was employed by sub-contractor Ferson Construction Services Limited, died in hospital on 15 March 2004, the day after the incident. The firm admitted health and safety breaches but disputed the terms. Cardiff Crown Court heard the firm now accepted its breaches had contributed to Mr Walsh's death. Judge Neil Bidder QC said the explanation for the late concession was that the company had recently changed ownership and that it was to the new owner's credit a third basis of plea was entered. Judge Bidder said Mr Walsh lost his life "tragically and unnecessarily." He said Taylor Woodrow had failed to provide details of safe construction for the wall, adding that a supervisor from Taylor Woodrow had been on site over 10 days when construction was taking place and had failed to notice that it was dangerous. He said the fact the supervisor lacked the qualifications or experience to appreciate the risk was "a very substantial failing." The judge added: "The family is angry at the death and what they regard as the disgraceful conduct of the defendants." Judge Bidder added that a "substantial penalty" was necessary to "bring home the need for ever present vigilance" and to "deter other companies from relaxing the highest level of safety." In addition to the £200,000 fine, he ordered Taylor Woodrow to pay £71,400 costs. Health and Safety Executive inspector Alun Williams said despite Taylor Woodrow recognising the risks before the contract began, it failed to properly manage the risk posed by working at height and by the pressure that the wall experienced during the process. "There are recognised procedures in the construction industry for backfilling and cavity insulation which would have prevented the wall from surging outwards," he said.

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

Death vessel firm fined £500,000

A Norwegian shipping company has been fined nearly £500,000 after eight people were killed when one of its vessels capsized off Shetland. The Bourbon Dolphin tipped over as it towed an oil rig's anchor and chain during the routine manoeuvre in April 2007. The 330-tonne chain slid suddenly across the new vessel's deck, pulling it over ([Risks 350](#)). The dead included David Arve Remy, 14, and his father, Oddne Arve Remy, 44, the ship's captain. Seven of the 15 crew survived after a major air-sea rescue effort involving RAF search and rescue helicopters, naval divers and an unmanned submarine. The vessel later sank, before the missing men and the teenager could be found. Norway's national prosecutor, Bjoern Soknes, said the boat's owner, Bourbon Offshore Norway AS, had failed to give Remy enough time to become familiar with the vessel, its crew and the anchor-handling operation. Remy was only given 90 minutes to take over. The firm was ordered to pay 5m kroner

(£491,000). It can appeal against the decision. In reports presented to a Commission of Inquiry set up by the Norwegian government, doubts were raised about the ability of both the vessel and its crew to handle large anchors in such deep water. Because the eight deaths occurred offshore, they were not included in last year's official UK work fatality statistics. The omission from official work death figures of non-HSE recorded deaths, including those in the Bourbon Dolphin tragedy, prompted the union Unite to call for HSE to publish 'honest' occupational fatality figures ([Risks 318](#)).

- [Maritime Journal](#). [Press and Journal](#). [The Guardian](#). [BBC News Online](#). [The Scotsman](#).

Ship death sailor 'needed permit'

A crew member who suffocated in a cruise ship's ballast tank did not have the necessary hazard permit, a formal investigation report has revealed. Filipino Joselito Zordilla, 43, died testing water on the Saga Rose as it docked at Southampton on 11 June 2008. A Marine Accident Investigation Branch report (MAIB) released this week said he was told to do the tests on the basis the ballast tank was full, and its water accessible from outside. But the tank was empty and he entered it despite being aware of the risks of low oxygen and not having a permit. The report said that because of the assumption that the tank was full of water, "a permit to work was not deemed to be necessary. However, the tank contained only a small amount of water and the second boatswain entered it despite being aware of, and practised in, the vessel's procedures for entering enclosed spaces. The atmosphere inside the tank contained insufficient oxygen to sustain human life due to the corrosion of the tank's steel structure." MAIB said Mr Zordilla's death was the sixth fatality in an enclosed space it had investigated since September 2007. Because these deaths were investigated by MAIB, none appear in the Health and Safety Executive's annual work fatalities figures.

- [MAIB Saga Rose report](#). [BBC News Online](#).

International News

Global: A bloody year for the news media

More than 100 journalists and media support workers died covering the news in 2008, according to a new analysis. The International News Safety Institute (INSI) counted 109 casualties in 36 countries, and says the great majority were murdered apparently because of their work. An additional four deaths are still under investigation. At least 1,375 news personnel have died trying to gather the news in the 12 years since 1996, the start date for INSI's 'Killing the Messenger' tracker for global media casualties. And 2009 has got off to a grim start with three deaths in the first four days, two in a suicide bombing in Pakistan and one gunned down in Somalia. The figure for 2008, cross-checked with data gathered by the International Federation of Journalists, was significantly down from the 172 counted in 2007, a record year. This was due mainly to a major fall in deaths in Iraq, from 65 to 16, the result of a general reduction in violence there. A total of 252 news personnel, most of

them Iraqi, have now died covering that conflict since the US-led invasion of 2003. Last year, the deadliest countries after Iraq were India and Mexico, with 10 deaths each, Thailand (9), the Philippines (8) and Pakistan (7). Five of the Thais were killed in a car crash on their way to the funeral of a colleague murdered by a terrorist bomber. Accidents claimed 25 lives around the world in the course of the year. "Journalists in far too many countries continue to be targeted for murder because of what they do," said INSI director Rodney Pinder. "We call on all nations, in war and peace, to observe in letter and in spirit UN Security Council Resolution 1738 of 2006 on the safety of journalists and on ending impunity for those who kill them."

- [INSI news release](#) and [fatal incidents listing](#).

Global: Firms fail on corporate codes

Consumers should know that some high profile brands are failing to live up to their own hype when it comes to corporate social responsibility, the global union representing workers in the clothing, textile and footwear industries has said. ITGLWF general secretary Neil Kearney said: "Nearly every brand and retailer claims to have their own code of conduct with some suggesting there are as many as 10,000 such codes in existence. But if these codes are not applied they constitute little more than a waste of paper." Among firms criticised by ITGLWF is Swedish home furnishing retailer Ikea. "Ikea is one of the main customers of the Turkish textile company Menderes, yet the retailer has failed to take adequate action to resolve the problems that have arisen at the plant, including the victimisation of union members," Mr Kearney said. "In November, a worker was killed in an accident at the plant – the fifth fatal accident at the plant in the past 10 years – highlighting the urgent need for dialogue between the company and the union on a wide range of issues including health and safety". He added: "Ikea has conducted audits and has encouraged the company to train managers on labour laws, but has done nothing to seek reinstatement for workers who have been dismissed in violation of the right of freedom of association or to create a climate in which workers are free to organise". The company has also criticised Wal-Mart, the world's largest retailer. This week it asked the company to amend the provisions of its code of conduct relating to working hours, as well as to address allegations that it is allowing its Indonesian suppliers to work up to 18 hours a week more than the legally permitted maximum. Neil Kearney said: "Wal-Mart's Standards for Suppliers allow workers employed by its suppliers to work up to 72 hours per week, or a maximum of 14 hours a day". He added: "Fourteen hour work days are abusive. In addition, excessive hours make no sense for the employer as they greatly reduce productivity and diminish quality".

- ITGLWF news releases on [CSR](#) and [Wal-Mart](#).

USA: Worker advocates issue safety wish list

Worker health and safety advocates in the US have published a wish list of seven key priorities for the incoming Obama administration. 'Protecting workers on the job - Priorities for Federal action in 2009', released this week by the National Council on Occupational Safety and Health and the American Public Health Association's occupational health and safety section, sets out to reverse the erosion of the worker safety protections that has put the nation's workers at a heightened risk of injury, illness and death, the groups say. "Over the past eight years, federal job safety agencies have failed to fulfil their promise to protect workers' health and safety on the job," said Tolle Graham, the National COSH president. "Workers continue to be killed and injured on the job at appallingly high rates, yet federal OSHA refuses to issue new protective standards or adequately enforce existing safety and health rules. Acts of gross negligence or criminal behaviour leading to workplace deaths result in minor fines. And millions of public safety employees - the very workers that protect us all from natural or deliberate disasters - are outside the jurisdiction of federal OSHA entirely." OSHA is the USA's national health and safety watchdog. The platform calls for an extension of worker protections, comprehensive OSHA coverage for all workers and penalties on safety offenders that offer a real deterrent. Celeste Monforton, the chair of the APHA occupational health section, said: "We're very encouraged to know that the Vice President will be leading a taskforce examining this very issue, and we'd welcome participating in that process."

- [APHA news release](#). [National COSH news release](#). [The Pump Handle](#). [Washington Post](#).
- [Protecting workers on the job - Priorities for Federal action in 2009](#).

USA: Victory in the hog house

Workers at the USA's largest hog slaughterhouse have won a 16-year fight to unionise. Safety had been a key organising theme in food union UFCW's campaign at Smithfield's plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina. Conditions are notoriously dangerous and heavy, with workers toiling until their bodies give out, causing them to quit or be fired ([Risks 198](#)). Ahead of the successful vote to unionise, the union launched a boycott and pressure campaign and funded an environmental justice group that was fighting the hog butcher's pollution seeping from giant waste lagoons. Smithfield fought back with a racketeering lawsuit, claiming the union's campaign had cost the company \$900 million (£600m) - and amounted to extortion. But when Smithfield was faced with the prospect of its grisly health and safety record being aired in court, the company settled in late October, clearing the way for the vote. Workers, who start at about \$10 (£6.60) an hour, gave speeches to hundreds of coworkers in the plant's cafeteria, and hundreds more wrote "Union Time" on their hard hats, a slowly building action that rank-and-file organisers began last May. Organisers said Barack Obama's campaign— which gave Democrats a win in North Carolina for the first time since 1976 - galvanised workers to stand together and vote in the union. "It is not all about the money, it is about having a voice," Aleisha Rascoe told reporters. "If we can change the White House, we can change the hog house."

- [Labor Notes](#). [American Prospect](#).

- Books, t-shirts and other ['Troublemakers Union'](#) resources from Labor Notes.

Events and Courses

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR JANUARY TO MARCH 2009

- [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

The person responsible for the Risks e-bulletin is Hugh Robertson
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