

Risks

TUC 

e-bulletin

Number 401 – 11 April 2009

**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

Injured firefighters win pensions fight
Teachers report widespread abuse
Bullying bosses led to rail action
HSE faces haemorrhage of expert staff
Union anger as helicopters resume rig flights
Strain injury takes away a future
Firm fails but claim succeeds
Slip leads to months off work

Other news

Construction deaths report is delayed
Minister announces crane safety register
Government defends excessive working time
One company, two cancers, two generations
Airport asbestos killed woman
Workplace illness 'to get worse'
Union welcomes betting shop move

International News

Australia: Union slams fatalities 'spin doctoring'
Colombia: 'Fatally flawed' safety blights US mine
Europe: 'No data, no market' for nano
USA: Safety watchdog failed under Bush
USA: Popcorn peril spreads to sweets

Resources

Global trade and safety newsletter

Events and Courses

Work stress conference, 21-22 November 2009
TUC courses for safety reps

Useful Links

Injured firefighters win pensions fight

Firefighters' union FBU has welcomed a landmark legal win in its fight over pensions and jobs for injured and sick firefighters. A judicial review at the Court of Appeal this week upheld a legal challenge by three London firefighters who had their ill-health and injury pensions removed under changes to the service's pension scheme. The Court of Appeal agreed with London firefighters Martin Marrion, Neil Burke and Andrew Scott that leaving them with neither a job nor a pension was unfair. The new guidance, issued in September 2006, meant that if a firefighter was still capable of doing any small part of their work they would not get a pension even if the Fire Brigade could not offer them a suitable job. The appeal court described the secretary of state's case as "deeply unattractive" because it leads to a "no job, no pension" consequence where there is operational unfitness but no redeployment available. FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "This is a tremendous victory for the Fire Brigades Union after a long and hard fight. The court's ruling is a victory for fairness and common sense. The government's view that disabled or badly injured firefighters should be sacked without a pension has been scandalous and repugnant. Our members routinely put their lives in danger and to deny them a pension if they are unable to work as a result of being injured is totally unacceptable." He added: "We now call on the government to urgently redraft the guidance to restore ill-health pensions to firefighters unable to work due to injury or disability. It must make that re-drafted guidance retrospective to restore pensions to any of our members who have already lost them."

- [FBU news release](#). [Morning Star](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Teachers report widespread abuse

Four in 10 school staff have faced verbal or physical aggression from a pupil's parent or guardian, according to teaching union ATL. And of the 1,000 teachers, lecturers, support staff and school leaders surveyed, a quarter said a pupil had attacked them. Over a third of teachers in primary schools said they had experienced physical aggression, compared with 20 per cent in secondary schools. Almost 60 per cent of those questioned thought pupil behaviour had worsened during the past five years. Around one third of teachers surveyed said that they had lost confidence as a result of the behaviour they had faced. Nearly 40 per cent of those surveyed had experienced some form of aggression from a student's parents or guardians. In most cases this was in the form of insults or derogatory comments, and intimidation such as threats or being sworn at. ATL general secretary Dr Mary Bousted said: "It is distressing that poor student behaviour continues to be a widespread problem in schools, and shocking that over a third of teaching staff have experienced aggression from students' parents or guardians." She added: "ATL firmly believes that no member of staff should be subjected to violent behaviour by either students or parents. Parents should be acting as good role models by supporting staff and helping them create a more positive learning environment for their children." Other survey results released last

week by ATL and Teacher Support Network revealed one in seven respondents said they had experienced cyberbullying and almost one in five said they knew of teaching colleagues who had become victims.”

- ATL [violence](#) and [cyberbullying](#) news releases. [The Times](#). [BBC News Online](#) and [related article](#).

Bullying bosses led to rail action

Around 100 station staff at seven stations on the Tube’s Jubilee Line stopped work for 24 hours this week over a breakdown in relations sparked by aggressive and bullying local management. RMT members at Willesden Green, Dollis Hill, Kilburn, West Hampstead, Finchley Road, Swiss Cottage and St John’s Wood stations had voted overwhelmingly for strike action after London Underground Limited (LUL) failed to take seriously complaints of bullying and intimidation. “There has been a surge in complaints about the complete disregard of attendance and disciplinary procedures at this station group, but LUL has so far buried its head in the sand,” RMT general secretary Bob Crow said ahead of the stoppage, which ran from the evening of Wednesday 8 April. “Our local reps have been unable to make any headway locally in dealing with blatant bullying, and the strike vote makes clear that our members have had enough. The manager involved was moved from another location after similar complaints nearly led to strikes five years ago, but it seems that senior management are now backing him. We are even hearing reports that LUL has been threatening new starters with the sack if they take strike action. That is illegal, and LUL knows it.”

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

HSE faces haemorrhage of expert staff

Workers are being put at risk because the Health and Safety Executive is haemorrhaging experienced staff, unions have warned. HSE staff unions Prospect and PCS have warned repeatedly that inadequate wages are causing more experienced staff to leave the safety watchdog. HSE acknowledges high staff turnover is a significant problem, with some sectors including its offshore and nuclear inspectorates particularly badly affected ([Risks 392](#)). In recent months, large numbers of staff have moved into industry or have switched from HSE to government departments, including health, justice and environment. Chris Hurley, chair of the PCS branch at the HSE’s Rose Court offices in London, says this problem is being compounded by the organisation’s decision to relocate the HSE head office to Bootle on Merseyside. She told Environmental Health News (EHN) that hundreds of experienced members of staff had left the organisation because they did not want to move to the new HQ. “Lots of the people leaving have worked for the HSE for 30 years or more. It will take a long time to replace their expertise and knowledge,” she said. “There will not be enough experienced members of staff to develop the vital guidance that helps identify and manage risks and dangers in the workplace.” So far only four HSE employees based in London out of a potential 320 have moved

to Bootle. Ms Hurley said morale among the HSE staff left at the organisation's former head office in London had "hit rock-bottom." She added: "The mood is very poor. Staff feel demoralised and undervalued. Management wants everybody out the door as quickly as possible."

- [Environmental Health News](#).

Union anger as helicopters resume rig flights

An offshore trade union has condemned Bond Helicopters, following the North Sea crash that claimed 16 lives last week, for resuming oil-rig flights using the same aircraft just 48 hours after the tragedy. Jake Molloy, of the RMT's offshore section, said it was "astonishing" that Bond Offshore Helicopters only grounded its fleet for two days before restarting business. The tragedy was the biggest offshore loss of life since the Piper Alpha explosion killed 167 in 1988. Mr Molloy told Scotland's Sunday Herald that his members had not been consulted by the company over plans to continue using the same helicopter. On Wednesday last week a Eurocopter Super Puma AS332 L2 MkII, operated by Bond, crashed into the North Sea as it was flying back from BP's Miller Platform. Sixteen men died. The Air Accident Investigation Branch (AAIB) is probing the crash. Bond grounded its fleet of Super Pumas as a mark of respect for the crash victims and their families. However, the firm resumed flights on Friday with the same model that plunged into the North Sea. Molloy also said the union had not been told of Bond's plan to re-start the flight: "They didn't consult us. There was no consideration given to that at all." He pointed to a recent helicopter crash in Newfoundland, Canada, that he said resulted in an entire fleet being grounded for safety checks. The union leader also supported calls for CHC, a firm that is continuing to use L2s to transport workers across the North Sea, to suspend its flights. On Monday a Super Puma operated by CHC had to make a "precautionary landing" while flying over the North Sea. The helicopter, with 19 passengers and two crew on board, landed on the Safe Caledonia after reporting a fuel problem on its way to Aberdeen from the Sedco 714 rig. The sixteen victims of last week's crash have been named as Captain Paul Burnham, 31, and co-pilot Richard Menzies, 24, both of whom worked for Bond Offshore Helicopters, along with rig workers Brian Barkley, 30; Vernon Elrick, 41; James Costello, 24; Alex Dallas, 62; Stuart Wood, 27; Leslie Taylor, 41; Nairn Ferrier, 40; Gareth Hughes, 53; David Rae, 63; Raymond Doyle, 57; James John Edwards, 33; Nolan Carl Goble, 34; Warren Mitchell, 38; and Mihails Zuravskis, 39. Most of the dead worked for drilling contractor KCA Deutag.

- [RMT news release](#). [Unite news release](#). [ITF news release](#). [Sunday Herald](#). [BBC News Online](#) and [related article](#). [Press and Journal](#). [Daily Express](#). [The Independent](#).

Strain injury takes away a future

A concrete technician who developed a debilitating workplace strain injury fears he may never find work again after he was made redundant. GMB member Paul Flintoff, 46, from Selston in Nottingham was diagnosed with carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS), a

painful lower arm disorder which can be caused by prolonged use of hand-held vibrating tools. Just a few days after receiving an £18,000 compensation settlement he was made redundant by Tarmac Precast Concrete, the firm he had been with for 22 years. Tarmac had admitted liability for his condition and settled the claim out of court. Mr Flintoff was among several members of staff who lost their jobs with the firm, which made concrete casts for use in building tunnels. He commented: "While working at Tarmac I was able to work in jobs where I didn't need to use power tools but now that I've been made redundant I worry that I'm unemployable. I'm restricted to the type of work I can do as a result of the CTS. It is only right that I received compensation for this injury which was caused me so much uncertainty."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Firm fails but claim succeeds

A GMB member whose shoulder was injured at work has received compensation even though his employer subsequently folded. David Billingham, 40, from Halesowen, received £3,500 after injuring his right shoulder while working as a caster for G Clancey Ltd. The firm went into administration in August 2006 and is still being wound up. David's injury happened in October 2006, just a few months before the staff were made redundant. He was pushing a trolley full of molten iron on a track, but the tracks were laid incorrectly. This caused the trolley to collide with a machine, with the resulting jolt injuring Mr Billingham's shoulder. He was forced to take a week off work and underwent intensive physiotherapy. He can no longer lift heavy objects. He decided to pursue compensation because despite similar accidents happening to his colleagues nothing had been done to fix the trolley's tracks. He said: "There had been a problem with this piece of equipment ever since it was installed and despite our continuous complaints nothing was ever done to fix it. By the time I had my accident I was so frustrated that I decided that the only way to get the equipment fixed was to take legal action."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#) [Halesowen News.](#)

Slip leads to months off work

A school caretaker had to take five months off work after slipping on a spill on the dining room floor. Unite member Jean Simpson, a caretaker at Abbey Primary School in Bloxwich, Walsall, was awarded compensation at trial for the fractured ankle bone suffered in the slip. Mrs Simpson was 58 at the time of the incident on 14 July 2005. The dining room floor was laid with thermoplastic tiles rather than the non slip flooring used in the classrooms. As a result of the injury she was unable to travel by air and had to cancel a pre-booked holiday to Florida. Her employer, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC), denied liability throughout. The case was heard at Dudley County Court where the judge found in Mrs Simpson's favour, awarding her £6,700 in compensation for her injuries. Richard P Johnson of Rowley Ashworth, the personal injury law firm acting for Mrs Simpson, said: "Walsall MBC attempted to defeat the claim by trying to show that Mrs Simpson fell in an area of the school which had non-slip flooring. The council produced witness evidence in an attempt to support this stance and the claim

was considered extremely high risk. The court rejected the council's argument and accepted that Mrs Simpson fell in an area of the school which was slippery when wet." He added: "With the continued support from Unite this case was able to reach trial and succeed. It is likely that without Unite's support such a high risk case would not have been pursued to trial."

- [Rowley Ashworth Solicitors news release](#).

Other news

Construction deaths report is delayed

Construction union UCATT has welcomed the decision to delay by two months an inquiry report into fatalities in the construction industry. The chair of the inquiry, Rita Donaghy, was due to have submitted her report to work and pensions secretary James Purnell by 30 April. It is now thought the submission date has slipped until late June. UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie commented: "When the inquiry was launched late last year we privately warned that there would not be sufficient time to examine all areas of the industry. Our concerns have now proved to be justified." He added: "I hope that the extra time that the inquiry will now have will mean that issues including statutory directors' duties, casualisation, gangmasters, blacklisting and endemic bogus self-employment will be properly examined. There was a real danger with a truncated inquiry was that these issues which are critical to site safety could have been glossed over." UCATT said it has raised repeatedly its concern the inquiry's scope be as wide as possible and not just "a paper shuffling exercise which purely looked at the inner machinations of the Health and Safety Executive." It has also complained that fatality case histories to be considered by the inquiry were hand-picked by HSE and so might not give a full reflection of the problems facing the industry.

- [UCATT news release](#). [Construction News](#). [Contract Journal](#).

Minister announces crane safety register

The government is to introduce a statutory register for tower cranes. The move, which comes after ministers had initially rejected the idea, follows pressure from unions and site safety campaigners. The new register has been agreed alongside a package of measures to improve tower crane safety and is likely to be in place by April 2010. Work and pensions secretary James Purnell made the announcement. He said: "It's unacceptable that people are dying directly as a cause of their work with tower cranes and I want to prevent this toll of human misery. It is also important that the package of measures is successful in both improving tower crane safety and improving public confidence in cranes." He added: "HSE will consult with both the industry and the public to agree how both of these ends can best be achieved." Other measures include working with the industry to improve the competence of those involved in handling tower cranes and carrying out targeted inspection work over the next 12 months. A voluntary system will

precede the statutory scheme, and should be in operation later this year. UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie said: "James Purnell should be applauded for his support for a statutory register." He added that the union would continue to press for further improvements. "Erecting tower cranes is highly skilled work," he said. "It is imperative that a specific qualification is introduced. Unskilled workers are potentially placing themselves and others in danger."

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

Government defends excessive working time

The TUC has criticised the government for its role in frustrating discussions in Europe to end the UK's opt-out from the 48-hour working week ceiling. A conciliation meeting last week between MEPs and employment ministers ended without agreement. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "We are disappointed the UK is part of a minority of EU governments that continue to block progress towards ending our damaging long hours culture. The health hazards and lack of productivity caused by excessive working time are well proven. And with people being made redundant or reducing their hours, the business lobby's insistence that they still need long hours looks even more out of date." The TUC leader added: "The working time directive will be under the spotlight again at a third meeting of MEPs and employment ministers later this month. The TUC urges the government to change its position and put an end to dangerous long hours working." Last week's meeting was the second of three formal conciliation meetings between the European Parliament and the Social Affairs Council. The third meeting must take place before Thursday 7 May. Commenting after the latest discussions broke down, employment relations minister Pat McFadden said: "We have said consistently that we would not give up the opt-out and that continues to be the case." He added: "In the current downturn it is more important than ever that people keep the right to put more money in their pockets by working longer hours if they wish. We refused to be pushed into a bad deal for Britain."

- [TUC news release](#). [BERR news release](#).

One company, two cancers, two generations

Two asbestos cancer payouts show how it's not just those working in asbestos factories that suffer as a result. The husband of Miriam Dean, 68, died from lung cancer in June 2007. Roy, aged 69, was exposed to asbestos while working at the Cape factory in Uxbridge between 1954 and 1956 and again between 1958 and 1961 where he cut sheets of asbestos using a circular machine saw. Miriam said: "When he was first diagnosed Roy had no idea his exposure to asbestos could lead to lung cancer and when he was told he had a matter of months to live he was determined to find out more about it." She added his legal advisers at Thompsons Solicitors were able to help us prove that Roy's asbestos exposure had contributed to his cancer. She received a "substantial" settlement. Trevor Albury's

father worked at another Cape factory, this time in Barking. When Trevor was a child, his dad, Albert, used to shake the dust off his overalls as he stepped through the door before handing them over to his wife to be washed. He'd give his five year old son a hug. Now Trevor, 63, has been given a year at most to live after being diagnosed with mesothelioma, an asbestos-related cancer. Cape's Barking factory closed in 1968 but the surrounding area has some of the country's highest mesothelioma rates, especially among women who washed their husband's overalls.

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#). [Daily Mirror](#).

Airport asbestos killed woman

A former airport worker died as a result of exposure to asbestos while working at Heathrow, an inquest heard yesterday. Marlene Elliott died aged 67 on 29 November, after collapsing at home. Her brother attended the Windsor inquest and told how she had worked as a flight attendant in the mid 1960s and went on to work on the ground at Heathrow in various roles. At the time of her death she was a travel representative. East Berkshire coroner Peter Bedford read from a document compiled by Ms Elliott before she died, which said in 1968 she was working as a receptionist in Terminal Three during "major building work including roofing." There was also building work taking place when she worked on the security desk in Terminal Two in the early 1980s. She felt she had suffered significant and prolonged exposure to asbestos. In September 2007, a tumour was found on her right lung and she was diagnosed with the asbestos-related cancer, mesothelioma. A post mortem revealed the tumour had spread to her right kidney and she died from a pulmonary thromboembolism. The coroner said Ms Elliott had been exposed to asbestos while in the course of her employment. A verdict of death by the industrial disease mesothelioma was recorded.

- [Maidenhead Advertiser](#). [Daily Mirror](#).

Workplace illness 'to get worse'

An ageing workforce and higher rates of illness and disease among employees will pose a serious threat to British business by 2030, a report has warned. Private healthcare company Bupa estimates the number of workers with chronic conditions will rise by at least 7 per cent to more than four million. Rates of mental illness and serious diseases, such as heart problems, will also soar. Bupa warns the problem will damage all companies' long-term productivity. Its report concludes employers should take a wider view of workplace health interventions, and this "requires employers to embed workplace health more closely in organisational culture. It also requires them to align investment in workplace health more closely with other aspects of human resources, such as skills and training, job design and working practices. By investing to improve the quality of work, employers can help to promote the positive relationship between good work and good health." The report, published in partnership with The Work Foundation, The Oxford

Health Alliance and RAND Europe, brings together more than 200 pieces of research to provide an insight into how the health of British workers will change over the next 20 years. The study estimates that the average age of the workforce will reach 43, while 68 will become the average age of retirement by 2050. The increasing age of the workforce will be one factor fuelling rates of ill health. Musculoskeletal disease will rise by 8 per cent to affect more than seven million people, while heart disease will rise by 11 per cent to affect more than a million. Rates of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD) and asthma are all likely to increase sharply. And rates of mental illness will rise by 5 per cent to 4.2 million.

- [Bupa news release](#). [The Work Foundation publication note](#) and full report: Healthy Work: Challenges and Opportunities to 2030 [[pdf](#)]. [BBC News Online](#).

Union welcomes betting shop move

A betting industry initiative to improve the safety of the sector's staff in London's bookmakers has been welcomed by the union Community. The trade union for betting shop workers said the launch of the Safebet Alliance, which is promoting a voluntary code of conduct for the sector, was a first step in improving safety for betting shop workers, but added more action was needed. Community points out it was instrumental in persuading the government to set up "a roundtable of betting industry stakeholders to look at how operators could make improvements in health and safety." It says this roundtable contributed to the development of the Safebet Alliance. Commenting on the new alliance, announced last week by the Association of British Bookmakers (ABB), Christine Hardacre, Community's representative on the roundtable, said: "This is a welcome first step but the industry must go further in improving safety for betting shop workers - for too long betting shop operators have been gambling with health and safety. We hope that the continued dialogue between industry stakeholders, including Community, will give safety the priority that it deserves." The industry roundtable, in which Community plays an active role representing betting shop workers' views, will now move on to discuss national standards that will also address other forms of violence and abuse in betting shops. Community will be calling for full implementation of its '10 minimum standards' including an end to single staffing, mag locks in all shops and safe cash-in-transit procedures.

- [Community news release](#) and [10 minimum standards](#). [ABB news release](#) and Safebet Alliance voluntary code [[pdf](#)].

International News

Australia: Union slams fatalities 'spin doctoring'

Production at BHP Billiton sites could be halted at any time after the Western Australia state government said it would issue immediate stop work notices for any further safety breaches at the company's

operations. But the move has been slammed by mining union AWU as "spin doctoring" to cover up the inadequacies of an under-resourced mines safety inspectorate. Mines and petroleum minister Norman Moore announced the temporary measure following high-level talks with BHP Billiton executives to discuss a recent spate of deaths at the company's sites. There have been five fatalities at the company's Pilbara operations since July last year. "Mines inspectors will now issue prohibition notices to BHP under the Mines Safety and Inspection Act 1994 - basically a stop work notice - for any breach of work practices or workplace conditions that may constitute a hazard to workers," Mr Moore said. Until now mines inspectors have generally issued improvement notices for breaches of worksite conditions - orders that allowed work to continue while problems were addressed. However, mining union AWU said it was "amazed at the spin-doctoring" by the minister. "These are not some amazing new powers the mines minister is invoking," said AWU WA secretary Stephen Price. "It is an example of a lot of talk with very little action - winning some great headlines." He added "these notices won't be effective because the Department is under-resourced and has only a limited number of inspectors to look after the entire mining sector in Western Australia, not just BHP sites. If inspectors are not available to be at the right place, at the right time, they are not going to be effective - because they just won't know the issue. And it just won't be reported." He said BHP had undermined safety by denying workers a collective voice, with workers now fearing reprisals for raising safety concerns. "BHP bosses adopted a strategy to ensure a rapid and aggressive de-unionisation, that has effectively silenced workers voices and had a negative effect on the level of safety within BHP's operations," AWU's Price said.

- [AWU news release. The West Australian.](#)

Colombia: 'Fatally flawed' safety blights US mine

A US owned mining giant operating in Colombia is putting workers in deadly danger, the global union confederation ITUC has charged. It says it "strongly condemns" the situation at the opencast mine in La Loma, operated by Drummond Company Inc for the last 13 years. "The lack of respect for workers' lives and safety cost Dagoberto Clavijo Barranco his life, in a fatal incident described by the human resources manager of the US multinational as a 'traffic accident'," the union body said. But ITUC said the energy and mining industry union SINTRAMIENERGÉTICA revealed the death "was a clear result of inadequate industrial safety, as Clavijo Barranco had only been working at the site for 32 days, was hired through an employment agency, and had not received sufficient training in the handling of a tanker, one of the most hazardous operations at the mine." On 2 April, the 9,000 employees at La Loma operation completed the third day of an all-out strike in protest at the poor occupational health and safety conditions. SINTRAMIENERGÉTICA is demanding that the management set up a joint commission to assess the risk of accidents and take preventive measures, as stipulated by national law and international regulations. The union is also demanding that Drummond pay for the deceased worker's funeral expenses. In a letter to the Colombian authorities, the ITUC urged President Álvaro Uribe to take every step necessary to guarantee the protection of workers and the inspection of companies, to ensure their full compliance

with national and international regulations on health and safety at work.

- [ITUC news release](#).

Europe: 'No data, no market' for nano

The European Parliament's environment committee is calling for tighter controls on nanotechnology, including the application of the 'no data, no market' principle contained in the REACH chemical safety law. The move came with the adoption on 31 March of a report by Swedish Green MEP Carl Schlyter. The non-binding report calls for products containing nanotechnology which are already on the market to be withdrawn until safety assessments can be made. The European Environmental Bureau, a network of environmental NGOs, hailed the report as a significant victory in the ongoing debate on how to legislate for fast-moving developments in nanoscience. Dragomira Raeva, EEB's nanotechnology policy officer, added: "Current safety testing methods do not address the nano-level, which makes it impossible to spot them in products, people or nature." Concerns about nanotech safety have taken centre stage in the EU in recent weeks. A 2 April Nanocap conference in Brussels heard ETUC confederal secretary Joël Decaillon issue a safety warning. "In the view of ETUC, health and safety at the workplace must be priorities and are to be implemented along the lines of the precautionary principle," he said. "In this way, we can achieve a socially responsible and acceptable development of nanotechnologies. We do not want to repeat the errors of asbestos and GMOs." ETUC says REACH should apply to nanomaterials, using "the principle of reversal of the burden of proof and thus the manufacturer's liability" – the substance is assumed hazardous until proven otherwise.

- EEB news release [[pdf](#)]. [REHS news report](#). [ETUC news release](#) and Nanocap conference presentation [[pdf](#)].
- New resource: The OECD [Database on Research into Safety of Manufactured Nanomaterials](#) collects information on research projects that address environmental, human health and safety issues of manufactured nanomaterials

USA: Safety watchdog failed under Bush

With 5,680 workers dying on the job each year, unions say a new report has shown just how callous the Bush administration was when it came to protecting workers. A report by the US Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General (OIG) reveals that the Bush administration's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the national health and safety watchdog, systematically failed to perform follow-up inspections for employers who put workers in serious danger. That failure could have led to nearly 60 deaths. According to the report, OSHA failed to, or was deficient in, following up on 97 per cent of the cases in its Enhanced Enforcement Programme, which was designed to step up enforcement against serious violators. The OIG found that at 45 worksites where OSHA oversight was deficient, 58 workers

subsequently were killed by job hazards. In a statement, AFL-CIO president John Sweeney says there was "no excuse for OSHA's failure to properly designate and inspect dangerous worksites, conduct follow-up inspections and enforce enhanced settlement provisions." AFL-CIO says the report is an indictment of the Bush administration's unwillingness to protect and safeguard America's working men and women. It says it demonstrates that many employers, including some of the country's biggest companies, are failing to meet their responsibility to protect workers.

- [AFL-CIO Now](#) and [John Sweeney statement](#). OIG report [[pdf](#)]. [The Pump Handle](#). [The Washington Post](#).

USA: Popcorn peril spreads to sweets

A recently identified outbreak of severe cases of popcorn lung among former sweet factory workers may prove what government and civilian occupational health experts have long feared - the sometimes-fatal disease can afflict those exposed to diacetyl butter flavouring regardless of where they work. Pulitzer Award winning investigative journalist Andrew Schneider reports that five patients have been diagnosed so far this year with bronchiolitis obliterans by two physicians - Allan Parmet and David Egilman. Both doctors are occupational medicine specialists who have, over the past ten years, diagnosed the rare disease in hundreds of workers exposed in microwave popcorn factories. The latest victims worked as candy makers at a now closed Brach's Candy plant on Chicago's west side, says the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. The union is concerned that workers in other plants that use diacetyl may be exposed to disabling or lethal levels of chemical flavouring agents and not know it. LaMont Byrd, director of health and safety at the Teamsters, commented: "There may be other workers in the hard candy manufacturing industry and other end users who may be at risk of experiencing adverse health effects due to exposures to chemicals used to make these products." Occupational health expert, Dr David Egilman, commented: "The cluster of new cases of bronchiolitis obliterans among candy makers has got to be the signal to even the most lethargic government agency that more workers - hundreds if not thousands - that use these chemical flavouring agents are in danger." He added: "I'd use the cliché and say it was a wake-up call, but that happened years ago at the popcorn plants and OSHA has yet to do anything meaningful."

- [Andrew Schneider Investigates](#). [More on diacetyl risks in the UK](#)

Resources

Global trade and safety newsletter

Increasing numbers of workers around the world are employed by international companies, exploiting tax and regulatory exemptions to produce goods for export. Health and safety is frequently a casualty. The Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network (MHSSN) newsletter - Border/Line Health & Safety - is the single best source on the issue. Maquiladora are foreign-owned production plants. MHSSN's work started with Mexican workers in the proliferation of factories just over the US border, but has expanded

to coverage of the health and safety problems arising out of deregulated global trade worldwide.

- Border/Line Health and Safety [[pdf](#)]. [Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network \(MHSSN\)](#).

Events and Courses

Work stress conference, 21-22 November 2009

The UK National Work-Stress Network conference, which will run on 21-22 November, is a residential weekend event. It "is open to health and safety representatives, shop stewards and union officers as well as those who have occupational health and safety at the core of their work." The conference has a full programme of speakers covering the causes, effects, symptoms and costs of stress-related illness, management competencies and EU law. There will also be examples of successful legal and workplace challenges to workplace stress and bullying.

- Stress – the 21st century epidemic?, [UK National Work-Stress Network conference, 21-22 November 2009, Hillscourt Conference Centre, Rednal, near Birmingham](#). Further details and booking form [[pdf](#)].

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR APRIL TO JUNE 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
Email: healthandsafety@tuc.org.uk