

Risks

TUC 

e-bulletin

Number 421 – 29 August 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](#)

Editor: [Rory O'Neill](#) of [Hazards](#) magazine. Comments to the TUC at healthandsafety@tuc.org.uk

Contents

Union News

Report highlights NHS staff struggles
Jail threat vital to deter union blacklists
Third serious incident at power station
Call to stop HGV testing closures

Other news

All is not well with new sick notes
New support for workplace mental health
Big leap in suicides at work
Deaths raise concerns over nano safety
Scrapyard boss on manslaughter charges
Machine death sparks road work alert
Dad's overalls killed his daughter
Daughter fights asbestos cancer
Asbestos 'snowballs' killed train driver
Farmer dies after being stung by wasps

International News

Australia: Ex-Hardie directors get business ban
Global: New safety drive at ArcelorMittal
Global: Dangerous increase in dumped seafarers
Malawi: Tobacco plantations poison child workers
South Africa: Safety protest workers are safe

Resources

New HSE programme on green energy

Events and Courses

TUC courses for safety reps

Useful Links

Report highlights NHS staff struggles

The government must respond rapidly to a report on the health of the NHS workforce, health service union UNISON has said. Commenting on the interim findings of the government-commissioned Boorman inquiry, published last week, the union said the report highlighted the need for quality occupational health services available to all NHS staff. The report found staff fall sick not only because of the proximity of illness but also as a result of pressure and stress. UNISON says some of the problems are illustrated in the case of a psychiatric nurse, who was attacked twice in as many years. During one of the assaults, Juliet Satterthwaite, 49, was forced to endure a prolonged attack by a patient because of staff shortages and faulty personal alarms. The nurse – one of about 56,000 NHS staff physically attacked last year – needed intensive counselling and was off work for five months. UNISON head of health Karen Jennings said: “Sadly, Juliet’s case is all too common in the NHS, with staff suffering violence and abuse on a daily basis. Trusts should not wait for the final Boorman report before taking action to ensure workers have access to quality occupational health care across the NHS. In addition, Trusts must look carefully at the underlying causes of sickness absence, as many accidents and violent incidents are preventable – as Juliet’s case so clearly shows. To be attacked twice in as many years is frightening enough, but it is a disgrace that she was subjected to a prolonged assault because of the lack of staff and faulty personal alarms.” The interim Boorman report found illness rates among NHS staff are much higher than those in the private sector and said more must be done to cut sick days. The report found stress, musculoskeletal problems and mental health difficulties were the most common problems suffered. It concluded that giving people access to services such as physiotherapy and counselling would help prevent serious problems developing. Overall, eight in 10 of the NHS staff questioned for the report said they thought health and wellbeing issues were affecting care.

- [NHS Health and Wellbeing website](#) and NHS Health and Wellbeing Review, DH, August 2009 [pdf]. [UNISON news release](#) and [comments on the Boorman report](#). [The Work Foundation news release](#). [FOM news release](#). [CIPD news release](#). [BBC News Online](#). [The Guardian](#).

Jail threat vital to deter union blacklists

Employers and consultants who blacklist trade unionists should face the full weight of the criminal law including the ultimate sanction of imprisonment, a top law firm has said. Employment law experts Thompsons Solicitors has told business secretary Peter Mandelson that the civil law sanctions proposed by the government in its consultation on the prohibition of blacklisting are “wholly inadequate” to deal with such a fundamental attack on human rights and freedoms. Richard Arthur, head of trade union law at the firm, said: “The Employment Relations Act 1999 which provides the enabling legislation, envisaged that there would be criminal sanctions for blacklisting trade unionists. It sends the wrong message to potential law breakers to now say that only civil law sanctions such as fines will apply.” The government pledged to outlaw blacklisting of trades unionists after an Information

Commissioner's Office probe found a construction industry controlled and bankrolled organisation, The Consulting Association, was operating a blacklist containing the names of more than 3,200 construction workers, many listed for their health and safety activities. Arthur said the new regulations proposed by the government will not offer adequate protection, adding "it will still be difficult to pursue blacklisting discrimination cases. The regulations will still require individuals to pursue claims, rather than allowing a trade union to do so on behalf of groups of members. What makes blacklisting so objectionable is the publication of an association between an individual and trade union membership or activities. By requiring individuals to put their name to proceedings this will simply be perpetuated." Other "serious omissions" identified by Thompsons include a time limit on claims and a failure to allow workers redress "over the simple fact that the claimant has had their personal details included on a blacklist."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#) and full response by Thompsons Solicitors on [The Blacklisting of Trade Unionists: Consultation on the Revised Draft Regulations](#). [Blacklist blog](#).

Third serious incident at power station

A Nottinghamshire power station where a union had raised concerns about safety management has experienced a third serious safety incident in less than four months. This week a man had to be airlifted to hospital after his legs were crushed at Staythorpe power station near Newark. The union GMB confirmed there had been a "serious accident" on 24 August at the Staythorpe site. GMB's Andy Fletcher said: "Apparently a pipe fell on to a worker, crushing his legs." The man's injuries are not thought to be life-threatening. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) said its inspectors would investigate the incident. GMB had earlier raised concerns at safety standards after incidents at Staythorpe power station in both May and June. On 1 June, what GMB described as a "serious health and safety incident" occurred when a 5 tonne steel beam fell from a crane near workers. It followed another incident involving contractor Alstom on the same site on 14 May. In the earlier incident, a 10 tonne pipe fell on a cradle after lifting cables snapped. GMB called after the second incident for a change in auditing arrangements "to enable the union to determine at the pre-tender award stage that bidders for work are able to meet the requirements of the National Agreement on pay and conditions." At the time GMB's Phil Davies said: "The Health and Safety Executive need to come in to this site and satisfy themselves that those undertaking the lifting on site have the necessary competence to undertake this work safely. Unless decisive action is taken someone will be killed" ([Risks 410](#)). Commenting on the latest incident, a spokesperson for Alstom said: "An incident occurred on Monday morning on site at Staythorpe power station in Nottinghamshire in which a worker with subcontractor Fisher Engineering was injured."

- [BBC News Online](#). [Building](#).

Call to stop HGV testing closures

Unions and MPs are calling on the government to preserve the national network of VOSA vehicle safety testing centres. Vehicle testing inspectors this week welcomed a top government committee's backing for a 'significant' national network of testing stations. Responding to the Transport Select Committee's report on 'The enforcement activities of the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA)', the union Prospect called for VOSA to abort its policy of closing down testing stations around the UK. Kevin Warden, Prospect and trade union side secretary for VOSA's 2,700 staff, said the MPs' recommendation that adequate coverage for annual testing should be maintained throughout the UK "flew in the face" of VOSA's current policy, which had seen four closures already announced. Warden said that Prospect had warned the committee that smaller operators in distant locations would be seriously inconvenienced by test station closures and the union's evidence had clearly carried weight. He criticised the agency for failing to take up £64m of funding made available by government in 2008 for investing in stations, and instead pursuing "an agenda of closures." The select committee warned against privatising the entire network of safety testing centres for heavy goods and public service vehicles, on the basis that this could significantly reduce access to testing, particularly in more remote areas of the country.

- [Prospect news release. The enforcement activities of the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency \(VOSA\)](#), Transport Select Committee, 24 August 2009.

Other news

All is not well with new sick notes

Plans to abolish the sick note in favour of the 'well note' could force sick and injured people back to work too early, a top employment law firm has warned. Trade union and personal injury specialists Thompsons Solicitors says the government's proposals, contained in a Department for Work and Pensions consultation on reforming the medical statement, would also fail to cut the cost of sick leave to industry or reduce compensation payments. It says unless the new rules oblige employers to make changes to the working conditions of employees who were injured or became sick because of their work – for example, altering their duties or making changes to workstations – then people will either be unable to return to work, or will do so only to go off sick again. Tom Jones, head of policy at Thompsons, said supporting people in getting back to work was a sound principle, "however many people remain on sick leave because employers fail to make the necessary adjustments to enable them to work again. This voluntary approach is highly unlikely to change that. People often find themselves in a no man's land: not wanting to stay off work, but unable to return." He explained: "Under the proposals employers might take someone back before they were ready, and even coerce them to do so and then dismiss them when they cannot cope. This is neither in the employee's or the employer's interest." He added the proposals appeared to link "well notes" with access to Employment and Support allowance. "This is fundamentally wrong. The government's new work health strategy must focus on the employer's duty to help people back to work. As with rehabilitation, it cannot be used as a stick with which to beat the sick and injured. Hard working families who have lost income through no fault of their own must not be

further punished." The new style notes are due to be introduced in spring 2010.

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#) and full response on [Reforming the Medical Statement: consultation on draft regulations](#).

New support for workplace mental health

People with mental health problems will receive extra support to manage their conditions and help them hold on to their jobs, the government has said. Employment minister Jim Knight said early indications from government led pilots, run in conjunction with the mental health charity Mind, have been "90 per cent successful" in helping people with fluctuating mental health conditions retain their jobs. Based on this trial, the government is now looking to extend the support, with an expectation of rolling it out nationally. The minister said: "Our plans to offer the right help early on can end the downward spiral of people falling out of work into sick leave, and onto benefits. We are all agreed that helping people stay in work is good news for them, their bosses and for the taxpayer." Other measures will include the government's "first ever" National Strategy for Mental Health and Employment, scheduled for publication in the autumn. It says the strategy will include expectations of employers, healthcare professionals, organisations and individuals in improving well-being in the workplace. There will also be a new network of dedicated mental health experts across Jobcentre Plus, which the government says will work with colleagues in the health system to coordinate support for people who have mental health conditions. Sophie Corlett, Mind's director of external relations, commented: "If employers put their mind to it and provide the right support they can keep their staff mentally well and fit for the workplace. People with mental health problems want to work but are often failed by employers who lack the understanding or the skills to provide the necessary support."

- [DWP news release](#). [The Guardian](#).

Big leap in suicides at work

The recession may be driving more people to take their lives at work, new statistics from the US suggest. The number of people who killed themselves at work in the US rose 28 per cent to an all-time high last year. Annual figures from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) revealed that "self-inflicted" deaths in the workplace rose from 196 to 251. A BLS spokesperson said the agency intended to research the surge in suicides more extensively. But anecdotal evidence has pointed to the financial crisis and job insecurity. Lanny Berman, executive director of the American Association of Suicidology, said that although the statistical jump required a case-by-case investigation, it "clearly has potential implications related to the threat of unemployment and it has implications related to dissatisfaction and rage about the quality of the work experience." He added: "When people do something in a public place, it tends to imply a suicide relative to something going on in that place." Researchers at the London School of Hygiene and

Tropical Medicine and the University of Oxford reported this year 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 ([Risks 414](#)). 'Crying shame', a report last year from Hazards magazine, warned that work factors could account for up to 250 suicide deaths in the UK each year.

- [US Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries](#). [Business Insurance](#). [The Guardian](#). [Hazards work-related suicide webpages](#).

Deaths raise concerns over nano safety

Seven cases of occupational disease, two of them fatal, have been linked to nanomaterial exposures at work. A study published last week in the European Respiratory Journal reports the seven women employees at a Chinese factory suffered shortness of breath, fluid in the lungs and around the heart, non-specific inflammation of lung tissue, and fibrosis in the lungs. Nanoparticles about 30 nanometres in size were found in the diseased areas of the lungs. "The workers, of peasant origin, were also completely unaware of workplace health and safety regulations and of the potential toxicity of the materials they were handling," said lead author Yuguo Song of the Occupational Disease and Clinical Toxicology Department at Chaoyang Hospital in Beijing. "Their only protection, used sporadically, was cotton gauze masks." When interviewed, the women mentioned that flecks were often present in the air and this seemed to cause itching on their face and arms. The authors say the condition was not a case of intoxication by paint vapour as a result of poor ventilation. Instead, they suggest the illness was caused by the inherent toxicity of the nanoparticles, which entered the body either through the airways or through the skin, or perhaps through both. "It is clear that the symptoms, the examination results and the progress of the disease in our patients differ markedly from respiratory pathologies induced by paint inhalation," Yuguo Song said. Within two years, two of the women died and the other patients' pulmonary fibrosis continued to develop slowly even once the exposure had stopped. The machine used by the women was shut down after the workers became ill, and no further cases were identified. The paper concludes: "These cases arouse concern that long-term exposure to some nano particles without protective measures may be related to serious damage to human lungs."

- Y Song, X Li, X Du. Exposure to nanoparticles is related to pleural effusion, pulmonary fibrosis and granuloma, European Respiratory Journal, published online 20 August 2009 [[abstract](#)]. [IOM news release](#). [2020 Science blog](#). [SAFENANO commentary](#). [The Pump Handle](#). [Jennifer Sass' NRDC blog](#). [Nature](#).

Scrapyard boss on manslaughter charges

A scrapyard manager has appeared in court charged with manslaughter following the death of a worker. Robert Owen Roberts, 55, appeared at Flintshire Magistrates Court at Mold on 25

August charged with unlawfully killing Mark Wright, who was working at Deeside Metal in Saltney when he died in April 2005 ([Risks 413](#)). The accused is also charged with gross negligence and breaching health and safety laws. Mr Wright, 37, died in a fireball after gas canisters he was asked to crush at the site exploded, causing 90 per cent burns to his body. An inquest into his death in February this year revealed the canisters could still have contained at least 19.6kg of propellant. During a brief two minute appearance in court, Mr Roberts, who appeared on a summons, was unconditionally bailed to appear at Mold Crown Court on 18 September. Mark Wright's parents, Dorothy and Doug Wright, are founder members of the campaign group Families Against Corporate Killers (FACK).

- [Flintshire Chronicle](#).

Machine death sparks road work alert

An investigation into a fatal incident involving a top cutting machine, which is used to prepare trenches in roads, has prompted a safety alert from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). On 30 July, Stuart Meakin, 28, was killed when he became entangled in the rotating drum of a top cutting machine. He was laying gas pipes during road works at Box in Wiltshire when he died after becoming trapped in the machine. HSE inspector Helena Tinton said: "Most machines of this type require a deactivation device which automatically stops the machine when the operator leaves the driver's seat. Employers are legally required to ensure that work equipment is maintained in an efficient state and to make sure all safety devices are in working order. Operators should also make sure that the power is disconnected and the machine has come to a standstill before carrying out any maintenance on the cutting wheel." She added: "We urge those in the construction and utilities industries to check the safety devices on their top cutting machines and to prevent similar incidents occurring." A joint HSE and Wiltshire police investigation into the death of the worker is ongoing.

- [HSE news release](#).

Dad's overalls killed his daughter

A widower whose wife died from an asbestos related cancer caused by dust on her father's overalls has received a "substantial" sum in compensation. June Probin died aged just 67 from mesothelioma in April 2008, just six months after being diagnosed. Her husband, Jack, said June, a trained nurse, knew the disease was caused by asbestos and recalled how she was exposed to dust on her father's work overalls more than 50 years earlier. Her father, Arnold Bemon, had worked with asbestos when he was employed as a boilermaker at the Crewe Railway Works, part of British Rail Engineering. During the 1950s Arnold would return home from work at lunchtime and in the evening with his overalls contaminated with asbestos. Jack said: "June knew it was an asbestos related disease and knew straight away how serious it was. It is terrifying to think that the whole

family was exposed to asbestos dust from her dad's overalls yet he was never warned by his employers about the dangers." Joanne Keen from Thompsons Solicitors, who represented the family, said: "Sadly June is one of many victims of mesothelioma exposed to asbestos on the overalls of a family member. Her death comes 50 years after her initial exposure to asbestos on her dad's work clothes. He had no idea that he was exposing her to a risk of fatal illness by merely coming home from work on a lunch time."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Daughter fights asbestos cancer

A woman who is fighting for her life fears that childhood hugs from her dad may have given her a deadly asbestos cancer. Judith Tomlinson loved nothing more than giving her dad Roland Adcock a hug when he came home from work. Now Judith, a former office worker, has mesothelioma which could be linked to the dusty overalls her dad wore while working as a construction foreman. The 58-year-old, who has launched a compensation claim, said: "My father would turn in his grave if he knew he may be responsible for giving me this cancer." She added "it's terrible that he may be to blame for this cancer, but it's his company's fault, not his. Dad was always dusty from work and would come in and sit and have a rest and a cup of tea before having a bath. I was always close to my father. I was daddy's girl as I was just like him, so when he got in from work, I wanted to be around him." Judith believes she may also have been exposed to asbestos dust while helping to wash her dad's work clothes and while riding in her father's work van. She believes her father was exposed to asbestos while working for construction firm Mason McCabe in Birmingham. Family solicitor Iain Shoolbred, from law firm Irwin Mitchell, said: "The disease traditionally affects people who have directly been exposed to asbestos during the course of their work. But sadly we have seen an increase in the number of cases involving family members who have been exposed to asbestos whilst laundering contaminated work clothes."

- [Coventry Telegraph.](#)

Asbestos 'snowballs' killed train driver

The widow of a former train driver who died from an asbestos-related cancer has described how her husband used to make snowballs from the deadly fibre. Frank White was diagnosed with mesothelioma in April 2008 and died, aged 74, in June this year. A post-mortem examination revealed he was suffering from pneumonia caused by the cancer. Derby and South Derbyshire Coroner's Court heard how Mr White became exposed to asbestos during part of his 47 years working for British Rail in Derby. While training to be a driver he cleaned fire boxes lined with asbestos. Speaking after his inquest, his widow, Freda, 80, said: "Frank would tell me about how some of the workers would make snowballs out of the asbestos to throw at each other while they were messing about, or make it into a football and kick it about." She added: "I

feel really cheated and angry and feel something should have been done about this years ago. Companies must have known it was dangerous." Recording a verdict of death by industrial disease, Louise Pinder, deputy coroner for Derby and South Derbyshire, said she was satisfied Mr White's mesothelioma was brought about by his exposure to asbestos during his time working for British Rail.

- [Derby Telegraph](#).

Farmer dies after being stung by wasps

A farmer died last week after being repeatedly stung by a swarm of wasps while working on his farm. Mark Evison, 47, had been clearing a dyke on farmland in Ellerker, near South Cave, East Yorkshire, when he disturbed a wasps' nest. He made a desperate phone call to his brother, saying, "The wasps have got me," before he collapsed. By the time the emergency services had reached Mr Evison he was already in the advanced stages of anaphylactic shock - a life-threatening allergic reaction. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Mr Evison was allergic to wasps and had been stung two years previously. On that occasion, he was taken to Goole Hospital where he was given a shot of adrenaline and made a rapid recovery. Latest official figures show there were four deaths in England and Wales in 2007 due to contact with hornets, wasps or bees.

- [The Independent](#). [BBC News Online](#).

International News

Australia: Ex-Hardie directors get business ban

The fines and bans handed down to former executives and directors of Australian asbestos giant James Hardie are not enough considering the extent of their immoral and illegal behaviour and the harm the company's deadly asbestos products have caused, unions have said. Justice Gzell of the New South Wales Supreme Court this week handed down fines and bans from directorships to the former board members. But unions expressed disappointment that the financial penalties were well short of those sought by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission. Jeff Lawrence, secretary of national union federation ACTU, said: "The former directors betrayed the trust of innocent victims of the company's products by deliberately lying about James Hardie's ability to meet its compensation liabilities. While we welcome the disqualifications given to the former directors, the financial penalties are inappropriate for the magnitude of the breaches of their duties." Former chief executive Peter Macdonald was fined Aus\$350,000 (£179,000) and disqualified from company management for 15 years. The Australian Securities and Investments Commission had sought a fine of between \$1.47 million (£750,000) and \$1.81 million (£920,000). Former company chair Meredith Hellicar and other non-executive directors were fined \$30,000 (£15,000) and disqualified for five years. Australian Manufacturing Workers Union NSW Secretary Paul Bastian said: "This decision exposes the

extraordinary lengths the James Hardie company went to avoid its obligations to asbestos sufferers." He added that the case showed "the Australian community will always hold to account company executives and directors who engage in this sort of immoral and illegal behaviour. We will never let them off the hook for the damage they have done."

- [ACTU news release](#). [Unions NSW news release](#). [News.com.au](#). [The Australian](#). [Perth Now](#).

Global: New safety drive at ArcelorMittal

Unions and managers from metals giant ArcelorMittal are pressing for occupational health and safety improvements across the firm's global operations. A Joint Global Health and Safety Committee (JGHSC) meeting, held this month at the Geneva HQ of global union federation IMF, reviewed progress and hatched a plan on how to press for further improvements. The meeting received reports from local union reps on two recent fatalities, one in Ostrava in the Czech Republic and one in Monessen, USA. Union members discussed ways to improve information flow between plants and unions at the global and national level, in particular when a fatality had occurred within the company. They agreed to develop a union safety communications network within the company to address this issue. The network would also be used to exchange journals and safety information produced by unions. Priority areas for future work identified by the committee included injury prevention, maintenance of plant and machinery, skills and awareness training and employee security.

- [IMF news report](#).

Global: Dangerous increase in dumped seafarers

Seafarers are finding themselves abandoned without wages or any resources when ships are laid up. Global union federation ITF says the practice of vessel "abandonment" is becoming more commonplace. It says it recently assigned one of its inspectors to head up a relief effort for seafarer on laid-up ships at Istanbul. ITF maritime coordinator Steve Cotton explained: "We knew this rise would be coming and first put our inspectors on standby for it last year, but that doesn't make it any less serious." He said: "I repeat the offer I made in February: any shipping company or financial institution with a maritime client having difficulties – in particular financial problems which are likely to adversely affect crews, can come to us to discuss how we may be able to help." He added: "It's difficult to put an exact figure to the increase, since the fine details vary, while on some laid up ships and vessels belonging to companies with severe cash flow problems you have all the features of abandonment even when technically that hasn't yet happened. So far this year we've notified 30 ongoing cases of abandonment to the ILO. That figure doesn't include the special project in Turkey, where there are around 15 vessels arrested with abandoned crew on board, or the constant stream of cases coming in that are borderline abandonments." He points to the Virtus, which arrived at

La Coruña in Spain on 11 June this year after experiencing mechanical problems and which, due to financial problems, is still there. On 17 July, ITF inspector Luz Baz established that the 12 Russian and Ukrainian crew members were without provisions and about to run out of water and fuel. She said: "Thankfully the Spanish Red Cross and several local NGOs are supporting the crew for now, while the port is supplying fresh water and electricity." She added: "This is yet another case of an abandoned vessel, of workers who have not been paid, haven't the money to get home and didn't even have food onboard."

- [ITF news release](#).

Malawi: Tobacco plantations poison child workers

Almost 100,000 children who toil on Malawian tobacco estates for up to 12 hours a day are exposed to "extremely high levels of nicotine poisoning," according to a report released by a children's rights group. London-based Plan International's 'Hard work, little pay and long hours' study found that labourers as young as five suffer severe symptoms from absorbing "up to 54 milligrams a day of dissolved nicotine through their skin," the equivalent of 50 cigarettes a day. The children sampled in the report exhibited common symptoms of nicotine poisoning, including severe headaches, abdominal pain, muscle weakness, coughing and breathlessness. This 'Green tobacco sickness' is a recognised occupational disease. It is made worse by humid and wet conditions, which are prevalent in Malawi, as residual moisture on the leaves helps nicotine to be absorbed quicker, with the effects worse in children. The report warns that as the tobacco industry continues to shift its production to developing countries, "more vulnerable children are being exposed to these hazardous working conditions." According to the group, "over 78,000 children work on tobacco estates across Malawi, some up to 12 hours a day, many for less than 1.7 cents an hour and without protective clothing." Macdonald Mumba, Plan Malawi's child rights adviser, said: "This research shows that tobacco estates are exploiting and abusing children who have a right to a safe working environment. Plan is calling for better enforcement of child labour laws and harsher punishment for employers who break them. These children are risking their health for 11p a day."

- [Plan International news release](#). [Hard work, little pay and long hours' report \[pdf\]](#). [Morning Star](#). [The Guardian](#).

South Africa: Safety protest workers are safe

Paper workers in South Africa who were under threat of dismissal after a safety dispute are to retain their jobs after a union campaign ([Risks 411](#)). The dispute between pulp and paper manufacturer Sappi and the union CEPPWAWU at the company's Enstra mill was resolved early in August. The firm had intended to severely discipline and even fire 19 shop stewards and 24 other workers for engaging in safety strikes late in April and early May. However, negotiations led to a four-page memorandum, signed on 5 August.

Under the terms of the agreement there were no dismissals, and the union admitted that its shopfloor leaders had engaged in unofficial action. Instead, affected shop stewards and others were given relatively short, unpaid suspensions. Final written warnings will stay in effect for only one year. Twenty-three workers received one-week suspensions and returned to work on 18 August. Fourteen shop stewards received a two-week suspension and will return to their jobs this week. Five other shop stewards, plus one other worker, were suspended for one month. A major international campaign in support of the workers was coordinated by global union federation ICEM. It says ICEM affiliates, health and safety activists worldwide, and scores of others "gave the dispute a global voice over health and safety concerns. These protests, CEPPWAWU feels, played the major role in lessening the penalties for what were a series of three illegal strikes. The South African affiliate, as well as the ICEM, conveys sincere gratitude to those who voiced their concerns from every corner of the world."

- [ICEM news release.](#)

Resources

New HSE programme on green energy

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has launched a new initiative in "response to government plans to introduce alternative (non-nuclear) energy technologies to combat climate change." It says its Emerging Energy Technologies (EET) Programme, which includes new online resources, is HSE's attempt to address the health and safety implications of the government's drive "to tackle climate change by reducing carbon dioxide emissions" and to "ensure secure, clean and affordable energy in the face of increasingly uncertain supply." The safety watchdog says EET's key objectives are to support the government strategy, provide guidance "that enables the safe introduction and expansion of new energy technologies", to "enforce the law to minimise risks to all those affected by new activities," and to "maintain a regulatory framework that is effective, coherent and pertinent." It says the programme's "work streams" include carbon capture and storage, natural gas storage and LNG imports, renewable energy, distributed generation and cleaner coal technology. Hazards magazine warned this month that the "green" industries could present a range of old and new risks to the workforce ([Risks 420](#)).

- [HSE Emerging Energy Technologies \(EET\) Programme.](#)

Events and Courses

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR AUGUST to OCTOBER 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