

# Risks

TUC 

*e-bulletin*

Number 415 – 18 July 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 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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### **Union warning on transport swine flu risk**

Transport union RMT has warned of severe pressure on staffing levels and serious safety risks across the transport system if the number of cases of swine flu increases dramatically. The union alert came as experts advised that up to 40 per cent of the population could become ill with the condition over the coming weeks. RMT said transport workers are known to be at greater risk of infection as they tend to work in close contact with the public and colleagues, and often in confined spaces like trains, buses, the Underground, ferries and offices. A Whitehall meeting last week of emergency services and business chiefs was told that more than a third of Britain's businesses have no response plans at all for dealing with the pandemic, while specific fears have been raised about the ability of the country's broadband network and the London Underground to operate effectively. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "We are demanding to see the contingency transport plans that have been drawn up in Whitehall and to be involved in future discussions on dealing with the flu pandemic. RMT members are seriously concerned about the safety implications of so many staff being off sick at the same time." The union leader added: "If the predicted development of the swine flu is accurate it will have a devastating impact on transport services and will expose both the shortage of staff and the inadequate planning across our fragmented system. London is expected to be hardest hit and it would be a dangerous gamble to try and run services without adequate staffing levels."

- [RMT news release](#). [Personnel Today](#). [The Observer](#).
- [TUC pandemic flu guidance](#).

### **Council failed to heed deadly bin warning**

The death of a man in a waste bin may have been avoided if a council had heeded a union warning. Sussex Police said 35-year-old Scott Williams had been reported missing an hour after his body was found at Sussex Waste Recycling Ltd in Newhaven. The dust cart, where Mr Williams' body was found, had been collecting bins in Brighton. Police believe he had been sheltering from the rain in a communal wheelie bin. The union GMB said it had long raised concerns about the use of these large communal and business waste bins. It added it had been particularly vocal in Brighton since the Conservative administration cut the refuse budget, which meant there was no longer a 'loader' to check that no-one was inside the bins before the driver automatically emptied them into a dust cart's crusher. GMB organiser Robert Macey said: "This was obviously a tragic accident and GMB send condolences both to the family of the deceased and the employees who found him." He added: "Since the Tory administration began cutting the budget for the refuse service and introducing communal bins GMB has been warning that that this was an accident waiting to happen. There had already been two near misses earlier this year before this latest tragic accident. Whether the bins are owned by the Council or private contractors, measures now need to be taken to ensure that all communal bins in the city are made safe and secured in a way that prevents people entering them and putting their lives at risk. GMB is therefore

calling on Brighton Council to take immediate action on this matter before another tragedy can occur.”

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

### **Wrong goggles fail to protect eyes**

A steel erector suffered permanent damage to his eye during the construction of the new Wembley Stadium after being provided with unsuitable safety goggles. Unite member Ian Pearson, 36, was working on the stadium in December 2005 for Fast Track Site Services. He was hammering a steel pin into a hole when a piece of galvanised coating broke off and, because his employer had supplied him with the wrong type of goggles, shot into his eye. The injury has left him with permanent symptoms including blurred vision. Fast Track Site Services, formerly based in Walsall but now dissolved, admitted liability and settled out of court. The steel erector received a £6,500 payout. He said it was important to him that his employers accepted responsibility for his injury. “I should have been supplied with the correct goggles,” Ian commented. “I’ve learnt to live with the end result of this accident and I don’t let it affect my life, but I hate to think how I would have coped if I had lost my sight.” Unite regional secretary Adrian Axtell said: “Construction workers wouldn’t dream of entering a building site without a hard hat - safety glasses are also a must-have item. However there are several types of glasses on the market and it is up to the employer to ensure that the type used is suited to the tasks being undertaken.”

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#)

### **Work injury stops endurance sportsman**

An engineering worker who had to give up endurance sport after injuring his leg at work has received £5,250 in compensation. The 48-year-old Unite member, whose name has not been released, was a keen marathon runner and established duathlete - a race where participants run and cycle - before he damaged his leg. The former senior machine minder for Scandstick UK, based in Sawtry, Cambridgeshire, was off work for three months and unable to exercise for eight months when a piece of machinery stabbed his leg and then fell on his foot, causing multiple soft tissue injuries and tendon damage. He was unable to bear weight on his foot and has now been forced to give up his sport because of the pain it causes when running or cycling. The injury occurred when a piece of machinery at the label factory became jammed. As he tried to fix the problem the part became dislodged, shot out and cut his leg. The heavy part then fell onto his foot. He was left with an eight-inch scar and damaged tendons and ligaments. Unite regional secretary Steve Hart commented: “Our members are entitled to free legal services, which can, as this case shows, cover any workplace accident.” Jyothi Bhurjee from Thompsons Solicitors, the law firm that took the case for the union, added: “Our client was left with a scar due to a workplace accident which wasn’t his fault. Scandstick

UK should have ensured that its machines were well maintained and inspected to avoid this type of accident.”

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

### **Serious fall injuries lead to payout**

A Unite member who was off work for more than 20 months after a fall at work has received £35,000 in compensation. John Kelly, 61, needed surgery on his shoulder and intensive physiotherapy following the incident at Sertac Group Holdings in Coleshill, Birmingham. In June 2007, the tool setter for the automotive components company tripped on a piece of metal flooring which hadn't been bolted down properly. Staff members had made complaints to the company about the hazard before the accident but it was not fixed. He broke his left finger, severed the muscles in his shoulder and damaged his knee. He needed surgery to correct his shoulder and has only just returned to work on light duties. Sertac Group Holdings admitted liability and settled the claim out of court. Gerard Coyne from Unite commented: "While some employers present attention to health and safety as a burden this case shows how attention to detail can prevent a serious accident. Mr Kelly has endured a long 20 months to get him back to work. This could have been avoided had regular checks been carried out to make sure the flooring was properly in place." Daniel Elder from Thompsons Solicitors, who provided legal back up for the union, added: "This is a classic example of a seemingly minor accident resulting in serious injury. Members of staff had already complained about the faulty flooring yet nothing had been done to correct it."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#)

## *Other news*

### **MPs back directors' duties and big fines**

Dangerous companies should face more prosecutions and tougher penalties, a top parliamentary committee has concluded. The latest report from the Work and Pensions Select Committee also calls on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to explain the dramatic drop off in prosecutions for safety offences, down by 40 per cent in four years, from 1,720 offences prosecuted in 2003/04 to 1,028 in 2007/08. The report also criticised a lack of commitment from company directors. A committee statement on the 12 July release of the report said "it appears that board level commitment to prioritising health and safety is still too low weak." It added: "The Committee has endorsed the recommendation for positive duties on directors in Rita Donaghy's recent report into the underlying causes of fatalities in construction [[Risks 414](#)]. We maintain that, if voluntary guidance is not working, the government should legislate to ensure company directors take ownership for their employees' safety." Other recommendations included support for an increase in worker involvement. Committee chair, Terry Rooney MP, said: "Employers need to understand their duties and where they breach them, they

must be held to account. Employees also need to be aware of their role in creating a safe work environment and they should be involved through worker engagement schemes, not prevented through fear of blacklisting.”

- [Work and Pensions Select Committee news release](#). [Workplace health and safety: follow-up report](#), (HC 635-I), Work and Pensions Committee, 12 July 2009.

### **Campaigners say government must act**

Two reports in a week calling for action to rein in Britain’s deadliest bosses must be acted on urgently by government, unions and campaigners have said. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber welcomed this week’s Work and Pensions Committee report, which comes on the heels of the Donaghy report into construction fatalities ([Risks 414](#)), and called for prompt action by the government. “At this time of recession we need both strong regulation and a strong regulator,” he said. “The government must ensure that funding for both the Health and Safety Executive and for local authority health and safety enforcement is increased to make sure that employers do not risk the health or lives of their workforce. The TUC also welcomes the strong call for a new health and safety legal duty on directors. Ministers must act now to ensure that directors take more responsibility for health and safety and we hope that there will be legislation to bring this about in the next Queen’s Speech.” Mick Holder of the Hazards Campaign said after the publication of two government reports in the past week supporting legal safety duties on company directors, “ministers must act to make named bosses answerable for corporate safety crimes. Government must urgently agree to the recommendations of both these reports and get on with it!”

- [TUC news release](#). [Hazards Campaign news release](#).

### **Unions back construction deaths report**

Unless the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is provided additional resources, the recommendations of an official inquiry into construction fatalities will be “meaningless”, the inspectors’ union has warned. Prospect is calling on government to heed the findings of the Donaghy Inquiry, which reported last week ([Risks 414](#)). Prospect negotiator Mike Macdonald, whose union represents 1,500 HSE staff, said: “This inquiry offers a welcome insight into improving health and safety on construction sites where the accident rate is both morally unacceptable and places a significant financial burden on the taxpayer.” He urged the work and pensions secretary to make effective implementation of the inquiry’s recommendations possible by providing the extra resources needed by HSE. “We value the long-term view set out in the 28 recommendations and hope that Yvette Cooper will recognise the need for additional HSE funding when responding to these recommendations,” he said. “While financial prudence is important, there is also a need to address long-term safety issues.” He backed the inquiry reports call for an enhanced role for unions. He said his

union also supported the call for a pilot study into more non-accident prosecutions, but added: "When are our members going to get the time to take such action? The Field Operations Directorate, of which HSE's construction division is a part, already has more open fatal investigations on its books than it has frontline inspectors." GMB general secretary Paul Kenny also welcomed the report and said the government should implement its recommendations "in full" before the next general election.

- [Prospect news release](#). [GMB news release](#)

### **Lobbyist defends deadly construction practice**

The "disgraceful and outrageous" comments on safety made by a construction industry leader have been condemned by the chair of a government committee and trade unions. UK Contractors Group director Stephen Ratcliffe dismissed an official inquiry's call for a crackdown on illegal employment in construction, saying the industry could regulate itself. He said there was "no justification" for the extension of Gangmasters Licensing Act to the sector – despite this being a key recommendation last week of the Donaghy inquiry on construction fatalities. Work and pensions committee chair Labour MP Terry Rooney branded his claims "disgraceful and outrageous." He said: "We have had 35 years of so-called self-regulation and we're still killing over 70 people a year in the construction industry." He added: "Bogus self-employment is rife in the construction industry and it is all employer driven. It is profit against worker safety and it is not on." Unite deputy general secretary Jack Dromey said: "Rogue gangmasters put life and limb at risk, flout employment rights and rip off the taxpayer. Rogues also undermine reputable employers. Extending the remit of the Gangmasters Licensing Agency will make building sites safer, protect building workers and benefit the public purse by ending tax-dodging." And Alan Ritchie, general secretary of UCATT, said: "The government did not take early action on regulating gangmasters because they accepted the distortions made by Stephen Ratcliffe and construction bosses, that casualised labour was not a problem in the construction industry. Rita Donaghy has seen through these fantasies and recognised what is really happening in the industry." He said the construction lobby's leader "should hang his head in shame."

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

### **Builder guilty of teen's work death**

A builder has admitted the manslaughter of a 15-year-old boy who was crushed to death as he was left unsupervised to prop up a falling wall. Essex teenager Adam Gosling died from head injuries while working on a five-bedroom house in Hadley Wood, north London, in April 2007. Colin Holtom pleaded guilty to manslaughter by gross negligence at the Old Bailey. The 64-year-old could face jail when he is sentenced on 20 July. Holtom had originally denied the offence but changed his plea this week when a retrial was due to begin. Judge Christopher Moss told Holtom: "All options are

open. Having given you bail, it does not rule out a custodial sentence." Holtom was said to have a "laissez faire" attitude to health and safety. Martyn Bowyer, prosecuting, said Adam was earning £25 a day as a labourer but should never have been allowed to carry out such work. The incident happened days after Mr Holtom sub-contracted the work from Darren Fowler. Adam had been left with his 18-year-old brother Dean to demolish an unstable 7 metre wall, which collapsed as he tried to prop it up, burying him. Detective Inspector Pete Basnett, of the Homicide and Serious Crime Command, said: "Holtom left two inexperienced young workers working at a wall already deemed to be dangerous without supervising them or giving proper instructions on how the work was to be carried out. Even when Adam approached him halfway through the demolition to seek advice as the wall was beginning to move, Holtom still took no action and didn't even go to inspect the danger area." The court heard that Holtom had never provided safety equipment such as hard hats. Darren Fowler, 47, pleaded guilty in April to breaching health and safety law and running a company while disqualified from being a director, and will be sentenced with Holtom. Linzi Herbertson, a founder member of campaign group Families Against Corporate Killers (FACK), said: "This case is tragic but not an accident, as those responsible should never have permitted anyone, let alone a 15-year-old boy to work on a job like this, where death or serious injury were entirely foreseeable and therefore should have been prevented."

- [HSE news release.](#) [FACK news release.](#) [BBC News Online.](#) [Construction News.](#) [Fenland Citizen.](#)

### **Concrete contractor fined over Wembley death**

Construction firm PC Harrington (PCH) has been given 12 months to pay a £150,000 fine for the death of a carpenter on the Wembley Stadium construction site. The concrete firm was handed down the fine and ordered to pay £25,203 in costs at the Old Bailey last week in relation to the 2004 death of employee Patrick O'Sullivan. However Judge Martyn Zeidman said he had effectively slashed the fine to ensure the company wasn't forced "into liquidation" during the recession. He also extended the payment period from three months to 12 months, although the company had requested a 15 month period so as to pay the fine in monthly £10,000 instalments. The judge gave the firm extra time to pay up because, he said, while "highly successful", the contractor had been "very greatly affected by the downturn". Mr O'Sullivan, 54, died in January 2004 when a 300kg platform fell from more than 100m, landing on him and colleague Martin Carroll, who sustained a serious fracture to his leg. Judge Zeidman said: "This is not a company that pleads poverty," adding it was "a highly successful company. But like so many businesses, and especially those businesses involved in construction work, they have been very greatly affected by the downturn." He said: "It was good fortune that more people were not killed. Other people had to scatter as the load came down. The fine needs to be large enough to bring the message home that this is a matter of life and death." PCH had been subcontracted to build a reinforced concrete framework by builders Multiplex. In April 2009, the firm reported a 64 per cent rise in pre-tax profit and a 32.5 per cent rise in turnover for the year to 31 May 2008. PCH's results showed a pre-tax profit of £7.5 million, up from £4.6 million the previous year while turnover totalled £151.5 million, up

from £114.5 million. Its highest paid director pocketed £327,382 and a £19,000 pension contribution that year – or about twice the fatality fines and cost total.

- [HSE news release](#). [Contract Journal](#). [Construction News](#). [The Independent](#).

### **New safety concerns at Southampton docks**

A man whose legs were crushed when a crane collapsed on to a ship at Southampton's container port remains in a serious condition in hospital. Following the incident, docks union Unite raised concerns about safety at Southampton Docks, owned by DP World, as this is the second serious incident this year. The crane, a twin boom rig with the cab suspended on rails, toppled on to the container ship Nyk Themis on 13 July. Crane driver Jay Squibb, 33, was taken to Southampton General Hospital with serious leg injuries. DP World said an investigation had begun. Police said the matter was being treated as an industrial accident and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) was investigating. Matt Tipper, Unite regional industrial organiser, confirmed Mr Squibb was a member of the union. He said: "This is the second serious incident in 2009 involving crane operations in DP World and we are obviously concerned over the health and safety implications for the workers there. This is of paramount importance to us and we will fully assist in the HSE investigation also providing full support to our member and his family at this very worrying time for them in every way we can." DP World, based in Dubai, is the majority shareholder in Southampton docks, which it owns jointly with Associated British Ports.

- [MCA news release](#). [Unite news release](#). [Southern Daily Echo](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- Information call: HSE is now seeking information on the use of Morris cranes in ports and elsewhere. Contact [Christine Barringer](#) at HSE

### **Firefighters 'devastated' after latest death**

Colleagues of firefighter Ewan Williamson, who died when a floor collapsed as he helped tackle a bar blaze, are said to be devastated by the tragedy. Fire chiefs across the country also joined in the tributes to Mr Williamson, 35. About 70 firefighters and 16 appliances were sent to Edinburgh's Balmoral bar after the fire broke out. More than 20 people were rescued from the flats above the pub. Another firefighter was taken to Edinburgh Royal Infirmary with smoke inhalation, and was released after treatment. Kenny Ross, FBU Scotland regional secretary said: "It is devastating news that we have lost a firefighter in the line of duty and that another is injured." He added: "Deaths in the line of duty touch everyone who works in the fire service. The death of this firefighter will be felt very deeply by everyone in the service in Scotland and across the UK." Andy Fulton, FBU Lothian and Borders brigade secretary, said: "It's a very hard blow to lose one of our fellow firefighters. We all work closely with each other together and we're a close-knit fire service. It is difficult to adequately describe the impact the death of a fellow firefighter has on everyone in the fire service. We are all

stunned and deeply hurt by this loss although we all know we have to keep working to provide a fire and rescue service for the people of Lothian and Borders." An FBU report last year linked a sharp rise in firefighter deaths to a lack of training, investment and government safety guidance ([Risks 382](#)). The report said in the five years from 2003, at least 22 firefighters died while on duty, significantly more than in the preceding five years.

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

### **HSE says offshore challenges remain**

The safety of the UK's offshore installations is improving but the "challenges are ongoing," the Health and Safety Executive has said. The HSE progress report comes 18 months after a critical report that followed a major three-year investigation into safety on more than 100 offshore installations. Commenting on the latest update, HSE chair Judith Hackitt said: "This is a work in progress and the momentum for improvement must continue." There was one major gas leak last year in the North Sea on a scale comparable to the one that caused the explosion on Piper Alpha 21 years ago. Two years ago there were five. Ian Whewell, head of HSE's offshore division, said: "Though the findings of this review are encouraging, the challenges are ongoing and should not be underestimated. The offshore infrastructure continues to get older and remedial work in some areas is yet to be completed." He said "momentum must continue to prevent the assets degrading to the unacceptable levels" identified in the 2007 report. Jake Molloy of the offshore union RMT called for a greater role for offshore workers. "We feel the most important area to bring about the desired improvements lies in greater workforce involvement," he said: "The report rightly refers to 'the dynamic nature of safety systems' and the 'need to monitor them continuously'. In our opinion there is no other group better positioned to fulfil this role than the people exposed to the greatest risks - the workforce."

- [Offshore KP3 report - review of industry's progress](#). [BBC News Online](#)

### **Council fined over asbestos disturbance**

Fife Council has been fined £10,000 after 12 flats had to be evacuated when contractors disturbed brown asbestos while replacing water tanks. Contractors moved the brown asbestos at a block of flats in Inverkeithing in November 2007. At Dunfermline Sheriff Court, the council's contractor, ECG Building Maintenance, was also fined £3,700. Sheriff Ian Dunbar said: "It seems to me from all that was said that the major share of responsibility for this unfortunate incident must lie with Fife Council." He added that while the council maintained records of asbestos locations, it "simply did not alert ECG to the fact that there may have been asbestos in any of these blocks of flats." The firm was not licensed to remove asbestos and was not competent to do the work. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector Alastair Brown commented after the case: "Fife Council failed to keep an understandable register of asbestos and failed to ensure that a full survey for asbestos was

carried out prior to any work starting, so the information available was not sufficient to alert persons to the immediate danger from the asbestos prior to the work beginning." He added: "The council failed to identify that asbestos was present in the area where work was to take place, and the contractor then failed to recognise it, resulting in the asbestos becoming airborne as it was disturbed and spread into public areas of the buildings."

- [HSE news release](#) and [asbestos 'hidden killer' campaign website](#). [BBC News Online](#).

## *International News*

### **Australia: Union official faces jail threat**

A West Australian construction union official says he is prepared to go to jail in his continuing safety campaign for union members. Joe McDonald, the assistant secretary of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) was fined Aus\$10,000 (£4,880) last week by a Perth magistrate for unlawfully entering three building sites two years ago. McDonald was also ordered to pay more than \$3,000 (£1,463) in court costs. He pleaded guilty to three charges of trespass. But Joe McDonald says he is going to continue doing so until safety is improved, even if it lands him in prison. He said he anticipated more court appearances and to "go to jail eventually to keep people alive in the industry. If that's what it takes, that's what it takes." The Australian Building and Construction Commission, a body created by the previous Liberal government in a bid to limit construction union power but controversially retained by the new Labour government, welcomed the penalty. The commission's John Lloyd hopes the penalty will serve as a warning to others. "The decision is important, and I think it's a lesson to everyone else who might be involved in the industry that the law needs to be complied with and when someone contravenes the law there are consequences like in this case," he said. Unions counter that the commission creates a separate, harsher set of rules for unions in the construction sector, which make it more difficult for unions to represent their members and which leave safety in jeopardy.

- [ABC News](#)

### **Australia: Casual work upsets mental health**

Men who work in full-time casual jobs report significantly lower levels of mental health than those who are permanently employed. The findings, in a paper by Flinders University academics Sue Richardson and Guangyu Zhang, suggest casual employment has a much bigger effect on the mental health of men than women. Professor Richardson said it appeared men suffered from the social expectation of being a breadwinner, which contrasts with the reality of working as a casual - the type of job where employment can often be precarious. "I think it is a concerning development," she said. "For many years now, the employment opportunities, particularly for lower-education, prime-age men (25 to 55) have

been getting tougher." She said much of the growth in full-time work in recent times has been for women and that for many men with low levels of education, casual work was not their preference, rather it was all that was on offer. About 7 per cent of Australian male employees work full-time as casuals. The findings, derived from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey of 7,000 households, suggest the changing economy is an important factor. "We've seen a long-term trend to the reduction of manufacturing and utilities employment; that is, the production of things as distinct from services," Professor Richardson said. "Those were jobs that provided decent, secure work for men who are semi-skilled and skilled." Canadian researchers last year found the same impact of precarious work on mental health, linking it to this and other chronic health problems ([Risks 374](#)). And the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) has identified tackling precarious work as one of its key campaign priorities.

- [The Age. Project briefing](#). Does casual employment affect workers' self-rated health? The case of Australia, Guangyu Zhang and Sue Richardson, Flinders University, 2009 [[abstract](#)]. [IMF precarious work campaign](#).

### **Canada: Involve workers in return-to-work**

Workers off sick with low back pain who are involved in identifying potential barriers to their return to work get back on the job quicker. Researchers in Canada found this was particularly true for older workers and those who have previously been off sick. Dr Ivan Steenstra of the Institute for Work & Health (IWH) led the study. "The results suggest a lot of progress can be made helping injured workers return to their jobs with a good workplace-based intervention, especially among those workers usually considered challenging cases," he said. The study involved 196 workers who had been off work for two to six weeks due to low-back injury. The workers were randomly assigned into groups: those who took part in a workplace intervention programme and those who received "usual care." Those in the workplace programme took part in a "participatory ergonomics" approach, with support from an ergonomist or occupational health professional. Those who received "usual care" were under the care of an occupational health physician only. Researchers compared the number of days the workers in each group were absent before returning to work. Only work-returns of four weeks or more, to the same job or a similar job at the same pay, were considered successful. The workers who participated in the workplace programme returned to work 30 days earlier, on average, and at only slightly higher cost. "There might be a tendency to not bother investing in older and previously sick workers because they're considered too difficult to return to work," said Steenstra. "But, according to this study, that's the wrong way to think. A workplace programme seems to work best among those often thought of as the hardest to return to work."

- [IWH news release](#) and [return to work programme](#). Ivan Steenstra and others. What works best for whom?: An exploratory, subgroup analysis in a randomized, controlled trial on the effectiveness of a workplace intervention in low back pain patients on return to work, *Spine*, volume 34, issue 12, pages 1243-1249, 2009 [[abstract](#)].

### **India: Six killed on Metro construction job**

Six workers have been killed and dozens are thought to have been injured in a serious accident on the Delhi Metro construction site. The 12 July tragedy occurred when a pre-fabricated concrete segment of viaduct weighing 1,000 tonnes gave away, taking with it a launching girder. A supporting pillar at the scene had earlier developed cracks, causing work to be stalled for three months due to safety concerns. Work had resumed only 2 weeks ago. Global construction union federation BWI said authorities are rushing to complete several extensions to the system, ahead of the Commonwealth Games in October 2010. "It seems time pressure of the deadline for Commonwealth Games may be an important factor in the accident, with manpower strength over stretched," BWI said. Trade unions say 80 workers have lost their lives in different phases of the Metro construction project's 12-year lifespan. Local unions have lodged a police complaint regarding the latest incident. A union statement points to "glaring technical faults" and alleges negligence. It adds that there has been a "rush to complete the work before time to get performance awards - thereby putting the lives of workers under risk." It is the second accident involving Metro construction projects in less than a year. In October, two people were crushed to death and 12 injured when another bridge under construction collapsed on to a bus and cars below. The day after the latest tragedy, three cranes collapsed as they were trying to lift a collapsed steel girder at the site, although there were no further deaths.

- [BWI news release](#) and [update](#). [New York Times](#). [BBC News Online](#).

### **South Africa: Dangerous construction companies will pay**

Construction companies that do not comply with safety and health laws will be prosecuted, South Africa's labour department has warned. Spokesperson Page Boikanyo said the department was embarking on a nationwide drive to ensure working conditions are safe. "With construction booming in the run-up to 2010, our approach will be underpinned by pillars of education and ensuring that there is compliance with labour standards," Boikanyo said. South Africa is hosting to 2010 football World Cup. The Labour Department's inspection and enforcement division, which is to drive the campaign, intends to target the worst offenders. "A database of repeat offending employers would be generated. And an outstanding database of enforcement cases would be determined and a backlog reduction strategy would be created and acted upon," Boikanyo said. The department's drive comes after labour minister Membathisi Mdladlana stated workers' rights are human rights and that employers should not put profit above safety.

- [SA Labour Department news release](#). [SABC News](#). [Weekend Post](#). [Bush Radio News](#).

## *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](http://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