

Risks

TUC 

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**HAZARDS
MAGAZINE**



**Asbestos -
The hidden killer**

Hazards at Work

updated second edition
now available

Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 16,000 subscribers and 1,500 on the TUC website. To receive this bulletin every week, click [here](#). Past issues are [available](#). This edition contains [Useful links](#) [TUC courses for safety reps](#) [Disclaimer and Privacy](#)

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

Contents

Union News

PCS victory in EU sick leave case
Injured firefighters fight sacking rule
Union dismay at fat firefighter firing
Safety breakfast is difficult to swallow
Site deaths could soar in the recession
Bad school environments are bad news
Boots workers get back pain
Payout after slip by a hole in the wall
Six figure settlement for attack trauma
Union wins whiplash case

Other news

Mixed reaction to new penalties law
Unions slam 'wrong' welfare bill
Workers are 'afraid' to take sick leave
Factory staff at 'higher risk' of cancer
Firm fined for asbestos exposures
Two injured in lift fall
Payout for railway injury whistleblower

International News

Global: Privatisation linked to increased death risk
USA: Nanotech safety may get higher priority
USA: The union role in NY air crash miracle

Events and Courses

TUC courses for safety reps

Useful Links

PCS victory in EU sick leave case

A union-backed European legal challenge has established employees on long-term sick leave are entitled to take the holiday they accrued when they return to work. The European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling also says if workers were sacked or left a firm, they must receive holiday pay equivalent to the time they were unable to take while ill. The ruling does not mean that staff away on long-term illness automatically benefit from annual paid leave while absent from work, but does require employers to give staff a reasonable chance to take holiday they accrued while off sick. The case was brought by five PCS members at Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) in the UK and a worker from Deutsche Rentenversicherung Bund in Germany. The case was based on a stipulation of the European Working Time Directive, which says workers have a "right to a minimum period of paid annual leave." The ECJ ruling said: "A worker does not lose his right to paid annual leave which he has been unable to exercise because of sickness. He must be compensated for his annual leave not taken." Employers' organisation the CBI called the decision "a real blow." The UK portion of the case was referred to the ECJ by the House of Lords. It is anticipated the case, which involves PCS members at HMRC, will return to the Lords later this year, to consider the effect of the judgment and to decide whether a complaint about unpaid annual leave can be brought as a claim for deduction from wages.

- [European Commission news release](#) and full decision, [Judgment of the Court of Justice in Joined Cases C-350/06 and C-520/06, ECJ, 20 January 2009](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Personnel Today](#).

Injured firefighters fight sacking rule

Firefighters have taken to the Court of Appeal their challenge to government pension rules that threaten to leave badly injured and disabled firefighters sacked and without a pension. The legal moves started after three disabled London firefighters had their pensions removed by the London Fire Brigade ([Risks 328](#)). One of the affected workers was dismissed because of his occupational hearing loss. Firefighters' union FBU has described their treatment as "totally unacceptable." The latest court action is against a judgment by handed down at the High Court on 15 May 2008. The rules hit all firefighters who suffer serious injury or ill-health, although FBU says the Scottish government has indicated it will not implement the same rules. FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "We cannot tolerate a position where firefighters cannot rely on a pension if they are unable to work after being seriously injured. The incidents we work at are treated as life-threatening hazards by other workers. It is totally unacceptable to expect firefighters to take risks others wouldn't then sack them if they are injured or become disabled as a result." The union leader added: "Firefighters test the limits of health and safety to save the lives of others. The government has ripped up the understanding that if we were injured or suffered ill-health we had a pension." New rules issues in September 2006 mean if an affected worker is capable of being redeployed, they are not eligible for a pension – even if there is no suitable job available. The legal action is against the Secretary of

State for Communities and Local Government, the London Fire Brigade and the Board of Medical Referees.

- [FBU news release](#) and [FBUtube video report](#).

Union dismay at fat firefighter firing

Colleagues of a Scottish firefighter fired for being overweight are considering industrial action in a bid to get him reinstated. Kevin Ogilvie, a 22-year veteran with the fire service, was dismissed for a second time after failing to meet strict weight loss targets set by his employer. Grampian Fire Brigade first sacked Kevin last year but did a U-turn and gave him three months to get fitter after his colleagues threatened industrial action. The firefighter failed a fitness test last week and was dismissed. He said he was "stunned" by the decision. FBU said it is taking legal advice on the issue. Alan Paterson, FBU secretary for the Grampian region, said: "The brigade set the bar too high. It was designed to fail." He added: "Kevin has lost weight, but not at the rate determined by the service. He was never out of the gym. He worked very hard with a dietician and an obesity expert we got on board. But the expert said there was no way he could achieve the targets he was set within the timescale the fire brigade wanted. We would have preferred to see a period of nine to 12 months. Unfortunately the brigade were not willing to accept that." Paterson said the sacking was "disappointing and unnecessary". Mr Ogilvy, 46, had just three years to go before he retired. His colleagues at Aberdeen central fire station regarded him as "a good and able firefighter." In November, a feature in the trade union health and safety magazine *Hazards* warned that employers were increasingly shifting the focus from tackling workplace health risks, to modifying workers' exercise, dietary and other personal habits. 'You big fat liars' said "the workplace lifestyle evangelists would be more credible if more employers changed their bad habits and left workers with the time, money and hazard-free workplaces to have a healthy life."

- [Daily Record](#). [Press and Journal](#). [The Herald](#). [BBC News Online](#). [The Telegraph](#). [Daily Mail](#). [Hazards feature](#).

Safety breakfast is difficult to swallow

Construction union UCATT has described as "window dressing" a breakfast meeting planned by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to educate employment agencies and gangmasters about their health and safety duties. HSE has invited employment agencies to attend the breakfast meeting at the Belfry Hotel in Nottingham on 27 January. Steve Murphy, regional secretary for UCATT's Midlands region, said HSE's approach was "highly disturbing". He added: "It is clear that the HSE has identified a problem with employment agencies and the care they provide to their workers, otherwise this meeting would not be deemed necessary. Employment agencies who are placing workers at risk shouldn't be given a free croissant and coffee, they should be closed down." The union wants the Gangmasters Licensing Act (GLA) to be extended to the construction industry, with agencies

and gangmasters needing a licence backed up by evidence they meet minimum standards on health and safety. "Workers employed by employment agencies in the construction industry are all too often placed on the worst jobs, with low pay and terrible conditions," Mr Murphy said. "Only the introduction of licensing will improve conditions and improve safety." The GLA covers workers employed by employment agencies in agriculture, forestry and food processing and shellfish collection, but not construction. HSE inspector Maureen Kingman, who will speak at the event, commented: "By reducing the number of injuries and the causes of ill health, employers can save themselves money by cutting down the number of working days lost. This is particularly important in the current economic climate."

- [UCATT news release](#). [HSE news release](#).

Site deaths could soar in the recession

Construction site deaths could soar as a result of the recession, a union leader has warned. Writing in Tribune, Alan Ritchie, general secretary of the building union UCATT, said: "If there is any reduction in the next annual fatality figures, it will be due to a combination of luck and less available work due to the economic downturn. My union, UCATT, fears the recession could actually make construction sites more dangerous in the medium term." He claimed the industry often paid lip service to safety, adding: "When times are tight, safety is first to be cut. With thousands of construction workers losing their jobs, those still employed are even less likely to refuse to perform a dangerous task, for fear of being given their cards and told there are plenty of others who will work without complaint." Reduced enforcement by the official safety watchdog, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), means firms are getting away with criminal safety breaches, he added. "In the construction industry, there has been a 42 per cent decline in the issuing of enforcement notices and a 30 per cent reduction in prohibition notices. The reduction in safety notices is not because sites are safer. When the HSE scrapes together the resources for a targeted blitz of construction sites, at least 75 per cent of those visited are found to be breaking health and safety laws. Many are so unsafe they are shut down immediately." He is critical of what he sees as HSE's resistance to increased enforcement. "The HSE is under the misapprehension that safety will not improve through an increase in inspectors, inspections and prosecutions," he charged. "Instead it is the responsibility of industries to regulate themselves. This dangerous nonsense would be funny if it was not so serious. In a highly casualised industry such as construction, the only way to keep the many rogue employers in line is by the constant threat of prosecution. Sending them glossy leaflets asking them to be more safety aware is a waste of time and money."

- [Tribune](#). [Contract Journal](#).

Bad school environments are bad news

Poor quality school premises in run down areas are bad for pupils

and bad for staff, a union-commissioned study has concluded. 'One more broken window', the first study of its kind in the UK to look at the issue, was carried out by independent research consultants Perpetuity Research and Consultancy International (PRCI) Ltd on behalf of the teaching union NASUWT. It examined the impact of the surrounding environment on schools' performance, pupil behaviour, parental attitudes and staff morale. PRCI research consultant Katy Owen, the lead researcher on the study, said: "It was clear from working with the schools throughout the research that the local environment has an impact on schools, be it through behaviour, attendance or educational achievement. Schools located in a declining neighbourhood can be affected negatively. It is important that urban planners think about the impact of regeneration programmes on schools and, where possible, involve them in decision making." NASUWT general secretary Chris Keates said: "Schools have a legal duty to provide pupils and staff with a safe and secure environment in which to learn and work, but, as the report highlights, many schools do not have the necessary support or powers to create secure school buildings. Action is necessary to give schools the legal tools to meet their responsibilities." The report focuses on the experiences of staff, pupils and parents in three schools experiencing issues of environmental decline, including substandard housing, derelict buildings and vandalism.

- [NASUWT news release](#). One more broken window [[pdf](#)].

Boots workers get back pain

Poor health and safety practices have left two GMB members with severe back problems. Nigel Williamson, 52, and Robert Cole, 56, were employed as depot workers for Boots. They both suffered back and shoulder strain after working at the Nottingham depot. The problems started when they were moved from their jobs as warehouse operatives to work in the dispatch department, where they fixed metal cages and wooden pallets. They were not given any heavy lifting equipment or training on how to do their job without causing back strain. No risk assessment was carried out on the job until an injunction was threatened by Thompsons Solicitors, the law firm acting for the union in related compensation claims. Robert, who has had to take time off due to back pain, received £5,000 in compensation. He said: "I have a bad back, shoulder and knee problems as a result of working in poor conditions for a number of years. I had no training whatsoever. I was at my wit's end with them and I felt the only option I had was to pursue compensation." Nigel, who had to take four months off work and who received £3,300 in compensation, added: "The work was extremely physical. I have never had back problems before but I still suffer from pain now. I found the total lack of any manual handling assistance, safe working procedures and risk assessments extremely frustrating and depressing." GMB regional secretary Andy Worth commented: "Our members worked in appalling conditions for a number of years and it took the threat of an injunction for Boots to eventually undertake a risk assessment for their role. It is a sad day when you must sue for compensation in order to make a workplace safe."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

Payout after slip by a hole in the wall

A cash machine maintenance worker has received £10,500 in compensation after slipping outside a Tesco supermarket. The 62-year-old GMB member, whose name has not been released, was replenishing a cash machine at the supermarket in Hemel Hempstead. A sewer drain had overflowed coating the pavement in slime, causing the Group 4 Securicor worker to fall. He suffered soft tissue injuries to his hip, spine and knee. He also tore the cartilage in his knee. The injuries led to him taking four months off work following the incident and he suffers ongoing pain in his back and groin. Following the injury, he contacted the GMB because he was concerned about the money he had lost by being on sick leave. Faced with a union-backed compensation claim, Tesco admitted liability and settled the claim out-of-court. The injured man said: "I was angry after this accident happened because it soon became apparent that Tesco staff were aware of the problem." GMB spokesperson Rosie Conroy said: "This accident could easily have been prevented. The area should have been cordoned off and hazard signs placed nearby to alert pedestrians to the problem. Staff only attempted to make the surface safe after the claimant's accident when it was too late."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Six figure settlement for attack trauma

A security guard who was severely traumatised in an assault has received £180,000 in compensation. GMB member James Maher, 56, was attacked while working as a security guard for the London Borough of Waltham Forest at the Low Hall Depot in Walthamstow. He has been left unable to work as a result of the incident, in which he was hit repeatedly across the head by the partner of a council worker. He was not seriously injured but has been left with psychological trauma which at times means he cannot leave his home. He also suffered bruising to his head and needed an operation on his knee. He never returned to work following the assault. On the day of the incident, a misunderstanding by a council worker's partner led to the attack. Mr Maher had warned his bosses on several occasions that the entrance to the security office should be made safer to prevent members of the public gaining access. Lone worker and customer care training should also have been provided to help Mr Maher manage dangerous situations. The council admitted liability and settled for £180,000 just two days before the case was due to be heard in court. Mr Maher said: "I haven't worked since the assault. My confidence has been affected by what happened and I hardly go out anymore. I don't think I will ever go back to work." Natalie Shelley from Thompsons Solicitors, who represented Mr Maher in the GMB-backed case, said: "Had the council carried out a thorough risk assessment of staff security before the assault the assailant would not have been able to gain access to the premises. Employers should do all they can to provide their staff with a safe working environment." No criminal charges have been brought against the attacker.

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Union wins whiplash case

An insurer has been forced to pay up after a Unite member suffered whiplash in a road traffic accident. Edward Haddock, 31, suffered the injury in March 2007 when a vehicle pulled out in front of his car, causing a collision. The other driver's insurer admitted fault, however lawyers acting on behalf of Mr Haddock believed the offer of compensation was too low. The case subsequently went before a judge at Newcastle County Court. The judge awarded Mr Haddock a sum that was nearly 50 per cent more than the amount originally offered. Sarah Watson of law firm Beecham Peacock, who represented Mr Haddock in the Unite-backed case, said "it is becoming increasingly common for insurers to put forward unreasonable settlement offers to claimants such as Mr Haddock, the innocent victim of a road traffic accident and refuse to compromise at all. In Mr Haddock's case this has ultimately led to the insurers having to pay significantly more than would have been the case if they had been more reasonable in the first place." Mr Haddock commented: "It was certainly worth waiting for. I am delighted with the outcome although it has cost the insurers far more in the long run by being unreasonable and refusing to offer a realistic amount of compensation to me."

- Beecham Peacock Solicitors news release [[pdf](#)].

Other news

Mixed reaction to new penalties law

Safety professionals have said it's momentous, safety watchdog HSE has said it won't have any effect on its enforcement practices, the business lobby has said HSE will now wave a bigger stick and the TUC has said its impact depends on the courts. The Health and Safety (Offences) Act, which came into effect this week, has proved a talking point. The law has provision for bigger fines, more safety offences to result in a jail term and for more to be kicked up to the higher courts where bigger penalties can apply. Ray Hurst, immediate past president of safety professionals' organisation IOSH, said: "We believe this Act will allow the courts to send a strong message to employers that health and safety offences are treated just as seriously as other offences, such as those involving financial misconduct." Health and Safety Executive (HSE) chair Judith Hackitt said: "It is right that there should be a real deterrent to those businesses and individuals that do not take their health and safety responsibilities seriously," but added under the new law "there are no new duties on employers or businesses, and HSE is not changing its approach to how it enforces health and safety law." The Forum of Private Business (FPB) was not inclined to believe Ms Hackitt, however. It said "the FPB is concerned that HSE is indeed wielding the stick, believing business owners need to be forced to comply," and called instead for "information, guidance and support." TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson commented: "While this legislation is very welcome and long-overdue, it will only be effective if courts start imposing realistic fines for health and safety offences. For many offences there was already an unlimited fine yet last year the average fine for a prosecution taken by the HSE

was £12,896 and by a local authority, £7,663. Courts must use their new powers to ensure that fines are more realistic and reflect the serious nature of these offences.”

- [IOSH news release](#). [HSE news release](#). [FSB news release](#). [Construction News](#).
- [Health and Safety \(Offences\) Act 2008](#).

Unions slam ‘wrong’ welfare bill

Trade unions have said the government’s Welfare Reform Bill is the wrong law at the wrong time and have said they will resist attempts to privatise Jobcentre Plus services. The bill, introduced last week, includes provisions which would compel the long-term unemployed to work for their benefits and require lone parents to undertake job-related training. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: “This is the wrong bill for the economic crisis we’re in. With thousands of people losing their jobs every week, now is not the time to introduce even tougher conditions for claimants. We’re also disappointed that the government appears to be persisting with plans that amount to a ‘work for your benefit’ scheme. Paid work is scarce enough. Forcing claimants to work for their dole too could make this even worse.” Civil service union PCS said punitive sanctions were not what was needed as the recession deepened, warning that the bill would drive people into poverty and stigmatise those who needed the most help. Both the TUC and PCS said unions would oppose the privatisation of Jobcentre Plus services. PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: “This is the wrong bill at the wrong time which will drive people who need the most help into poverty through punitive benefit sanctions. The bill will replace the principle that the needs of the many should be at the heart of the welfare state, with a system that puts profits before people.” He added: “The private sector doesn’t have the capacity or the track record to help people back into work. Jobs are needed not benefit sanctions, as the recession deepens with no end in sight. The government should be putting its faith in the world class skills and expertise of Jobcentre Plus, rather than the untried and untested private sector.” A report this month from the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) warned that the government was failing to create high quality jobs, a problem that could leave well-qualified applicants also competing for low paid, poor quality jobs.

- [DWP news release](#). [TUC news release](#). [PCS news release](#) and [updated news release](#). [ippr news release](#). [Nice work if you can get it](#), ippr, January 2009.

Workers are ‘afraid’ to take sick leave

More than four in 10 Britons are worried about taking sick leave because they are afraid it will jeopardise their jobs. The survey by Minster Law Solicitors also found that almost two-third (64 per cent) of people have serious concerns about the unstable job climate and would be prepared to forgo their basic employment rights to avoid risking their job security. A total of 2,000 workers were asked what they thought they would endure for job security. Taking sick leave was the top no-no for workers fearing for their jobs, identified by 42 per cent of respondents. Almost a quarter (23

per cent) said they felt under pressure to work later than necessary because they think it looks bad to leave work promptly at the end of the day. One in five said they would not take legal action on bullying or sexual discrimination. And more than one in seven workers would not ask to be paid for overtime in an effort to keep their jobs secure. Matthew Briggs, chief executive of Minster Law Solicitors, commented: "It is clearly an unsettling time for people in the market and our research reveals that a large number are feeling under pressure to really go the extra mile to ensure they keep their jobs. However, it is worrying that they are prepared to forgo basic employment rights in order to do this."

- [Minster Law Solicitors news release.](#)

Factory staff at 'higher risk' of cancer

Scientists have uncovered higher rates of cancer at a rubber chemical plant in North Wales. Birmingham University researchers found that at least 10 people at Wrexham's Flexsys factory in Cefn Mawr may have already suffered premature deaths as a result. The study led by Professor Tom Sorahan found workers at the former Monsanto plant who came into contact with mercaptobenzothiazole – known as 2-MBT – were twice as likely to die from large intestine cancer. They were also three times more likely to die from bladder cancer. Exposed workers were twice as likely to be diagnosed with bladder cancer, and four times as likely to be diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a bone marrow cancer. The higher the exposures, the higher the risks, the study concluded. Flexsys said MBT had not been used at the plant since 2001. Professor Sorahan said the MBT exposed workers "were twice as likely to get cancer of the colon, and four times as likely to get multiple myeloma." The researchers, whose findings will be published in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, call for further research in other workplaces using the chemical, adding. "In the meantime, perhaps MBT should be handled with increased care as it may be a human carcinogen." Unite senior regional organiser Peter Hughes commented: "If it is shown there is a link between cancer and the chemical then the union would pursue compensation claims on behalf of workers affected." The report examined the impact of MBT on workers who had come into contact with the chemical between 1955-1986 and its effects up to 2005. Among the 2,160 plant employees analysed, 336 had worked in a job that would have exposed them to MBT.

- [Daily Post.](#) [Evening Leader.](#) [BBC News Online.](#)
- Tom Sorahan and others. Cancer risks in chemical production workers exposed to 2-mercaptobenzothiazole, *Online First Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 2009. doi: 10.1136/oem.2008.041400

Firm fined for asbestos exposures

A West Midlands firm has been fined after untrained workers were exposed to asbestos during electrical work. Scriven Electrical Contractors Ltd was fined £3,000 and ordered to pay £2,757 in costs by West Bromwich magistrates for breaching the Control of

Asbestos Regulations 2006. The court heard that an electrician employed by Scriven installed three heat detectors and cabling in a commercial sized kitchen and boiler room. Although the ceiling tiles contained 5-50 per cent brown asbestos, no asbestos awareness training was given by his employer prior to commencement of the work. Speaking after the case, HSE inspector John Healy said: "Scrivens should have known of the dangers and the legal requirement to give sufficient training to protect employees from exposure to asbestos because 98 per cent of their work involves the risk of encountering asbestos. Those responsible for employees ordinarily have a legal duty to protect their health and safety but, in the case of asbestos those involved in building or refurbishment must know that any disturbance of such a dangerous material should only be completed by trained workers."

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

Two injured in lift fall

A Scottish firm has been fined £10,000 after two workers fell from an unguarded lift shaft. One man fell over ten metres while his colleague fell two metres. The pair avoided a falling concrete lintel, which weighed 110kg, but both still suffered serious injuries in the incident. Dundee-based Tricon Construction Ltd pleaded guilty at Dundee Sheriff Court to a breach of safety law. The men were working to cap the lift shaft and were manoeuvring concrete lintels using a scaffold as a means of access. Part of this scaffold was unstable and tipped when the workers stood on it, causing the men to fall down the outside of the lift shaft. The access scaffold had not been correctly erected and there was a gap of between 0.5 and 1.0 metres between the existing floor and the wall of the lift shaft. Commenting after the case, HSE inspector Murray Provan said the Sherriff had "quite rightly" identified the possibility the incident could have resulted in a double fatality. "Competence, as highlighted in the recent Construction (Design and Management) Regulations, is the key to preventing such accidents, both in the management of site activities and in the individual worker possessing the skills and experience to complete the work properly and safely," he said. "A further HSE campaign on refurbishment work throughout the construction industry will take place during March 2009."

- [HSE news release](#).

Payout for railway injury whistleblower

A rail worker has been awarded £200,000 in compensation for being sacked after he blew the whistle on a manager who asked him to lie about a workplace injury. Jim Glencross, 58, from Carlisle, said Network Rail sacked him because he reported unsafe working practices which led to a colleague being injured. Network Rail insisted Mr Glencross was sacked for serious safety offences. However, Mr Glencross successfully argued at an employment tribunal he had been unfairly dismissed. The tribunal in Carlisle awarded Mr Glencross the six-figure sum to compensate him for

lost earnings and pension. Mr Glencross said he had originally been pressured into making a false statement about the accident, which he witnessed in 2004. But after changing his statement he was sacked. The case centred on an accident on the West Coast Main Line near Shap in 2004, witnessed by Mr Glencross, when a colleague fell from an unstable metal structure while working on overhead lines. The structure should have been clamped in place but Mr Glencross and the injured man were using an unauthorised wooden ladder to support it - a practice encouraged by managers because it saved time, they told the tribunal. But the ladder slipped, the structure jolted, and the worker fell, breaking his leg. Mr Glencross and his colleague said they were put under pressure to make false statements, covering up how they cut corners. An earlier tribunal hearing unanimously decided Mr Glencross had been unfairly dismissed. In a statement, Network Rail said: "We maintain that Mr Glencross was dismissed as a result of misconduct with regard to safety on the railway, something we take extremely seriously. We remain disappointed that the court did not share this view." It added that the award was for lost income, and was not punitive. The company said its lawyers were considering the decision. A further hearing is due to be held to determine whether Mr Glencross was victimised before his dismissal.

- [Cumberland News](#). [BBC News Online](#).

International News

Global: Privatisation linked to increased death risk

The rapid mass privatisation that followed the break up of the Soviet Union fuelled a massive increase in death rates among men, research suggests. One million working-age men died between 1989 and 2002 from the "economic shock" of mass privatisation following the collapse of the Soviet Union, according the report in *The Lancet* medical journal. The researchers said their findings should act as a warning to other nations that are beginning to embrace widespread market reform. The research, which analysed the deaths of three million working-age men in former communist countries, suggests that at least one third were victims of privatisation, which resulted in widespread unemployment and social disruption. The study defined rapid, massive privatisation as the disposal of at least 25 per cent of large state-owned enterprises to the private sector within a two-year period. In countries where this happened, unemployment surged and the death rate rose by 12.8 per cent. The researchers found that countries with stronger social support networks withstood the turmoil far better. Where 45 per cent or more of the population were members of at least one social organisation, such as a church group or trade union, mass privatisation did not increase mortality. The authors, led by Oxford University sociologist David Stuckler, wrote: "The policy implications are clear. Great caution should be taken when macroeconomic policies seek radically to overhaul the economy without considering potential effects on the population's health." In an accompanying article, Professor Martin Bobak and Professor Sir Michael Marmot, from University College London, said the findings were relevant today. "Countries in other regions are, and have been, undergoing economic and social transitions," they wrote. "That the extent and speed of such changes are important is increasingly apparent."

- David Stuckler, Lawrence King and Martin McKee. [Mass privatisation and the post-communist mortality crisis: a cross-national analysis](#), The Lancet, Early Online Publication, 15 January 2009. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(09)60005-2
- Martin Bobak and Michael Marmot. [Societal transition and health](#), The Lancet, Early Online Publication, 15 January 2009 doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(09)60043-X
- [NUPGE news report](#). [Radio Free Europe](#). [BBC News Online](#).

USA: Nanotech safety may get higher priority

Draft legislation put forward by a top US government committee suggests nanotechnology safety may be set to take a higher priority. The House Science and Technology Committee has just introduced new legislation, the latest recognition of the need to strengthen federal efforts to learn more about the potential environmental and health and safety risks posed by engineered nanomaterials. The new bill is almost identical to legislation that passed in the House last year with overwhelming bi-partisan support. The Senate was expected to approve similar legislation, but lawmakers ran out of time. "We know that when materials are developed at the nanoscale that they pose potential risks that do not appear at the macroscale," said David Rejeski, the director of the Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies. "This new bill shows that lawmakers recognise both nanotechnology's enormous promise and possible problems. The legislation reflects mounting Congressional interest in understanding potential risks in order to protect the public and to encourage safe commercial development and investment." The House bill comes only weeks after a National Research Council (NRC) panel issued a highly critical report describing serious shortfalls in the Bush administration's strategy to better understand the health and safety risks of nanotechnology and to effectively manage those potential risks ([Risks 387](#)).

- [Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies news report](#).

USA: The union role in NY air crash miracle

They're calling it 'the miracle on the Hudson' - the successful emergency landing last week of a US Airways jet in the Hudson River and subsequent rescue of all 155 passengers and crew. They're detailing the heroism of all involved, starting with the pilot and including cabin crew, ferry crews and first responders. But what they are not telling you, bloggers have revealed, is that every single one of these heroes is a union member. Most of the tributes have been directed at the pilot, 57-year-old Chesley B Sullenberger III. Unable to get back to La Guardia airport, he made a command decision to avoid densely populated areas of New York and try for the Hudson. When all the passengers were out, the pilot walked up and down the aisle twice to make sure the plane was empty, officials said. Sullenberger is a former national committee member and the former safety chair of his union, the Airline Pilots Association. He and his union have fought to ensure pilots get the kind of safety training to pull off the Hudson "miracle". The flight attendants who made sure the passengers followed safe practices are members of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA.

According to the blogger Marcy Wheeler of Emptywheel, "this should remind all of us that flight attendants are first and foremost safety professionals - they should not be treated like cocktail waitresses." Others credited with helping to avert catastrophe, including air traffic controllers, ferry crews and emergency service workers, are hail from unionised workplaces.

- [AFL-CIO Now](#). Blog coverage on [Emptywheel](#) and [Examiner](#). [BBC News Online](#).

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