

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 rebuke for official 'don't prosecute' line

A government report saying safety enforcers 'should not generally prosecute or impose a punitive sanction' on some small and medium sized firms (SMEs) guilty of criminal workplace safety violations has received a strong rebuke from the TUC. The union body was reacting to a 5 March government response to the Anderson review of health and safety business guidance. The business department (BERR) response said: "The government agrees in principle that where an enforcement authority has discretion over what enforcement action is taken, they should not generally prosecute or impose a punitive sanction where a business has reasonably followed their advice and there are no other factors which indicate that a prosecution would be appropriate."

Responding to another Anderson recommendation that could put additional pressure on safety enforcers not to act, BERR said: "The Better Regulation Executive will explore how to make it clearer to users the options for redress available to them, where they feel that they have received inaccurate guidance." A similar appeals system in the US has received widespread criticism as it has led to time-consuming challenges to official enforcement action, with the safety watchdog OSHA routinely making concessions or avoiding enforcement action in the first place. TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson said there was no evidence inspectors in the UK were taking unjustified prosecutions, something borne-out by officially-backed studies. He warned: "One minor infringement can lead to death. The reality is the law is there to protect working people and if employers obey it they have nothing to fear." He indicated the Anderson report and the government response painted an inaccurate picture of the current regulatory system. "Health and safety law says you have a duty to protect the health and safety of people at work and those affected by work but only as far as is reasonably practicable. Therefore, if something is not reasonably practical then the duty holder cannot be prosecuted," he said.

- [BERR news release](#) and Government response to the Anderson review, March 2009 [[pdf](#)]. [Environmental Health News](#).

HSE must act on management failings

The Health and Safety Executive's new strategy must address management failings and should be backed up by new legal safety duties on company directors, unions have said. The call for new directors' duties echoes that made by safety professionals' organisation IOSH in its submission to HSE's strategy consultation ([Risks 397](#)). IOSH also called on HSE to 'beef up' its strategy goals. Now the union GMB has said the emphasis of the strategy should be on ensuring management meets its safety duties. Dan Shears, from GMB's health and safety department, said: "A new strategy of specifically tackling management failure is key in reducing the number of workplace fatalities and accidents in the UK. Senior managers giving health and safety priority could transform performance in the UK and mean that far fewer workers die each year. This is why GMB are calling for formal legal duties on directors as a part of our submission on HSE's new strategy." He added: "We think it is absolutely essential that someone takes responsibility

when a worker is killed by their work. Corporate directors can face huge penalties for financial misdemeanours but no one is held to account when a worker is killed at work." A submission to the HSE consultation from construction union UCATT said the HSE plan was short on detail and "provides no direction as to how it wants to achieve the improvements it acknowledges are necessary." The submission says it is virtually impossible to judge the effectiveness of the strategic plan because it "contains extremely little information and is outlined in very general terms." The UCATT submission says HSE must stop relying on voluntary action and should instead take a more active enforcement role and should press for the introduction of statutory directors' duties. It adds there should be renewed support for roving safety reps.

- [GMB news release](#) and full submission [[pdf](#)]. [Contract Journal](#).

UNISON welcomes meat industry report

A report calling for a review of the 'light touch' enforcement of meat hygiene and for more resources for food safety has been welcomed by the meat inspectors' union UNISON. The union had earlier warned that there had been too little support for meat hygiene workers. A UNISON survey had found 73 per cent of workers had witnessed bullying or harassment, with 57 per cent being subjected to it themselves. Forms included intimidation (36 per cent), abuse (29 per cent), malicious rumours (21 per cent), keeping staff out of decisions (31 per cent) and humiliation (28 per cent). Respondents put the bullying down to inadequate training, stressed managers and staff shortages. The Pennington inquiry report, published on 19 March, called for more resources to be put into food safety. The inquiry followed a huge E.coli outbreak in South Wales, which killed a boy, five-year-old Mason Jones, and left over 150 people ill. UNISON national officer Simon Watson commented: "It is absolutely crucial that the industry acts on these recommendations to restore public confidence. We welcome 'light touch' enforcement being reviewed, as it is clear that it simply isn't working." He added: "The industry must not be allowed to inspect itself and we are deeply concerned that the government is pushing the EU to allow for more self-regulation in plants. Meat hygiene inspectors should be allowed to get on with their job of protecting the public from bad meat and not be intimidated or harassed by owners." Mr Watson said UNISON members had warned of bad practice at the plant responsible for the South Wales outbreak. "If their warnings had been heeded then five-year-old Mason Jones would still be alive today," he said.

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

Rugby star cleared of asthma drugs charge

A professional rugby player who tested positive for his asthma medication has fought off a ban threat with the help of his union. GMB member Ian Sibbit, a second-row forward with Salford City Reds, found himself facing drug misuse charges after an independent drugs test last year showed high levels of the asthma drug salbutamol in his system. Having suffered from asthma since

birth, Ian uses a salbutamol inhaler to control his breathing during a match. He had been issued a Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE) form which he believed allowed him to use salbutamol freely. But while the Rugby Football League (RFL) accepted this, the World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) did not and pressed for a two year ban. A WADA appeal found he had misunderstood the TUE and was using the inhaler too often. But with the backing of his club and his union, Ian has now been told he will not be banned from the game. Instead he was reprimanded of the use of inhaler, but can continue to play. Ian commented: "Rugby league is my life and I have never taken any performance enhancing drugs. The thought that I could be banned for two years has hung over me and I now look forward to concentrating on my game. I have now been advised by the doctor on ways to manage my asthma effectively." Geoff Burrow from the GMB's sports section said: "GMB are only too happy to support Ian in his fight to clear his name. It is unfortunate that he has had this appeal hanging over him since the start of the season in September. However he has proved his strength of mind by continuing to perform well for Salford City Reds."

- [GMB news release](#). [Manchester Evening News](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Post union slams 'sick' dog attack posters

A rail company poster showing a postal worker being attacked by a dog has been denounced as 'sick' by the post union CWU. The union accused South Eastern Trains of 'acting irresponsibly'. The poster, promoting the rails firm's season tickets by post system, includes an illustration of a postman being attacked by a dog, with the strapline: "Good news for you - bad news for the postman." CWU national health and safety officer Dave Joyce said 6,000 postmen and women get attacked, bitten and mauled by dogs every year. "Many of the attacks result in serious debilitating physical injuries and mental trauma for CWU members," he said. "Many never fully recover. Two of our members nearly died when attacked by dogs in the last two years." He added: "It's unforgivable for a major rail company to depict the very serious problem of dog attacks on postal workers in such a light hearted, flippant way. It's no joke and this type of thing simply encourages those irresponsible dog owners to continue not taking their responsibilities seriously." CWU has written to South Eastern Trains asking them to get rid of the posters from their railway stations and to act more responsibly. The union launched its Bite-Back campaign last year to highlight the dog attacks problem. It is seeking government's support for changes to dangerous dogs legislation. It also wants to see the law better enforced by the police and harsher penalties on offenders. Angela Smith MP has secured a Ten Minute Rule Bill seeking to close a loophole in the law on dangerous dogs which leaves people with no protection when attacks occur on private property.

- [CWU news release](#). [BBC Politics Show](#). [Scotland on Sunday](#).

Firm must screen out bus attacks

A major bus company is leaving its drivers at risk of attack by refusing to provide safety screens, the union GMB has said. The union has accused Brighton Bus Company of failing to protect its staff from assaults by not installing protective screens on all of its fleet. Rob Macey, GMB's organiser for Brighton Bus Company, said: "Assaults by passengers have long been a problem at the bus company", with at least 15 assaults occurring last year. He said one assault was particularly violent and meant the union member has been unable to return to work. "The company is ensuring that all new buses have screens installed but has refused to upgrade its existing fleet," Mr Macey said. "Staff have previously asked them to ensure that all vehicles have protective screens installed, but have been told that this will not be done as it is not 'economical'." The union says if the screens are not put in place soon then it could result in lives being lost. But it says the company has refused to consult the GMB on health and safety matters and has barred its stewards from attending health and safety meetings. "GMB believes that cost should not be a factor when considering the health and safety of staff and is calling on Brighton Bus Company to install protective screens on all of its buses," Mr Macey said. On 18 March, the day after the GMB warning, another member was assaulted in Brighton. The bus driver had a cup of urine thrown at him by louts in a van.

- [GMB news release](#) and [update](#). [Brighton Argus](#).

Rail maintenance drop-off criticised

Train drivers' union ASLEF has written to the heads of all UK train companies to raise its concerns about a dramatic reduction in rail maintenance. General secretary Keith Norman is asking for their views on Network Rail's decision to cut back on track renewals and maintenance. The union's executive insists that if any accident occurs as a direct result of reduced maintenance routines "train travel in Britain will come to a standstill". Mr Norman has told train companies of his alarm at Network Rail's admission that it plans "huge reduction in track renewals expenditure." According to the union leader: "This irresponsible decision will have a direct and negative impact on the provision of passenger rail and freight services." ASLEF said Network Rail's actions undermine government commitments to bring forward rail infrastructure projects to boost employment. It added that it is "appalled" that Network Rail is prepared to cut the frequency of track inspections and routine signals maintenance on cost grounds. "The cumulative effect of these measures – less maintenance and renewals – will be to significantly raise safety risks to passengers and industry employees," Mr Norman said. He warned of "another Hatfield, Potters Bar or Grayrigg" and said all ASLEF members would react instantly if this happened again. "How many times do we need to learn the same lesson?", he said.

- [ASLEF news release](#). Related [Early Day Motion](#).

Action ballot over rail lone working

Nearly 100 revenue protection officers (RPOs) working for Southern Railway are to be balloted for industrial action over the threat of lone working, loss of commission and worsening roster and holiday arrangements. The ballot, for action short of a strike, will open next week and comes after the company ignored a union warning that ending the arrangement under which RPOs work in pairs would increase the risk of assault. "Southern should be ashamed that in a blatant attempt to maximise profits it is prepared to expose staff handling money to greater risk of assault and cut their pay at the same time," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said. "If that wasn't bad enough they are also imposing rosters that make it more difficult to balance work with family life and making it more difficult to take time off. Revenues, passengers and profits are all still rising at Southern, and only last month its parent group boasted of another record year, but they are putting their ruthless pursuit of profit ahead of safety and service." The RMT leader added: "Our members are telling us that they will not accept the chipping away at their safety, pay and conditions, and the union will be urging them to vote for action to stop this needless attack."

- [RMT news release](#).

Probe call into strike safety breaches

Reports of serious safety lapses by London Midland managers undertaking striking train conductors' duties should be investigated urgently, rail union RMT has said. RMT says it understands that passengers were put at risk of serious injury when a manager put in charge of a 12-car commuter train last week opened doors on all twelve carriages when it stopped at an eight-car platform at Bletchley during the morning peak. The union understands that the stand-in manager failed to follow the normal procedure of isolating the doors of the rear four carriages to ensure that they did not open, leaving commuters at risk of falling onto the track. In a separate incident the union says it understands managers undergoing refresher training on a train out of Euston managed to leave the real conductor behind, and that the train ran without a conductor as far as Watford. RMT called on the railways inspectorate to investigate the competency of managers undertaking conductors' duties as well as the procedures followed by the company. "We said before Friday's strike that London Midland was being reckless by forcing managers to take on safety critical duties after a three-day refresher, when it requires three months to train a conductor," RMT general secretary Bob Crow said. "If the reports we have received are borne out they would underline our fears and show that London Midland is treating the safety of its passengers and staff with utter contempt. If the company put as much effort into settling this dispute as it has into trying to undermine our members' rock-solid action there wouldn't be a strike, and it is time they got round the table and talked seriously to us." The strike involves 100 train conductors working at London Midland depots at Bletchley, Northampton and Watford.

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

Cancer warning on night work

A top UK occupational health researcher has warned that the UK authorities are lagging behind their Scandinavian counterparts when it comes to action on night work hazards, linked to cancer and other chronic health hazards. Stirling University's Professor Andrew Watterson said the problem was being neither properly recognised nor addressed in the UK. His comments came after the Danish authorities recognised night work as a breast cancer risk to women. There, the government has paid compensation to women who have developed breast cancer after long spells working nights, with over 40 receiving payouts so far. The Danish authorities acted following a finding by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), an arm of the UN's World Health Organisation, which found night work was a probably cause of cancer in humans ([Risks 335](#)). Professor Watterson, head of Stirling University's Occupational and Environmental Health Research Group, said the UK is far behind Scandinavia in recognising the dangers. He said: "The evidence has been good over a long period of time about cardiovascular disease and night work, gastrointestinal problems and nights. Work indicates there may be risks in terms of low birth-weight babies and longer pregnancies for women." He added: "We don't tend to identify the damage being done where shift working is prevalent and I think that's an error. The damage is there but we don't see it and we don't count it." However, the Health and Safety Executive's chief medical officer, Dr John Osman, commented: "The HSE has been very on the ball in this area and has commissioned a very eminent epidemiologist to examine the risk of working at night and whether there is any link to breast cancer. This report will be completed in 2011." HSE's 2006 shiftwork guidance says 3.5 million in the UK work shifts, but makes no reference to a potential cancer risk ([Risks 268](#)). Shiftwork has been linked frequently to problems including breast cancer ([Risks 222](#)), heightened accident risk ([Risks 178](#)), heart disease risk factors ([Risks 266](#)) and pregnancy problems ([Risks 237](#)).

- [BBC News Online](#) and [The Investigation radio show](#). [The Scotsman](#). [Telegraph](#). [Daily Mail](#). [The Guardian](#).

Usdaw backs retail crime crackdown

Shopworkers' union Usdaw is calling on retail employers to work with local police to crackdown on shoplifting. The union is urging shop owners to act on new government guidance on ways local CDRPs (Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships) and neighbourhood police can work with retail employers to reduce crime. The guidance gives examples of good practice, including Co-ops in North Wales simply encouraging police to take their tea breaks in the local stores. The guide aims to overcome the lack of knowledge about CDRPs and neighbourhood policing and to dispel the view that most retail crime isn't worth reporting because the police aren't interested. Usdaw general secretary John Hannett commented: "This new guidance supports our Freedom From Fear campaign; aiming to reduce violence against shopworkers. Much violence that occurs in stores is a result of shopworkers challenging people committing theft. If we can cut theft in the first place, the

workers will be less at risk." He added: "Shop theft isn't victimless. The police realise this and are looking at ways to address the issue. But they need retail employers to work with them, which is why we are urging store managers to look at this guidance and create working partnerships with their local force."

- [Usdaw news release](#) and [Freedom from Fear campaign](#). [Home Office CDRPs website](#).

Government pledge to end blacklists

The government has pledged to put an end to blacklisting of safety reps and other union activists. Harriet Harman, deputy leader of the Labour Party, told the House of Commons on 12 March that the government would be working with the Information Commissioner and unions to ensure that these "scurrilous activities" are ended. Ms Harman said: "I don't think a trade union health and safety representative should find they are on a blacklist and will never be able to work again. We are totally opposed to that and want to make sure there is most effective enforcement of it." Ms Harman was replying to a parliamentary question from MP Mick Clapham. His Early Day Motion is demanding that the laws on blacklisting, which are already in place, should be implemented immediately. The 1999 Employment Relations Act included provisions to make blacklisting illegal. But these provisions have never been enacted into law. UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie welcomed the government commitment. He said: "It will be the first step in the fight for justice for our members who have been discriminated against and denied work purely because of their trade union activities." Last week, the Information Commissioner revealed that the Consulting Association had files on over 3,000 construction workers. Over 40 construction companies, including major names in the industry, were clients ([Risks 397](#)). UCATT said it is "believed that health and safety representatives have been a particular target of blacklists." The union added: "Many safety representatives have reported being laid off or finding it difficult to secure work after highlighting unsafe sites and dangerous working practices. It is feared that this has impacted on site safety."

- [UCATT news release](#). [Contract Journal](#). [Building](#). [Construction News](#). [The Scotsman](#). [The Guardian](#).
- [EDM 1020 - Blacklisting in construction](#).

Recession ups the pressure on workers

The economic recession is making 44 per cent of British workers feel more pressured in the workplace, a survey has found. The survey carried out by YouGov for safety professionals' organisation IOSH found nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of the workers who were feeling more pressured identified job insecurity as the cause. Nattasha Freeman, the president of IOSH, said: "The worry from these findings is that more people are getting trapped by the pressures of living to work, rather than working to live. Pressure isn't always a bad thing, it can of course be a positive motivator for some, but too much prolonged pressure is not good. Being overly

pressured can affect an individual's efficiency, frustrate teamwork and, on a personal level, it can impact on family life." She added: "Having a health agenda in the workplace really can help workers who feel pressured, and it can help you save money in the long run." Health and safety minister, Lord McKenzie of Luton, told the IOSH conference this week that the economic downturn didn't mean the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) would be letting up. "The economic climate over the next few months is going to be testing, but that doesn't mean the duties around health and safety have gone away," he said. "The HSE and its inspectors will not weaken their position on health and safety. Skimping on health and safety is wrong – the financial and reputational consequences can be severe."

- [IOSH news release](#) and [conference release](#).

Asbestos is in 90 per cent of schools

Nearly nine in 10 schools contain deadly asbestos, the Daily Mirror has claimed. The paper's charge is based on results from freedom of information requests made to local authorities across the UK. More than a dozen councils responded, admitting that 2,917 out of their 3,286 schools were built using asbestos. The Mirror says this means that in total more than 22,000 of Britain's 25,000 schools could be contaminated with asbestos. It adds that between 1980 and 2005, 178 teachers died from mesothelioma, a cancer caused by inhaling asbestos dust – "and worryingly the number is rising." Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of teaching union ATL told the paper: "For every teacher who may have been exposed to asbestos, up to 30 children have probably been similarly exposed." She added: "Because asbestos-related illnesses take between 15 to 60 years to develop it is impossible to know how many will become ill or die as a result of exposure." Chris Keates, general secretary of teaching union NASUWT, said: "Asbestos is a huge risk in schools and teachers are often unaware it is there."

- [Daily Mirror asbestos campaign blog](#).

Pet food firm fined for death

A dog food manufacturer in Surrey has been fined £157,500 after one of its workers was crushed to death in packing machinery - but manslaughter charges on company bosses were dropped. The equipment at Naturediet Pet Foods at Hazelbridge Farm, Chiddingfold, exerted a 24st pressure on 40-year-old Marcus Snow, the Old Bailey heard. He was working on a semi automatic 'off load machine', used to transfer finished cartons of dog food onto a conveyor, when the machine became jammed. Mr Snow crawled into the front entrance of the machine in an attempt to clear the suspected jam when the pneumatic pick-up unit descended and pinned him to the stack of trays. The court was told that approved safety measures were not in force and workers adapted methods such as using broom handles to unblock jams in the machinery. There was also a faulty safety mechanism that exposed workers to a risk of being trapped or crushed. The company had also failed to

act after being warned about the failures two years before the tragedy on 2 February 2006. Sentencing, Judge Giles Forrester said the firm bore a "high level of culpability" for the death. He said: "These are serious breaches because important safety devices which should have been in place to protect employees had been deliberately overridden thereby putting the staff at risk. The risks of serious death or injury were obvious and significant. They had existed for a significant period of time. No reasonable employer could have overlooked them." Judge Forrester said the company had put the needs of production ahead of safety and corners were cut in an attempt to save time. Chairman and founder of Naturediet Robin Orrow, 61, and his son Andrew, 38, were charged with manslaughter and put on trial at the Old Bailey. Half way through the case the prosecution dropped the charge and accepted a plea from Naturediet to failing to discharge its duty under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. No costs order was made.

- [HSE news release](#). [Get Surrey](#). [Sussex Express](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Thorntons fined over crushed fingers

Chocolate retailer Thorntons has been fined £12,000 after an employee had his hand crushed by a machine. Derby Magistrates' Court heard Ashley Taylor, 23, was carrying out work at its factory in Somercotes in 2007 when he slipped and got trapped in rollers. The company was also ordered to pay costs of £4,548 after it pleaded guilty to breaching health and safety regulations. Mr Taylor was standing on a conveyor belt to cool a depositor, which puts the filling into the centre of chocolates, when he slipped on a wet mat. As he slipped, his hand was thrust inside the depositor hopper, and into the rotating rollers. Although a trip bar was provided around the hopper it was not correctly positioned to protect someone standing on the conveyor, and his hand was trapped. He broke two bones, suffered severe tissue damage and needed the assistance of the fire service to be freed. He has not been able to return to work since. HSE inspector Noelle Walker said: "In this case, a combination of the wet surface and inadequately guarded rollers led to this injury, which could so easily have been avoided. This is just one of a significant number of accidents involving the cleaning and maintenance of food machinery and companies must ensure that they have the right systems in place to protect their staff from hazardous situations."

- [HSE news release](#) and [STEP slip prevention guidance](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Worker scarred by molten plastic

A Huddersfield firm has been fined just £1,250 after a worker received permanent scars from molten plastic. Forteq (UK) was also ordered at Huddersfield Magistrates' Court to pay costs of £2,224.40 after pleading guilty to a charge under the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992. The prosecution followed an incident on 20 June 2008 when an employee of the company suffered burn injuries as molten plastic sprayed onto his face, neck and arms as he was stripping the barrel of an injection

moulding machine. The employee, who was not wearing eye, face or arm protection, remains visibly scarred. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector Andrea Jones commented: "This case demonstrates the importance of employers not only providing suitable personal protective equipment for workers, but also ensuring its day-to-day use. In this case the company, which failed to monitor the working practices of its employees, signally failed to ensure that the appropriate personal protection was being worn, resulting in the burn injuries. There were no written procedures or risk assessments in place before the incident which specified that face visors, long sleeve gauntlets and work overalls were necessary for this work. The employee was fortunate that the molten plastic did not spray into his eyes." She added: "After the incident HSE served an improvement notice requiring the company to implement a safe system for maintenance work on injection moulding machines where there is a risk of a person receiving burn injuries from molten plastic."

- [HSE news release.](#) [Huddersfield Daily Examiner.](#)

International News

Australia: Execs get bonuses to deny payouts

Executives of Australia's national postal firm are being paid bonuses for reducing worker compensation costs, a union has alleged. Australia Post has denied that doctors are being pressured to dismiss injury claims. But the Communications Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) secretary for New South Wales, Jim Metcher, maintains Australia Post pressured doctors into writing medical reports dismissive of injury claims, while executives are receiving bonuses for cutting compensation costs. CEPU believes the lucrative bonuses at Australia Post have led to a culture in which managers deny injured workers their entitlements. "There are literally hundreds of people that are caught up in this," Jim Metcher said. "It needs to stop now." He said rewards and pay bonuses for executives who rip-off workers and undermine their personal safety are "simply not on." One long-serving Australia Post employee, Gail Seaton, said she was diagnosed with a painful repetitive strain injury - epicondylitis - by her GP, but a company-appointed specialist subsequently denied the condition was still active. She said Australia Post used the specialist's evidence to deny her compensation claim and then forced her out of her job because she could not perform her duties. CEPU met with the federal communications minister this week to raise its concerns.

- [Herald Sun.](#) [ABC News.](#)

Finland: Researchers warn of nano catastrophe

There are over 600 products in the shops based on nanomaterials, but we know barely anything about the risks, a Finnish expert has warned. Kai Savolainen, director of nanotechnology safety research at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH), said when the economic expectations are big, there is a tendency to ignore the health risks. Savolainen draws parallels between asbestos and

nanotechnology. He says the asbestos experience should now serve as a wake up call. "Let us not allow the 20th century asbestos catastrophe to be followed by a nano catastrophe," he said. His FIOH colleague, Tuure Hurme, said only one per cent of the research resources on nanotechnology are directed towards risk assessments. The greatest risks concern employees at the production and scrapping stages, he said, where there are already millions of people employed.

- [Trade Union News from Finland.](#)

USA: Workers failed by old lead standard

Americans who work with lead and their families are still at risk of developing serious chronic health conditions, according to a new report. 'Indecent exposure', published this week by health researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, notes: "As scientific evidence has shown more serious health effects associated with lower lead levels than previously anticipated, the number of persons who must be considered at risk increases dramatically." It says the official workplace safety watchdog, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), has ignored more than 30 years of medical evidence showing that its lead regulations are no longer protective. These standards were introduced in 1978 to protect industrial workers from acute lead exposure. But the UC Berkeley team says there is compelling evidence of harm from long-term exposure to much lower levels of lead than OSHA allows in the workplace. And family members can be poisoned by lead dust on workers' clothing, increasing the risk of developmental problems in young children. Even at very low levels – much lower than the US and UK exposure limits – workers are at risk of heart and kidney problems and decreased brain function and reproductive problems. The UC Berkeley team calls for the revision of OSHA standards and recommends measures including eliminating unnecessary uses of lead, substituting safer compounds, and expanding education and outreach for employers and workers. "Clearly, current workplace standards are not protecting workers and their families from unsafe lead exposure. Ignoring the mountains of evidence is no longer an option," said Holly Brown-Williams, one of the report authors. "Health problems caused by lead can, and must, be prevented." The call is backed by Dr Philip Landrigan, an expert on lead toxicity at New York's Mount Sinai School of Medicine. "The continuing overexposure of American workers to lead and the persistent occurrence of occupational lead poisoning is a national scandal," he said.

- Indecent exposure: Lead puts workers and families at risk, Perspectives, volume 4, number 1, March 2009 [[pdf](#)]. [The Pump Handle](#)

USA: Movement at last on popcorn lung

The US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), reversing years of foot dragging while the agency was controlled by the Bush administration, is moving quickly to protect workers from

a serious lung disease caused by diacetyl, the artificial butter flavouring added to popcorn and other food products. Official safety watchdog OSHA announced this week that it was fast-tracking a standard to protect workers from exposure to diacetyl by withdrawing a last-minute Bush-issued procedure that could have added two years to the standard-setting process. In recent years, hundreds of workers in plants where diacetyl is produced or applied to food have developed the rare and sometimes fatal disease, bronchiolitis obliterans, also known as "popcorn lung." Lynn Woolsey, the chair of the Workforce Protections Subcommittee of the House Education and Labor Committee, said Solis' action will withdraw a Bush era procedural roadblock. "This is good news for the thousands of workers who handle this dangerous food flavouring, all who up until now have done so at the risk of their own health," she said. Just days ago, a federal jury awarded \$7.5 million to an Iowa man who had developed popcorn lung from his work as a butter flavour "mixer" in the 1990s. But Ronald Kuiper, 69, died of lung and heart failure the day before the 12 March verdict. At the time of his death, less than 30 per cent of his breathing capacity remained, a newspaper reported.

- [OSHA news release](#). [Lynn Woolsey statement](#). [AFL-CIO Now](#). [The Pump Handle](#). [Andrew Schneider Investigates](#).

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

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