


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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Pilots want action on laser threat

Pilots are calling for government action to address the potential deadly risks from lasers pointed at planes. Pilots' union BALPA says the number of incidents of laser beams being shone into aircraft cockpits and temporarily blinding pilots during take-off and landing has increased dramatically in recent years. "We are calling on the secretary of state for transport, Lord Adonis, to act before we have a serious incident," said BALPA general secretary Jim McAuslan. "Passenger lives are being put at risk every week now." The union says laser incidents have gone up from just three in 2003, to 29 in 2007 and 206 last year. It says the laser guns, some no bigger than a ball-point pen, cost less than £10 and can be obtained from websites and even from some corner shops. The laser beams can reach 37,000 ft but most are targeted at the cockpits of aircraft taking off or landing round Britain's airports. In his letter to Lord Adonis, Jim McAuslan noted "technology to locate the exact origin of the beam has been developed and we hope that such devices are rapidly rolled out to police forces across the UK." He said the Civil Aviation Authority has also expressed its concern. "We are pleased that an amendment to the Air Navigation Order is going through parliament to make targeting aircraft with lasers a specific offence, but there is much more to do," he added. "Unfortunately the buying and using of these laser guns has become something of a fad. We have to stamp it out before a tragedy occurs. Fortunately no pilot has lost his or her sight permanently, but that is not to say it won't happen. None of us can afford to let the use of these laser guns go on unchecked."

- [BALPA news release](#).

London buses can't handle the heat

Many London buses are so inadequately maintained drivers cannot turn off the heating during the summer resulting in temperatures on board of up to 45 degrees celsius, busworkers' union UNITE has said. It says this means passengers and staff on some buses are enduring conditions hotter than Dubai. The union has been pressing bus firms to ensure that air conditioning is fitted in the cabs of all the buses for many years. Unite regional industrial officer, Peter Kavanagh, said: "Many of our members are being unfairly targeted by angry passengers who cannot understand why the heating on the buses cannot be switched off during the summer." He said the bus companies need to employ more engineers, adding: "Unite will be writing to Transport for London's managing director to ask why this problem has not been sorted out yet, as this serious discomfort for both passengers and drivers happens every summer." Mr Kavanagh said that while the problem remains unaddressed "thousands of our members and millions of members of the public will have to suffer hotter temperatures than in Dubai. This is clearly a ridiculous situation which needs to be addressed urgently as health and safety of the staff and public must be paramount."

- [UNITE news release](#). [Personnel Today](#).

Welder forced to retire by injury

A welder has been forced to retire after he injured his back at work. Kevin Hartley, 63, needed surgery after sustaining the injury at Network Rail Infrastructure in Sheffield. The RMT member has now received more than £37,000 in an out-of-court compensation settlement. He worked as a track welder for the firm for 34 years. On the day he suffered the injury, he was lifting a heavy piece of equipment when he fell causing a slipped disc in his back and damage to his sciatic nerve. He was off work for several months but after returning to light duties his condition became so bad he found it difficult to walk and he took early retirement. RMT general secretary Bob Crow commented: "Many of our members work in environments where moving heavy objects is a regular activity. Employers should be aware of the risks involved and should take appropriate action to avoid injuries." Tristram Sterry from Thompsons Solicitors, who took the case for the union, said: "This employer failed to comply with manual handling regulations or conduct an adequate risk assessment on the task Mr Hartley was carrying out. As a result our client has been forced to retire early and will suffer from a debilitating back injury the rest of his life."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Firefighter gets payout after foundry fall

A firefighter who suffered extensive injuries when he fell down a 20ft pit while trying to put out a blaze has received £250,000 in compensation. The FBU member, whose name has not been released, received the compensation for injuries he sustained when he attended a fire at Sigmacast Iron Ltd in Cardiff in September 2004. He was walking through the building with an employee of the firm to find the best way to tackle the fire when he fell down a 20ft deep unguarded pit containing a mixture of oil, water and discarded steel parts. The 33-year-old broke his left wrist, right elbow, received a puncture injury to his leg and ruptured ligaments in his left knee. The injured man commented: "I am concerned about what the long-term holds for me. I worry that the injuries to my joints will have an impact on the manual work I can do in the future and will limit my employment opportunities. I still find it hard to come to terms with what happened on that day. It was totally unexpected." FBU's Grant Mayos said: "This case show how important free legal services are for our members who risk their lives on a daily basis. While firefighters are trained at the highest level to work in dangerous fire situations nothing could have prepared this member for falling into what was effectively a trap."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Report calls for 'positive duty' on directors

Directors must have a positive legal duty to ensure good health and safety management and gangmaster licensing should be extended to the construction industry, a hard-hitting inquiry into construction fatalities has concluded. The moves are among 28 recommendations made by Rita Donaghy, who chaired the government-convened inquiry, in her final report published this week. The report also urges all construction workers to become union members. The extension of the Gangmasters Licensing Act and of building regulations is also necessary, the inquiry concluded. The 96-page report, 'One death too many', also calls for a full-time minister for construction. The recommendations have been welcomed by unions and campaigners. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "This is a strong endorsement of the arguments that the TUC and unions have been making for many years. There is an undeniable case for a change in the law to ensure that directors ensure good health and safety practice through a framework of planning, delivery, monitoring and reviewing. Other recommendations in the report, including extending the remit of the Gangmasters Licensing Authority to include construction and revising building regulations so that health and safety is considered in building control, will help make construction sites safer places to work." He added: "The level of fatalities in this sector is totally unacceptable and we hope that the government will act quickly to fully implement the recommendations contained in this report and so prevent more needless deaths."

- [One death is too many: inquiry into the underlying causes of construction fatal accidents. Rita Donaghy's report to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Cm 7657, 8 July 2009 \[pdf\]. TUC news release.](#)
- <http://www.hse.gov.uk/construction/inquiry.htm>.

Government must act on deaths report

Campaigners and unions have said the government must act promptly to implement the recommendations of the Donaghy inquiry into construction industry fatalities. Construction union UCATT "warmly welcomed" the inquiry's report, published on 8 July by the Department of Work and Pensions. Alan Ritchie, the union's general secretary, said: "This is a hard hitting report which makes a series of vital recommendations which when implemented will have the effect of improving construction safety overnight and cutting deaths and accidents. The government must adopt the report's recommendations in full." He added: "By extending the Gangmasters Act tens of thousands of construction workers will be given greater protection overnight. Companies which do not meet health and safety criteria will be barred from supplying labour. Cowboy companies which kill workers will be barred from the industry." He also welcomed the report's support for a "positive duty" on directors. The report notes: "As with most advances in society, eg. seat belts in cars, drink driving, there comes a time when good practice has to become a legal requirement." Mr Ritchie said: "Good companies have nothing to fear. But the first time that a rogue boss is led away in handcuffs after killing a worker will be the day when all company bosses will take safety issues seriously."

Campaign group the Hazards Campaign said the report's recommendations could "secure a far safer industry." Spokesperson Mick Holder said: "It is now down to government to accept the report and act rather than ignoring the recommendations." He added: "We now need a properly resourced Health and Safety Executive (HSE)... capable of making these good ideas workable ideas and for government to stop their obsession with pandering to irresponsible elements in business that believe operating safely is a 'burden'."

- [UCATT news webpage](#). [Hazards Campaign news release](#). [Construction News](#). [The Guardian](#)

Moves to outlaw blacklisting by bosses

The government has launched a consultation on new regulations that will make it unlawful for trade union members to be denied employment through secret blacklists. Business secretary Peter Mandelson said: "Blacklisting someone because they are a member of a trade union is totally unacceptable. I am determined to act quickly to stamp out this despicable practice." The proposals will make it unlawful for organisations to refuse employment or sack individuals as a result of appearing on a blacklist. Among other measures, the proposals would enable individuals or unions to pursue compensation or solicit action against those who compile, distribute or use blacklists.

This consultation will run for a shorter than usual period of six weeks to enable legislation to be brought forward as soon as possible. Ministers say they plan to seek parliamentary approval for the regulations in the autumn and to implement them as soon as possible after that. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber commented: "Early consultation by the government on blacklisting is welcome. It is vital that the introduction of new regulations is treated as a priority, to prevent the profoundly undemocratic practice of discrimination against those who choose to join unions." The government move follows an Information Commission investigation that found many major construction firms were paying the Consulting Association for illegally held records on thousands of construction workers, often listed as troublemakers after raising concerns about site safety.

- [BIS news release](#) and consultation [[pdf](#)]. [TUC news release](#). [The Guardian](#).

Unions welcome blacklisting ban plan

Unions have welcomed a government decision to push ahead with a ban on blacklisting of trade union activists. UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis said: "UNISON applauds government moves to deal with this despicable practice, which smacks of the McCarthyite witch-hunts in 40's and 50's America." He added: "We need to make sure that employers cannot stop workers from making a living, simply for joining organisations that aim to win and safeguard hard fought for rights. We must get protection onto the statute books as soon as possible." Unite assistant general secretary Les Bayliss said: "Blacklisting was made illegal in the

1999 Employment Relations Act, however the necessary regulations were never enacted because the government claimed there was no evidence. The government must now act swiftly to end this unjust practice for good." UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie said his union also welcomed the move to end blacklisting, but added "we are disappointed that the consultation document fails to recommend any compensation for existing victims of blacklists." John Hannett, general secretary of retail union Usdaw, said: "No blacklist should be lawful, whether it identifies workers for their trade union activities or is based on conjecture about the honesty of individual employees." He added: "We live in a country where you are innocent until proven guilty. That is a point we will be making very strongly to government in our response to the consultation."

- [Unite news release](#). [UNISON news release](#). [Usdaw news release](#). [UCATT news release](#). [Construction News](#)

Scotland's work prosecutors start work

Specialist prosecutors are now leading the investigation and prosecution of dangerous workplace incidents across Scotland, the solicitor general has said. Frank Mulholland QC said the new Crown Office Health and Safety Division would examine cases reported by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). He hopes to produce a concentration of expertise and identify bad practice. The new unit will have eight specialist prosecutors in a team of 16 and will be based in Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The prosecutors will adopt an approach similar to the specialist units for investigating sexual offences and environmental crime. Announcing the official launch of the new division, Mr Mulholland said: "Drawing on their expertise and experience, they will identify unlawful practices that put safety at risk in our communities, bringing to justice those who fail to discharge their obligations under health and safety law." Elaine Taylor, head of the new health and safety division, said: "While we investigate all cases thoroughly, some, such as the recent Super Puma tragedy, are particularly high profile and complex, with unique challenges for investigators and prosecutors. We anticipate that cases like this will benefit particularly from the new division and its specialist teams." Ms Taylor added: "We also recognise how important it is that we communicate with victims and families during what can be lengthy investigations and inquiries. That is why our team has a dedicated member of staff from our Victim Information and Advice (VIA) service who will be working to keep families informed and updated about the progress of cases." HSE regional director Paul Stollard welcomed the new division. "By building on the close working relationship that already exists between HSE and the procurator fiscal's office, we can ensure those responsible for fatalities and major injuries in the workplace are held to account so that further incidents can be avoided."

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

Maltings firm fined after forks fall

A Berwick maltings firm has been fined £10,000 after an employee suffered serious injuries in a fall from the forks of a forklift truck. Simpsons Malt Limited was also ordered to pay £5,883.75 in costs after it pleaded guilty to a breach of health and safety legislation. The incident took place on 6 October 2007, when employee John Weatherburn was injured after falling from the forks of the forklift while attempting to repair a roller shutter door. HSE principal inspector Richard Bulmer said: "Falls from height are the most common cause of workplace fatalities and many other serious major injuries. Experience shows that using a simple pallet on a standard fork lift truck as a means of access when carrying out maintenance or repair work is fraught with danger. Many workers have been either killed or seriously injured in this way in the past." The inspector added: "Health and safety law requires a reasonable approach to risk reduction, involving for example, such alternatives as the safe use of ladders, mobile scaffolds or cherry pickers (mobile elevated work platforms). The method employed should be sufficient to the circumstances of the task. Forklift trucks may be used if properly modified and provided with a secure safety cage."

- [HSE news release. The Journal.](#)

£150k fine for driver's death

A company has been fined £150,000 and ordered to pay costs of more than £24,000 after one of its forklift truck drivers was crushed to death. MB Plastics Ltd pleaded guilty to an offence under health and safety legislation at Manchester Crown Court last week.

Birse Integrated Solutions Ltd, principal contractors for the project at the Davyhulme Waste Water Treatment Works where the incident happened on 18 September 2003, also pleaded guilty and was fined £50,000 as well as being ordered to pay costs of more than £41,000. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) warned of the danger of not maintaining equipment after the court heard the forklift truck's off-side cab window, which normally acted as a guard, was missing after being damaged five weeks before.

Judge Peter Lakin said although there were no witnesses to the incident, the most likely explanation is that the man, who was not identified, leant out of the cab window and came into contact with the joystick, bringing the arm of the forklift truck down on to him. Judge Lakin said MB Plastics had failed its employees. "MB had primary responsibility for the welfare of its employees," he said. "The harsh reality of this case is that, in relation to this contract, MB completely failed to have any proper regard to their health and safety obligations. This directly led to the development of an unsafe and sloppy system of work. As a result MB's workforce was exposed to completely unnecessary and avoidable risk."

- [HSE news release. This is Cheshire. Building](#)

Meat plant pays £30,000 for fingers

A Scottish meat processing plant has been fined for criminal safety offences after a worker lost three fingers. Belcher Food products Ltd

employee Steven Glass was working on an Endoline tape packaging machine which had been under repair. When it would not work, he attempted to fix it. As the machine could not be properly isolated to prevent accidental operation, it started, trapping three of his fingers, which were amputated. Later at hospital, one finger was successfully reattached. Mr Glass no longer works for the company. The firm was fined last week at Ayr Sheriff Court after pleading guilty to safety offences. The court heard that a year before the incident, the company commissioned an electrical inspection of their premises which identified 866 faults with the electrics and wiring system, of which nearly 200 were rated as most urgent. By the time of the accident, little or no work had been done to rectify these faults. Three months before the injury, HSE inspectors had visited the plant and told the company they must have a procedure in place to ensure machinery could be properly isolated while being repaired. This had not been carried out at the time of the incident that landed the firm in court. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigating inspector Helen Diamond said: "This serious accident was entirely foreseeable and preventable. The company themselves had identified a large number of serious faults with their machinery well before this accident, yet little was done to rectify these faults. The company also failed to follow the advice of our inspectors." She added: "Our investigations showed that it was normal practice for employees to repair their own machines."

- [HSE news release](#)

Damning inquest on office worker death

An office manager was killed when a huge pane of glass weighing 1.8 tonnes fell on top of him. An inquest in Leeds heard Alan Fletcher died when a wooden crate containing industrial glass toppled and crushed him as it was unloaded at Roadway Container Logistics Ltd (RCL) in the city. The jury returned a narrative verdict, saying inadequate safety procedures, lack of training and failure to monitor company policy had played a part in the 59-year-old's death. Mr Fletcher, who had worked for the firm for 20 years, was watching workmates unload the glass. He was office-based and had never unloaded containers but had asked to observe the operation. When the final, largest crate – 6ft 9in high and less than 12ins wide at its base – started to topple, he positioned himself in front of it in a bid to stop it falling. Its enormous weight made that impossible and he was crushed and killed in the 6 April 2006 tragedy. Tony Hoyland, a former government inspector in mechanical engineering, told the inquest there were failings at the firm which "indicated a lack of knowledge or disregard for procedures." He said: "The evidence I have seen indicates that when RCL tendered for the contract they didn't have sufficient experience and knowledge to do the work." A Health and Safety Executive investigation into the incident is ongoing.

- [Yorkshire Evening Post](#)

Environmental firm fined over fall

A West Midlands environmental services company has been fined £100,000 for a health and safety breach that led to a worker being seriously injured in a fall. Veolia Environmental Services Birmingham (VESB) was also ordered to pay £22,000 in costs when it appeared before Birmingham Crown Court. Its contractor, Hansen Transmissions (HTL) of Huddersfield, was fined £70,000 and ordered to pay £22,000 costs after also pleading guilty to a breach of the Health and Safety at Work Act. The charges related to an incident on 5 July 2007 when a Hansen employee was replacing a gearbox within a condenser unit at VESB's premises in Tyseley when he fell from a height of more than 10 metres, landing on a pallet of bundled narrow bore copper pipes. As a result of the fall he suffered serious injuries including broken ribs, a punctured lung and a hernia. Speaking after the court hearing, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigating inspector Paul Smith said: "This incident resulted in serious injuries which could so easily have been fatal. The man involved is lucky to be alive." He added: "The system used by HTL was plainly unsafe – men, working 10m and more up in the air, were manoeuvring bulky plant using inappropriate methods, on and above an inadequate working platform, with markedly inadequate protection from the drop beneath. Any informed check upon this system of work should have identified its shortcomings and put a stop to it. VESB failed to properly monitor or manage the work being carried out by HTL."

- [HSE news release](#). [IOSH news update](#). [HSE falls webpages](#)

Call for 'urgent' asbestos audit

A top safety body's call for urgent action on asbestos in schools has been welcomed by teaching unions. Sixteen teachers die on average each year from asbestos-related disease and an urgent audit must be carried out, according to the British Safety Council. Its chief executive, Brian Nimick, told a conference it was unacceptable that no risk assessment of the problem in schools had been carried out. Mr Nimick told the Centre for Corporate Accountability conference there had been 228 asbestos-related deaths among teachers in the UK over the last 14 years. He said an audit should lead to the register, and eventual removal, of asbestos. "It is unacceptable that the UK, in 2009, has not yet undertaken a national audit of asbestos in schools, has not comprehensively assessed the risks that teachers and pupils in each and every school face; and has not allocated appropriate resources to take urgent remedial action," he said. "Without these actions the tragedy of asbestos in schools will be left to fester and continue to kill the lifeblood of our society. Teachers and pupils continue to live with the deadly legacy of having once worked or studied in a school containing asbestos." Teaching unions have called previously for all asbestos to be removed from schools under the Building Schools for the Future Programme, a project to refurbish all secondary schools in England. Christine Blower, general secretary of NUT, said her union "wholeheartedly supports the British Safety Council's call for a national comprehensive register of asbestos in schools; and an assessment to be made of the risk to the users of school buildings. The NUT has been continually campaigning to ensure that all schools are free from asbestos." She added: "While I am pleased that Gordon Brown has said that more needs to be done to solve this very serious problem, the present asbestos management policies are woefully inadequate. The government has already

dragged its heels enough in dealing with this problem. The NUT looks forward to working together with the government and other teachers' organisations to address this serious issue."

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

HSE says advisers need accreditation

Health and safety advisers need accreditation to ensure they meet appropriate standards of professional competence, the chair of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has said. Judith Hackitt told guests at an International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IIRSM) reception that although HSE did not intend to run such a scheme, it did believe one was necessary. She said: "We do believe that there is a need for an accreditation system within the competency framework for health and safety professionals. We have no interest in HSE directly controlling or regulating such a scheme, but we are very keen to ensure that all professional bodies who establish an accreditation scheme do so in a way that measures competence in practice, not just acquired knowledge." She added: "Accreditation must include continuing professional development as a requirement as well as a means of sanction, with real teeth, for anyone who acts unethically in their professional activities – including providing inappropriate advice or guidance." Safety professionals' organisation IOSH has long sought a formal accreditation scheme for safety advisers.

- [HSE news release](#)

Warning on recession related death risk

The stress triggered by job losses could see suicides rise across Europe if governments fail to take preventive action, according to a new study. Researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the University of Oxford examined economic downturns over the past 30 years and concluded that soaring stress brought on by job losses could prompt a 2.4 per cent rise in suicide rates in people under 64 years of age, a 2.7 per cent rise in heart attack deaths in men between 30 and 44 years, and a 2.4 per cent rise in homicides rates, corresponding to thousands of deaths in European Union countries, such as the UK. Writing in the *Lancet*, the authors conclude that people who lose their jobs during a recession are at greater risk of suicide – and that for the least well-educated, the risks are even higher. David Stuckler, who led the research, said: "Governments might be able to protect their populations specifically by budgeting for measures that keep people employed." The researchers found that whether more people died depended on how much countries spent on social protections, including active labour market programmes. In the UK, where currently about £91 per head per year is spent on active labour market programmes, the researchers estimated that at least 25 to 290 suicides would occur as a direct result of the financial crisis. Report co-author Professor Martin McKee of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine noted: "Suicides are just the tip of the iceberg – rising suicide rates are a sign of many failed suicide

attempts and high levels of mental distress among workers and families.”

- [LSHTM news release](#). David Stuckler and others. The public health effect of economic crises and alternative policy responses in Europe: an empirical analysis, *The Lancet*, 8 July 2009. [Science Daily](#). [The Guardian](#). [Sky News](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Hazards at work - sci fi or soap opera?

When it comes to getting your message across, working it into popular TV dramas has to be a campaigner’s holy grail. And the trade union magazine *Hazards* has done just that – twice since the start of June. On 5 June, top ITV soap opera *Coronation Street* featured this year’s Workers’ Memorial Day poster from the magazine throughout a key storyline, with a glimpse of the 2006 poster for good measure. Then on 6 July, BBC 1’s hit sci fi drama *Torchwood* gave pride of place to the award-winning journal’s ‘Repeat after me’ RSI prevention poster. In the episode, a message is sent to all the governments of earth saying: “We are coming”. The aliens could easily have been talking about the army of elite safety reps roaming the planet in a quest for a safer, healthier working world. “A lot of people out there saw the posters – our phones were ringing off the hook,” said *Hazards* magazine’s Jawad Qasrawi. “We are pleased union reps are getting our campaign materials displayed so widely they have now crossed the divide from reality to the world of fiction. It shows the earth’s not the limit when it comes to safety reps – and establishes beyond doubt that the union safety effect is really out of this world.”

- [Hazards on the box](#). Workers’ Memorial Day posters from [2009](#) and [2006](#) and [RSI poster](#).
- Have you spotted union health and safety materials in unexpected or strange places? Send details and photographs to [Hazards magazine](#).

International News

Balkans: International project to improve safety

A cooperative project between a global union federation and union organisations in the former Yugoslavia and Spain is aiming to improve metal workers’ safety in the Balkans. The International Metalworkers’ Federation (IMF) last month implemented the second phase of its occupational health and safety project for affiliates in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. The project, which is carried out in close cooperation with the IMF Spanish affiliate MCA-UGT and the Spanish Trade Union Institute of Cooperation for Development, was launched in April 2008 in Belgrade and will continue until 2010. It targets the steel and non-ferrous sectors and aims at training union health and safety representatives and improving health and safety at the workplace. The latest stage focuses on encouraging prevention, using a combination of inspections and investigations and effective communication. “Unions will use this information to

develop workplace, regional and national level preventive measures,” an IMF spokesperson said. The next stage will concentrate on collective bargaining in health and safety, she added.

- [IMF news release](#)

France: Environment a “huge” cancer factor

Workplace and environmental exposures are a “huge” factor in the risks of developing cancer, an official French agency has said. Substances including tobacco, chemicals, asbestos and benzene in fuels are behind much of the rise in the incidence of cancers, according to the environmental and occupational health and safety agency Afsset. Afsset’s opinion, announced at a 2 July press conference, is based on a report published in October by the French National Institute for Health and Medical Research (INSERM), supplemented with evidence taken from eminent figures, specialists and voluntary organisations. “There is a huge number of cancers for which we have no explanation today,” said the agency’s director general, Martin Guespereau. He said few can be put down to a single factor (asbestos, smoking), and that most have “cross-factorial” causes. Afsset believes that multiple exposures must be measured not just by adding up the impacts on all levels - home, work, leisure - but also looking at the interactions between substances. It wants suspected carcinogens to be replaced by other less dangerous substances. It also argues that the onus of proving that products are not harmful - especially new ones like manufactured nanoparticles - should lie on industry. Afsset said there is also a need to “step up enforcement of the rules” in workplaces. The statement came a week after the agency called for an immediate increase in protection for workers exposed to formaldehyde, a potential allergen and carcinogen.

- [ETUI-HESA news report](#) and [Afsset formaldehyde statement](#).

Global: 'Toxic pants' pesticides protest

Campaigners are calling on consumers to swap non-organic cotton pants for organic ones, in a bid to reduce pesticide use. Groups including the Pesticide Action Network, Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) and Pants to Poverty have a particular beef with endosulfan, a pesticide that's banned in the EU. A new lab test on 1,000 UK pants found traces of endosulfan in 1 in 50 pairs - which would suggest over 8.5 million contaminated pairs countrywide. But the groups say the real danger is not to pant wearers, but to workers. EJF claims 20,000 agricultural workers are killed annually because of exposure to pesticides. Dr Mohana Kumar, chief doctor for the Padre district in India, has been compiling records of patients in his region showing symptoms that match endosulfan poisoning. Acute endosulfan poisoning can cause convulsions, psychiatric disturbances, epilepsy, paralysis, brain oedema, impaired memory and death. Long-term exposure is linked to immune-suppression, neurological disorders, congenital birth defects, chromosomal abnormalities, mental retardation, impaired

learning and memory loss. Kumar says the "proof against endosulfan is comprehensive." IUF, the global union federation for farm and food workers' unions, has fronted a long-running campaign for a global ban on endosulfan, which was its campaign priority for Workers' Memorial Day 2008.

- [The Guardian](#) environment blog. [IUF on endosulfan](#).
- [Coalition against Bayer Dangers](#). [Pants to Poverty](#). [Environmental Justice Foundation](#).

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