

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 17,000 subscribers and 1,500 on the TUC website. To receive this bulletin every week, click [here](#). Past issues are [available](#). This edition contains [Useful links](#) [TUC courses for safety reps](#) [Disclaimer and Privacy](#)

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Contents

Union News

Official safety guides to lose price tag
Work's a lot worse than you think
Union wins gun trauma payout
GMB warning on airport fumes
Asbestos danger message driven home
Unite anger at compensation law delay
Food workers welcome gangmaster action
Six digit payout for wrecked hand
Employer ignored workers' concerns
Firm pays twice for firing injured worker

Other news

Survivor stress hits the workplace
TUC's cautious note on fit notes
Pleural plaques linked to lung cancer
Firm fined £280,000 for fatal breaches
Shell fined record sum over fire safety
Injury fine for serial offender

International News

Europe: Backdoor attempt to undo regulation
Global: Stop exploitation of shipbreaking workers
South Africa: Health workers face TB risk
USA: They want more than blood

Events and Courses

TUC courses for safety reps

Useful Links

Official safety guides to lose price tag

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is making millions of pounds worth of its priced publications available free online. The move, pressed for by the TUC and unions, was announced this week at the launch of the new HSE strategy (see below). TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "Union safety representatives need access to the safety guidance and approved codes of practice that the HSE produces in order to deal with problems at work or to challenge their employers when they cut safety corners in the workplace. As unpaid volunteers, safety reps often cannot afford to purchase copies of these materials themselves." He added: "The TUC has been calling for free access to HSE publications for many years and it was a key point we made in the recent TUC charter for safety reps. Unions will be delighted that the HSE has listened to the arguments and agreed that within the next year all priced publications will be accessible in pdf format on its website. This will be a great help to safety representatives in their work with employers to ensure compliance with safety laws and the promotion of good health and safety practice." The first of the previously priced documents will appear online from September, with the remainder expected to be available for download by March 2010.

- [TUC news release](#).

Work's a lot worse than you think

Workers massively under-estimate the risk of suffering a serious workplace injury, new research has found. Survey results released by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to coincide with the launch of its new strategy reveal almost half of Britain's workers know someone who has been injured at work but, on average, employees think that just 3,000 people were killed or seriously injured at work last year. HSE figures on officially reported workplace deaths and serious injuries put the number at 137,000 – more than 45 times higher. HSE acknowledges these figures are themselves a significant under-estimate and that many more are killed or have their health damaged each year by occupational diseases. The recession could make some workplaces more dangerous, as more than a quarter of business leaders say that that their organisation will face pressure to cut spending on health and safety this year, the survey found. This is not only potentially dangerous but could also be bad for business, says HSE – its survey found nearly eight in ten business leaders acknowledge that good health and safety standards are beneficial. Launching the 'Be part of the solution' strategy this week, HSE chair Judith Hackitt said: "As regulators, our approach to businesses will be proportionate to the risk they present and their approach to managing it. We are calling on employers and business owners to take the lead themselves in preventing the thousands of deaths every year which are caused by work – it is their moral and legal duty and it is good for the business." Speaking at the strategy launch, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "At a time when employers are trying to cut costs, getting the message across on the importance of health and safety is more important than ever. Today's strategy is short on rhetoric, but big in vision. Unions and health and safety

representatives are committed to supporting this strategy as well as the day to day work of the HSE.”

- [HSE news release](#) and Be Part of the Solution [strategy](#) and [pledge](#).

Union wins gun trauma payout

The driver of the tube train on which an innocent member of the public was shot dead by anti-terror police has received £1,000 compensation for trauma because he was chased down an underground tunnel by officers in the aftermath of the incident. ASLEF member Quincy Oji had to take time off work after being caught up in the tragedy at London’s Stockwell tube station in July 2005. He was driving the train on which the Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes was shot after being mistaken for a suicide bomber. Oji ran through a tunnel after the shooting and fell to the ground as he was followed by armed police. His claim for compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder was initially rejected by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) but he appealed and received £1,000. CICA initially refused compensation on the grounds Mr Oji was not the victim of a violent crime, because a crime had not happened, and that he was some distance from the shootings so would not have feared physical harm. “I have never come across such spurious arguments to avoid paying compensation to someone who clearly deserves recompense,” commented ASLEF general secretary Keith Norman. “I’m delighted that we finally have recognition of the trauma our member suffered, even if the £1,000 we have secured hardly reflects what driver Oji has endured. It does make you wonder about the mega-cautious approach of CICA. Small wonder that it is often viewed as an uncaring and vindictive outfit.”

- [ASLEF news release](#). [The Guardian](#). [BBC News Online](#). [The Telegraph](#).

GMB warning on airport fumes

Passengers and staff are being exposed to high levels of potentially toxic aircraft fumes at a London airport, the union GMB has said. GMB says London City Airport operates an extremely unusual parking system for aircraft. They manoeuvre the aircraft so that the tail of the aircraft points towards the airport building, causing jet engine exhaust to be propelled straight towards the arrivals lounge in the airport building. GMB says this causes a high volume of uncontrolled exhausted jet fumes to enter the international and domestic arrivals hall, which has left a number of workers suffering ill-effects. It adds these fumes have at times overwhelmed the employees working in this area. The union was denied access to the results of the airport’s air quality monitoring. It says an independent environmental report found there were volatile organic compounds present in the sampled air, sufficient to cause discomfort and possibly ill-health. GMB organiser Stephanie Attwood said: “GMB members working in the arrivals area report that the fumes get so bad that they experience signs of poisoning exposure such as dry mouth, nose and throat, sore, itchy eyes, headaches and breathing difficulties.” She criticised the company

for refusing to release the findings of its own monitoring or to agree to an independent survey. She added: "The reality of the situation is that London City Airport has chosen to sacrifice the health of their passengers and staff in order to line their pockets with high levels of profit. It is time for the airport to get real and clean up the situation finally putting their passengers' and staff's health first."

- [GMB news release](#).

Asbestos danger message driven home

Residents and maintenance workers are at risk from asbestos because of "huge deficiencies" in the rules covering the management of asbestos in people's homes. A report backed by construction union UCATT warns that householders undertaking DIY are at particular risk. 'As safe as houses?', prepared for the union by Dr Linda Waldman and Heather Williams of Sussex University's Institute of Development Studies (IDS), criticises the absence of any requirement to reveal the presence of asbestos when selling a private property. The report also raises concerns about the major differences in how individual local authorities and registered social landlords notify tenants about whether properties contain asbestos and the likely risk of exposure. It recommends that all social landlords should have a duty to manage asbestos in the internal part of properties; currently there is only a duty to manage asbestos in communal areas such as stairwells. IDS research fellow Linda Waldman said: "People aren't aware of the dangers of asbestos and don't know where it is in their homes. This lack of awareness leads to asbestos exposure and increased risk." UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie commented: "The report demonstrates that new regulations are urgently needed in order to ensure that construction workers undertaking maintenance and refurbishment work are properly protected. Workers should not be expected to play Russian roulette with their health." The report's recommendations include a call for all power tools to carry warnings to remind workers of the potential dangers of asbestos. It adds that there should be increased asbestos training, awareness and guidance for all local authority staff and resident association representatives. The content of apprenticeship training courses for construction workers should be revised to contain modules on asbestos risks and protection procedures, it says.

- [UCATT news release](#). [IDS news release](#). [Morning Star](#)

Unite anger at compensation law delay

The union Unite has reacted angrily after a Scottish law intended to create a fairer compensation system for victims of accidents and diseases was blocked this week by SNP, Conservative and Liberal Democrat members of the Scottish Parliamentary Justice Committee. The proposals for the Damages (Scotland) Bill, brought forward by Labour MSP for Anniesland, Bill Butler, would assist the victim of accidents and disease and their immediate family, including victims of workplace accidents, to receive a fairer and swifter compensation award. John Quigley, Unite Scottish regional

secretary, said the action by “an unholy Tartan-Tory alliance” was “shameful”. He added: “The proposals put forward by the bill are based on the strong recommendations of a robust consultation process already conducted by the Scottish Law Commission (SLC) throughout 2007 and 2008. The need for reform in this field is urgent, exemplified by the recent compensation award for the Stockline disaster which was reached five years after the tragedy itself.” He added: “It is vital for victims and their families that not only do we have access to justice but also a justice system that is efficient, practical and transparent - fit for the 21st century, placing people before profit. Clearly, our SNP, Conservative and Liberal Democrat MSPs on the Justice Committee think otherwise.”

- [Unite news release](#). Proposed Damages (Scotland) Bill [[pdf](#)].

Food workers welcome gangmaster action

A crackdown on abusive gangmasters has been welcomed by a food union. GMB was commenting after two gangmasters has their licences revoked. In the latest case, an Ilford gangmaster who supplied workers to the French Croissant Company (a subsidiary of Maple Leaf Bakery UK Ltd) and who in turn supplied bakery products to Marks and Spencer, was found by a Gangmasters Licensing Authority (GLA) investigation to be using illegal and abusive employment standards. The licence of 1st Universal Services Ltd, the gangmaster business that supplied more than 50 workers to the London bakery, was revoked after the company withdrew its appeal against the GLA decision. Workers had been paid below the minimum wage and suffered other abuses including a failure to provide sick pay. GMB London regional secretary Paul Hayes said: “This case proves that here in London the labour market left to itself involves exploitation and abuse of workers. It was the trades union movement that campaigned to set up the Gangmasters Licensing Authority to deal with this abuse. In the space of a single week we have seen two separate gangmasters, one supplying Tescos and this one Marks and Spencer, having their licences revoked.” He added: “It was also found that the French Croissant Company, despite having audited the gangmaster business themselves, and clearly identified problems, had left them been unresolved. This is not good enough.” Last week GLA revoked the licence of gangmaster Jagjit Singh, who operated Southampton labour supplier Sapphire Trading, after finding safety and other employment abuses ([Risks 408](#)).

- [GMB Universal Services Ltd news release](#) and [GMB Sapphire news release](#). [GLA news release](#).

Six digit payout for wrecked hand

A GMB member who lost four fingers after his hand was mangled at work and who later had to have his thumb amputated has received a six-figure sum in compensation. His employer was also fined £50,000 for criminal safety breaches related to the incident. The 49-year-old worker, from Farnworth near Bolton was working as a waste disposal operative for Greater Manchester Waste Limited

when his left hand was crushed in a machine in December 2005. He was cleaning a machine used to separate waste but as he reached through an open hatch to clear it of debris his hand was crushed between its rollers. He had been unable to tell the machine was running as the room was dark and noisy. His skin was stripped away from his hand and he lost four fingers. He had to undergo 14 operations and his thumb was amputated. He still works for the same company but is now employed in a lesser role directing people where to dump their waste. Since the incident the firm has fitted skylights and additional lights to the area containing the machine. It has also fitted a new system allowing the machine to be operated manually when being cleaned. The fine followed a prosecution by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). A GMB spokesperson said: "Greater Manchester Waste was prosecuted as a result this member's accident and fined £50,000. However it shouldn't have happened in the first place. It was entirely foreseeable and entirely preventable. The poor standards on site meant that it was only a matter of time before a serious accident like this happened."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Employer ignored workers' concerns

Unsafe employers continue to pay compensation rather than remedy safety problems. Unite member Gerard Healey, 59, received a "substantial" sum in compensation after his former employer failed to listen to employees' health and safety concerns. Mr Healey had to take 15 weeks off work after he hurt his left arm while lifting heavy wooden pallets. He has now retired from his job as an assistant finisher with Mayr-Melnhof Packaging Limited based in Bootle. In January 2008 he was moving 5ft square wooden pallets which had been stacked above head height outside the warehouse. The pallets had been left out in the rain and as a result were sodden and heavy. Unite members at the printing firm had previously complained about the company's procedure for storing the pallets outdoors but nothing had been done to resolve the problem. When Mr Healey attempted to lift a pallet it fell backwards wrenching his left arm and causing a soft tissue injury to his left elbow and straining his left wrist. He was forced to wear a splint and had to undergo a series of injections for pain in his wrist. Mayr-Melnhof Packaging admitted liability and settled the claim out of court. Mr Healey said: "We complained several times about the pallets being stored outdoors because they had become awkward to lift after being exposed to the elements but our concerns were ignored. I hope by claiming compensation that my former employers will now listen to its staff's future concerns about health and safety." Unite's Paul Finegan commented: "A simple risk assessment followed by the correct action would have avoided the pain and suffering that Mr Healey has endured."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Firm pays twice for firing injured worker

A major events organiser fired a worker after he broke his foot at work – but ended paying for both his unfair dismissal and his injury. BECTU member Tony Pike was dismissed from his job as a production manager for Dream Events Limited after he suffered a stress fracture in his foot. The three broken bones forced to take six weeks off work. But when he approached his employer about sick pay he was told he no longer had a job. The firm arranges big events such as award ceremonies and weddings in prestigious venues like the Dorchester and Claridges. Mr Pike ran the set building department for the firm. When he started a compensation claim, the firm argued he had not been employed for a year and as such they could dismiss him without following any procedures - workers must be employed for a year before they can claim unfair dismissal. During an Employment Tribunal pre-hearing review the tribunal accepted that Mr Pike had been employed for more than 12 months and a settlement for both his unfair dismissal and injury claim was agreed. Mr Pike, who is now self-employed setting up lighting and sets for big events, said: "My employer had told me they did not pay sick pay but when I found out I was going to be off work for so long I approached them to see if there was anything they could do. That was when I was told that I had lost my job. I couldn't believe that I was being fired for being off sick and to make matters worse my injury was caused by being at work. I knew I had to stand up for my rights and that is why I decided to contact my union for help." BECTU national official Suresh Chawla said: "This case shows how important it is to be a member of a trade union so you can get assistance in fighting employers who make ill-judged decisions like this one."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Other news

Survivor stress hits the workplace

British workers are experiencing panic attacks and insomnia because of stress associated with the economic downturn, a survey has suggested. Norwich Union Healthcare polled 200 GPs, 200 business leaders and 1,000 employees for its Health of the Workplace survey. Half the workers admitted to being stressed, while one in five reported suffering depression. The annual study found workers are putting increasing amounts of time and effort into their jobs. About half are going into work when they are ill and working longer hours, while just over a third are not taking lunch breaks. A third (33 per cent) of the employees questioned said they were offering to take on more responsibility. When the workers were asked about their illness, half said they were suffering from insomnia while a third said they were having migraines and over a fifth (21 per cent) had anxiety attacks and palpitations. Almost a third said they were drinking more and a fifth were smoking more. A third said they were comfort eating. More than nine out of 10 of the GPs and 80 per cent of employers polled predicted that stress-related illness will be the most critical occupational health issue of 2009. But even though 97 per cent of business leaders agree the health status of staff impacts upon productivity, only 1 per cent said they planned to introduce new health measures in 2009.

- [BBC News Online.](#)

TUC's cautious note on fit notes

The TUC has sounded a note of caution about government proposals announced last week concerning the reform of the sick note. Commenting on the proposed 'fit note', TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "The TUC agrees that more needs to be done to help those off sick to return to work. In some cases a phased or a supported return may help speed up the process of an ill or injured worker getting back to work. But there are many circumstances where an early return can prevent the worker making a full recovery, or even lead to a relapse. Most employers won't have the expertise to give workers the support they need for an early return and this could make matters worse." He added: "There is also a danger that because of the proposed changes, the sick note process will become a dialogue between the GP and the employer, and workers may feel they are being forced back to work. The most effective way of encouraging workers back to work is through access to proper occupational health support." Announcing a 12-week consultation on the proposals, the government said the new medical 'fit note' would replace the current 'sick note' and help more people stay in work rather than drift into long term sickness. Work and pensions minister Lord Bill McKenzie, said: "Employers tell us that managing sickness absence can be a challenge. This is compounded by a 'sick note' system that makes sickness absence a black and white issue – either you are unfit for work or you are not. We recognise how important it is to help people who are sick to stay in work or get back to work quickly - the new fit note will help do just that." Workplace health campaigners have raised concerns about the ability of GPs to make judgments about what work a patient may be able to undertake when the medics have no knowledge of a workplace or a job and little training in occupational health. There are also concerns that discussions between employers and GPs may breach medical confidentiality. And while the government says the measures are intended to address a "sick note culture", research has shown there is no such culture at work. Instead, workers fearing for their jobs are trooping in while unwell.

- [DWP news release](#). [TUC news release](#). [Personnel Today](#).

Pleural plaques linked to lung cancer

One in eight patients with lung cancer also had pleural plaques, a study has found. The Japanese study comes at a time the insurance industry is challenging moves to compensate pleural plaques in Scotland and across Britain. Insurers are arguing this form of asbestos related lung scarring is asymptomatic and should not be compensated, however unions and asbestos campaigners maintain the condition is linked to a far greater likelihood of subsequent cancer development and this association alone causes unacceptable stress and anxiety. The campaigners' argument would seem to be corroborated by the new research, released this week by 12 medical institutions in Japan. The research team said the number of people who died from asbestos related lung cancer in Japan might amount to several thousand people a year, several times the number currently receiving compensation. Between 2006 and 2007,

the 12 medical institutions examined 471 patients aged 26 to 94 who were diagnosed with nonmetastatic lung cancer, to check if they had developed pleural plaques. The 12 institutions belong to the Japan Federation of Democratic Medical Institutions. The research team discovered pleural plaques in 28 patients, or 5.9 per cent, through chest X-rays, and in 58 patients, or 12.3 per cent, through high-resolution computer tomography. According to a study panel of the Japanese Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry, asbestos exposure is the sole cause of pleural plaques. Akihiko Tamura, director of Kyushu Institute of Social Medicine and a member of the research team, said far more lung cancer patients should be receiving compensation for asbestos-related lung cancer.

- [The Yomiuri Shimbun](#).

Firm fined £280,000 for fatal breaches

A shipping firm was fined £280,000 last week for safety breaches which a judge said probably contributed to the deaths of three workers. Finlay MacFadyen, 48, died on board the Viking Islay in September 2007 as he tried to save two colleagues from an oxygen-starved compartment. Robert O'Brien, 59, and Robert Ebertowski, 40, had collapsed in a chain locker. Judge Robert Moore sitting at Sheffield Crown Court said if Vroon Offshore Services had made sure the North Sea rescue support ship had an oxygen meter on board the deaths may have been prevented. Mr MacFadyen's wife Patricia, 48, criticised the level of financial penalty handed to the firm, calling it a "paltry sum". Speaking on her behalf, Mrs MacFadyen's lawyer Lisa Gregory said: "Mrs MacFadyen has told me she felt sick to the stomach on hearing the level of the fine." She added: "If this is the best the courts can do it sends out the message that life is cheap." Judge Moore said the failure to provide an oxygen meter was the worst safety breach and fined the firm £160,000. The judge said a second offence of failing to evaluate the efficiency of its safety management system would mean a fine of £80,000. He fined Vroon £40,000 for failing to ensure the third engineer had the appropriate certificate of competency. Last month, a jury cleared the ship's captain, Donald Fryer, of failing to discharge his duties properly in such a manner as to cause the deaths. Captain Fryer's union, Nautilus, said the case should not have been taken to court. "Our deepest sympathies go to the families of those who died in this tragic incident," said Nautilus general secretary Brian Orrell. "However, the case should never have gone to court, and it is yet another alarming case of criminalisation of the maritime profession." Speaking after Capt Fryer was cleared, he added: "Like all masters, Capt Fryer was subject to his company's safety management system - a system that was found seriously wanting in this case, as shown by the absence of oxygen monitoring equipment on his ship and others in the fleet. Where the regulator fails, the seafarer pays - either with their lives or their professional reputation."

- [Nautilus news release](#). [Press and Journal](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Yorkshire Post](#).

Shell fined record sum over fire safety

Shell International was fined £300,000 this week over deficiencies in fire safety at the Shell Centre in central London, London Fire Brigade (LFB) said. The company was also ordered to pay £45,000 in costs. It pleaded guilty at Inner London crown court to three breaches of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO). It was the largest fine imposed under the measure. The LFB prosecution followed two small fires in three weeks at the Shell Centre. Fire officers found extensive breaches, including blocked escape routes and fire exits, defective fire doors and excessive fire loading. The deficiencies were so severe the London Fire Brigade served a prohibition notice on Shell which restricted the use of the Shell Tower and basement levels. Under the prohibition notice, only people working to remedy the fire safety deficiencies were allowed to enter those parts of the building. All employees and members of the public were prevented access until the affected areas were considered to be safe enough to occupy. London Fire Commissioner Ron Dobson said: "This conviction shows that major companies are not exempt from prosecution and must take their responsibilities under the RRO seriously. The London Fire Brigade continues to work with companies to make sure they comply with the order. Failure to do so can, as this case has shown, result in a substantial fine."

- [London Fire Brigade news release](#). [The Guardian](#).

Injury fine for serial offender

A West Midlands flooring firm has been prosecuted and fined for a third time for failing to guard moving machinery parts. The latest court appearance for The Amtico Company Ltd came last week after employee Ian Burrridge's hand was crushed between heated high-speed rollers in September 2007. The company was fined £75,000 and told to pay £23,721 costs after pleading guilty at Coventry Crown Court to safety breaches. Mr Burrridge, 44, was working on a 'calendar machine', a series of heated rollers that stretch flooring material. A strip of material failed to fall onto a return conveyor and Mr Burrridge went under the machine to cut it away, but his left glove became caught between the high-speed rollers. He lost his ring finger, and suffered crushing and burn injuries to his other fingers and forearm. At the time of the incident, there was no guard to prevent access to the dangerous moving parts of the machine. Prosecuting HSE inspector Jenny Skeldon said it could have been a lot worse. "This man has suffered life-changing injuries," she said. "Companies should consider all the risks associated with this type of work to prevent something like this happening. HSE publishes Approved Codes of Practice, guidance and information leaflets with practical advice on machinery guarding - so there is no excuse for duty holders who don't control risks and protect their employees."

- [HSE news release](#) and 'Using work equipment safely' guidance [[pdf](#)]. [Coventry Telegraph](#).

Europe: Backdoor attempt to undo regulation

Health and safety legislation across the European Union is being threatened by an unaccountable "high level group" created by the European Commission with a deregulation brief. The ETUC's health and safety research arm, HESA, says the Stoiber group was created in August 2007 "supposedly to represent independent stakeholders." But the group, chaired by right-wing former Bavarian premier Edmund Stoiber, has only one trade union representative. "The group's composition ensures that the most hard-line deregulationist views have an automatic majority," warns HESA. Commenting on a European Commission online consultation with employers and involving the group, it adds: "The very basis of the consultation is biased, offering no scope for defending any of the existing rules or arguing for them to be strengthened. All that is wanted is proposals that reduce the 'burden on business.'" In January this year, the group made its first statement on a health and safety law, calling for even further erosion of the Working Time Directive than in a highly controversial European Commission proposal which had angered MEPs and unions. HESA says the group is "taking positions that far exceed its remit limited to administrative burdens", and instead is trying to attack legislation and its application. The chemical control law REACH is also in its sights. The Stoiber group is seeking a new restriction on its scope, namely exclusions for small and medium sized businesses. HESA points out that the highly dangerous substances covered by REACH are just as deadly when used by smaller firms, who may handle them in high volumes. The use of tachographs to monitor truckers driving hours is also a top target of the group, which again is seeking exclusions for smaller firms.

- [Community bureaucracy and "better regulation"... pot – kettle?](#), special report on better legislation, HESA newsletter, number 39, 2009 and [[pdf](#)].

Global: Stop exploitation of shipbreaking workers

International union bodies are calling for a new independent authority to govern shipbreaking. In a joint submission to the European Commission, the International and European Metalworkers' Federations have called for the establishment of a new independent authority to regulate one of the world's most dangerous industries. The submission also calls for mandatory legislated standards after the failure of voluntary codes established by the International Labour Organisation, Basel Convention and International Maritime Organisation. "It is no longer acceptable that we close our eyes to the daily exploitation of shipbreaking workers," said Jyrki Raina, the newly elected IMF general secretary. "Both IMF and EMF demand a safer and greener global system for dismantling ships. Our joint submission aims to give a voice to the affected workers and their concerns." Peter Scherrer, EMF's general secretary, added: "The EU must not wait for the implementation of a new international instrument in 2015 as this will cost hundreds of lives. The EU must show leadership by creating the conditions for a European shipbreaking sector that can set exemplary international standards." The submission called for mandatory labour rights and

employment standards in the sector, an inventory of all hazardous materials on board ships slated for dismantling and a clear role for trade unions in monitoring and regulation.

- [IMF news release](#).

South Africa: Health workers face TB risk

Health care workers in South Africa may be at much higher risk of drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB) than the general public, according to new research. A study of 3,639 patients referred between 2003 and 2007 to KwaZulu-Natal province's King George V Hospital specialist treatment centre for drug-resistant TB found that 235 were health care workers. Of these, 23 had extensively drug-resistant (XDR) TB, which is resistant to most TB medicines. The researchers calculated that the incidence of XDR-TB and multidrug-resistant (MDR) TB, which is resistant to the two most powerful anti-TB drugs, is six to seven times higher among health care workers than among non-health care worker patients. The findings confirm that poor TB infection control measures in many of South Africa's health facilities are putting health care workers at risk. "The message is simple," one of the study's authors, Prof Keertan Dheda of the University of Cape Town, said. "We need to take infection control seriously."

- [IRIN news](#).

USA: They want more than blood

American Red Cross blood transfusion centres have been picketed across the US in response to plans to boost profits by jeopardising the safety of the blood supply and mistreating workers. Carrying signs proclaiming "Donors before dollars" protesters joined a giant inflatable rat outside the Red Cross national headquarters in Washington DC. The union-backed protesters are concerned that blood safety will suffer because the Red Cross national office is insisting that workers take pay cuts and that qualified nurses be replaced with unlicensed supervisors. The organisation supplies 45 per cent of nation's blood and runs the service as a multi-billion dollar profit-making enterprise. It's also an unsafe operation. Since 1993, the Food and Drug Administration – blood is treated as drug in law - has fined the American Red Cross more than \$21 million for violations of blood safety laws and regulations. The problem stems from high staff turnover, the result of pay rates little better than minimum wage, former executives say. But rather than pay its workers a decent wage, the Red Cross is trying to force employees to work unlimited hours, replace nurses with unlicensed supervisors, slash workers' health care entitlements and cut or freeze wages.

- [Union gal blog](#). [AFL-CIO Now blog](#).

Events and Courses

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