

Risks

TUC 

e-bulletin

Number 426 – 3 October 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

RMT launches maintenance cuts hotline
Health workers urged to have swine flu jab
Payout for lucky-to-survive bus driver
Widow denied asbestos compensation
TUC marks safety law landmark

Other news

Action needed on workplace strains
TUC calls for major strains move
Labour Party backs gangmaster law on sites
New protection for migrant workers
Worker crushed then blamed in laundry horror
Fine for death in meat blender
Recycling firm fined after lorry fatality
Take notice of dermatitis risks or pay
Presenteeism harms employee health
Asbestos lurked in teacher's cupboard
BP 'failed' to make safety changes

International News

Global: Protect workers, not just bankers
India: Dozens die in chimney collapse
USA: 'Green hotel' claim is dangerous greenwashing
USA: Work exposures rise as inspections fall

Events and Courses

TUC courses for safety reps

Useful Links

RMT launches maintenance cuts hotline

Rail union RMT has launched a confidential email hotline for members amid growing concerns over planned maintenance cuts by Network Rail which it says will put safety and thousands of jobs at risk. Company briefings for RMT safety reps have confirmed that the cuts will be spread across the whole Network Rail maintenance operation, including track, signalling and overhead lines. The union says over 2,500 jobs – nearly 20 per cent of the total workforce – are at risk. As part of a campaign strategy for opposing the plans, RMT is compiling a dossier of where the proposed cuts are hitting maintenance works along with an assessment of the safety risks. The union has sent a confidential email address to all RMT members involved with Network Rail maintenance and is urging them to send details of the impact in their locality of the cuts. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "RMT has warned repeatedly of the serious impact that the cuts being considered by Network Rail will have on both safety and reliability. The company briefings to our safety reps have confirmed those fears and that's why we have launched this hotline to begin the process of assembling a dossier exposing the hard facts." Mr Crow added: "While the politicians are talking about future cuts they are already a reality on railway lines up and down the country and we are determined to ensure that both staff and the travelling public know exactly what impact they will have. With the billions spent bailing out the banks it is disgraceful that essential maintenance services on the railways are under massive pressure to cut corners, increasing the risk of another tragedy on the tracks."

- [RMT news release](#).

Health workers urged to have swine flu jab

UNISON is urging health workers to get the swine flu vaccination. The union's Health Service Group Executive says it will give full support to the government's swine flu vaccination programme. Karen Jennings, UNISON's head of health, said: "We are recommending that all health workers have the swine flu vaccination, in addition to the seasonal winter flu one. UNISON will work with the Department of Health to ensure that staff have the right information to make an informed decision and to protect them, their patients and their families." She added: "There should be no shortcuts to safety when it comes to getting the vaccine up and running. Ultimately, having the injection is down to personal choice, but we are supportive of the move."

- [UNISON news release](#). [TUC flu pandemic guide](#).

Payout for lucky-to-survive bus driver

A bus driver who nearly lost his life in a head-on crash has been awarded £250,000 compensation. Medics told Unite member James

Morton, 60, he was lucky to survive after a Mercedes van smashed into his bus on a country road near Cramlington, Northumberland. Mr Morton had to be cut free from the wreckage by firefighters and he was then airlifted to hospital. His left leg was shattered below the knee and only the speed with which he was treated saved him from having to have it amputated. His driving licence has since been revoked on medical grounds, forcing him to give up the job he had enjoyed for 27 years. Following a two-year legal battle, the van driver has admitted responsibility for the crash, which also injured several passengers. Mr Morton said: "I feel lucky to be alive really. You can't put a price on an injury like that, but it's some consolation. I was planning to work until I was 65, but that's been cut short." Unite regional secretary Davey Hall said: "I'm pleased that the claim has been settled.

"I see it as a victory for Mr Morton and his family, and I'm very proud that the union has been able to support him throughout this ordeal."

- [Evening Chronicle](#).

Widow denied asbestos compensation

The widow of a man who spent 44 years working with asbestos has missed out on a potential £200,000 payout. Dinah Eaves is not eligible for the money because the firm her husband David worked for was taken over after he was exposed to the deadly dust. GMB member David Eaves died in 2006, nine months after retiring. His widow received just £17,000 from the Pneumoconiosis Workers Compensation Act fund. The couple's son Sean, 41, said: "It is immoral. He worked for that business for 44 years. He died thinking mum was being looked after and that is not the case." David Eaves drilled and fitted asbestos panels in caravans for FG Bailey Ltd without a mask during the 60s. He died, aged 65, in June 2006. Dinah Eaves, 64, from Bristol, said: "The last six or seven months of his life were hell. I was nursing him 24/7 and he was just getting weaker and weaker, thinner and thinner. We were always a couple and always cared for each other. He didn't want to go into a hospice and I didn't want him to." She added: "Directors from the company used to come and see him but it felt to me like they were on a fact-finding mission rather than there through genuine kindness." Stephen Loach from Thompsons Solicitors, who were brought in by GMB to act for the family, said: "When past employers have since ceased business it is vital to trace insurers. We estimate that thousands of asbestos victims fail to gain justice because of problems doing so. The Association of British Insurers' tracing scheme is inadequate. The GMB and Thompsons continue to campaign for a fund of last resort to be paid for by the insurance industry."

- [Bristol Evening Post](#). [Daily Mirror](#).
- [Thompsons Solicitors campaign for an insurance fund of last resort](#).

TUC marks safety law landmark

The TUC has said the union campaign that resulted in a new safety law a generation ago has delivered life-saving results. The Health and Safety at Work Act, which had its 35th anniversary on 1 October, "was one of the most important pieces of social legislation of the past 50 years," said TUC general secretary Brendan Barber. "It helped transform the safety system in Britain and has helped ensure that many more of us go home safely after a day's work. This Act came about as a result of long-term campaigning by trade unions and safety campaigners and has stood the test of time." The TUC leader warned, however, that "we must not rest on our laurels. While the death toll from injuries may have fallen considerably since 1974, the Act has yet to have a major impact on occupational diseases such as musculoskeletal disorders, cancers and stress. The TUC also believes that while the Act places a specific duty on employers, workers and suppliers, the lack of a specific positive duty on directors is a significant failing which the government should address at the earliest opportunity." The TUC says union reps can show their support for new directors' duties by signing an online petition published by two leading safety magazines ([Risks 424](#)).

- [TUC news release](#). [HSE news release](#).
- Sign up to the [HS@W/HSB petition](#) calling for statutory directors' duties.

Other news

Action needed on workplace strains

Muscle and joint pain accounts for almost half of all sick leave, both in the UK and across Europe, a study has found. A call by the researchers for workplace interventions to tackle the problem early has been backed by the TUC. Half of all of all sickness absence (49 per cent) is caused by musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), concluded the Fit for Work Europe report by The Work Foundation, a London-based think tank. It estimates that this costs the UK economy £7bn each year, with the cost across the European Union as high as £219bn. The report says an estimated one million people in the UK alone suffer from MSDs that cause them to take time off work, with 9.5 million working days lost each year. It found 100 million Europeans suffer from chronic musculoskeletal pain – over 40 million of whom are workers – with up to 40 per cent having to give up work due to their condition. Tatiana Quadrello, senior researcher at The Work Foundation, said: "The Fit for Work study clearly suggests that early intervention is a key factor in allowing people with MSDs to remain in work. This has provided us with the beginnings of a potential calculation of an 'early intervention premium' which could encourage governments and healthcare professionals to consider this when discussing intervention policies."

- [Fit for Work Europe](#) website, [related blog entry](#) and [full report](#). [BBC News Online](#).

TUC calls for major strains move

The Work Foundation's strain injuries report shows the urgent need for better occupational health services, rehabilitation and a specific strain injuries prevention law, the TUC has said. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said the Fit for Work Europe report "highlights what trade unions have been demanding for many years, which is access to early rehabilitation for those with muscle and back problems." He added that only two per cent of UK workers have access to comprehensive occupational health services through their employer. He said the alternative, a GP referral to a specialist, could take months, by which time the condition could be chronic and could cost a worker their job. "We need a national occupational health service which identifies and treats these conditions at the earliest opportunity. Workers with muscle and back conditions also need more help to return to work once they feel able to," Mr Barber said. "Many of these illnesses are caused or made worse by work. The huge number of cases shows that the current European regulations on manual handling and working on computers are failing to prevent work-related musculoskeletal disorders. We urgently need new and clear regulations, backed up by strong enforcement against those employers that are causing many of these injuries." Unions across the European Union have been pressing for a Europe-wide strain injuries law ([Risks 328](#)).

- [TUC news release. European trade union MSD campaign.](#)

Labour Party backs gangmaster law on sites

Construction union UCATT has received a significant boost in its campaign to have the Gangmasters Licensing Act (GLA) extended to the construction industry. The Labour Party's conference this week backed a call for legal protection under the GLA to cover site workers. This means the issue will now form part of Labour's internal policymaking process. Speaking at the Labour Party conference, UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie said: "Workers, whoever they are. Wherever they work. Must not be exploited. The government must act. And extend the gangmasters legislation." Mr Ritchie, added: "Government must act to stamp out these abuses of construction workers once and for all." Gangmasters Licensing Authority director Paul Whitehouse commented: "Speaking personally, I can say that we know of two gangmasters whose licences we have revoked who are continuing to operate in the construction industry and that is just the tip of the iceberg. It is right to protect workers wherever they work." Referring to the calls for an extension of legislation, he said: "As far as I am concerned, anything that allows us to protect workers from being exploited is very important."

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

New protection for migrant workers

The government has introduced measures to help protect migrants from being forced to work in dangerous conditions for poor wages. Communities secretary John Denham said this exploitation could also undercut local workers and cause resentment. He said around

£3 million over two years is being allocated to projects which enforce basic workplace rights like working in safe conditions and tackling illegal working practices such as poor wages, and which ensure employers meet their obligations to all workers. John Denham said: "The very fact that some migrants are being asked to work in dangerous conditions for poor wages is unacceptable. But as a result these employers are also undercutting the wages of local workers, putting unfair pressure on businesses struggling to compete and causing resentment in the community." He said: "This funding is going to projects that will protect existing workers through enforcing the minimum wage and by ensuring employers meet their obligations to all workers." Case studies cited by the government include a contractor who was fined after pleading guilty "to allowing five Polish workers to use a construction site as sleeping accommodation, putting them at substantial risk. He also failed to prepare a plan before the start of work that would have highlighted risks from fire, working at heights and from site electrics, and enabled safe working practices to be used."

- [DCLG news release.](#)

Worker crushed then blamed in laundry horror

A giant laundry business who blamed workers for a highly dangerous incident that left a worker in a coma has been fined. OCS group was fined £80,000 and ordered to pay costs of £33,059 at Southwark Crown Court last week after admitting a criminal safety breach. Joseph Pathmananthan, 61, was in a coma for 19 days and was told he would lose his legs following the incident at Cannon Hygiene Ltd - part of the OCS Group - in October 2007. Six operations eventually saved his legs. He was attempting to unblock an industrial washing machine at the Balham, south London, commercial laundry when the 80 kilogram hopper of the machine fell on top of him from 2 metres. He suffered fractures to both femurs, his right tibia, ribs and spine. He also had a fractured left shoulder blade and injuries to his lungs. OCS Group UK Ltd's internal investigation lay almost all the blame with employees on the Balham site, including the victim, who was disciplined. Its investigation made little criticism of the company's policies or of senior management. Sentencing the company, Judge Taylor criticised OCS Group UK Ltd for what she said was a systemic failure and its complacency during monitoring. If the company had not pleaded guilty at the earliest opportunity, the judge said, the fine would have been £40,000 more. Mr Pathmananthan's solicitor, Henrietta Phillips from Thompsons Solicitors, said: "Mr Pathmananthan's life has been completely turned upside down by this accident. His bravery and determination to walk again are a credit to him and his family. We are pursuing a claim for compensation on his behalf for not only the horrific injuries but the losses he has suffered and expenses he has incurred in his fight to walk again."

- [HSE news release.](#) [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#) [Wandsworth Guardian.](#)

Fine for death in meat blender

A company has been fined £160,000 after a worker was fatally injured while cleaning a blending machine at a meat processing plant in Milton Keynes. Lynda Trebilcock, 53, was killed at the Delico plant in May 2007. The firm, based in Hull, had pleaded guilty to breaching health and safety regulations at a hearing in July. At the sentencing at Aylesbury Crown Court last week, the firm was also ordered to pay costs of £40,452. Mrs Trebilcock suffered severe head injuries when the powered door on the blending machine closed unexpectedly. She died at the scene. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigated the incident at Delico's meat processing plant in Snelshall West, Milton Keynes on 19 May 2007. The safety watchdog issued an immediate prohibition notice stopping use of the machine, which had inoperative guard interlocks. Four improvement notices were also issued, requiring better training, inspection and maintenance. HSE inspector Karl Howes said: "Employers must ensure that they implement safe systems of work for staff using machinery. They must make certain that safety features on machines, such as guards are not overridden. All areas of risk need to be assessed, including cleaning and maintenance tasks, to make sure that tragic incidents like this do not happen."

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

Recycling firm fined after lorry fatality

The death of a man who was run over by a skip lorry has led to a waste and recycling company being fined. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) brought the prosecution against Shanley and Sons Ltd of Trowbridge, Wiltshire. The company was fined £80,000 and ordered to pay costs of £25,000 last week at a hearing in Swindon Crown Court. A guilty plea had been entered at an earlier hearing. The case followed the death of Bert Reeves, 62, who was fatally injured when a skip lorry reversed over him at a transfer station on 21 June 2007. The site is used to process skip waste and Mr Reeves was working on foot in the tipping area, unknown to a skip lorry driver who was reversing his vehicle to tip. Mr Reeves was in a large blindspot in the lorry's mirrors and was struck by the rear of the lorry and run over. He died later the same day in hospital. HSE's prosecuting team told the court the site was chaotic and congested with a lack of communication and was rife with dangerous working practices. No blame was attributed to the lorry driver in this case. Bert's widow, Frances Reeves, said to the court: "Life for me can never be the same. I feel that his death was so preventable. If Shanley's had taken the time to ensure that safety rules were in place, that the yard was being managed so that people were out of the way when vehicles operated, then Bert would not have been able to have been killed." She added: "As a family, we believe that if there is any good that can come of this, it will be that we've helped to spread the message that waste and recycling sites are incredibly dangerous places. Safety rules need to be in place to keep people out of the way of vehicles. If managers of these sites listen to this message, and act, hopefully we can stop other families from being ripped apart. Nobody should have to go through the things that we've been through."

- [HSE news release](#) and [waste industry webpages](#).

Take notice of dermatitis risks or pay

An NHS trust has been fined for ignoring official notices calling requiring it to sort out dermatitis risks in a hospital. The Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust was fined £6,500 and ordered to pay £4,500 in court costs after pleading guilty to two health and safety charges at Harlow Magistrates' Court last week. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors visited Harlow's Princess Alexandra Hospital in November 2007 and found it was not managing adequately the risk of staff becoming sensitised to latex, mainly from latex gloves. HSE inspectors served two improvement notices - legal notices which require improvements to be made within a certain timeframe. The Trust needed two extensions and significant support from the HSE before it complied with the first notice, requiring risk assessments, in May 2008. The second notice on control of dermatitis risks was extended three times, finally to 1 July 2008, but when HSE inspectors visited the Trust they found it had still not complied. Inspectors also discovered the Trust had failed to report that a member of staff had been diagnosed with latex-linked occupational dermatitis. HSE inspector Matthew Tackling said "employers need to realise the importance of complying with improvement notices as they can be prosecuted for not carrying out the required work within the specified timescale." He added: "Reporting cases of occupational dermatitis is a legal requirement. Employers should ensure they know which substances can cause dermatitis in their workplace, how to recognise the symptoms, how to prevent it occurring and the need to report cases if they develop."

- [HSE news release. Harlow Herald.](#)

Presenteeism harms employee health

UK workers are so terrified of losing their jobs in this recession they are working while sick, a new study has found. According to those surveyed as part of Simplyhealth's Bothered Britain Report, 43 per cent of people living in Britain haven't taken any days off in the last 12 months, up from 36 per cent in 2008. Raman Sankaran from Simplyhealth commented: "Today's competitive and pressured working environment means that some people find it difficult to speak up about an illness or take time off. However, employees should not be made to feel that they have to put their health at risk to save their job. A healthy employee is a more productive employee, and it's important that companies do everything they can to help support employees to good health." He added: "The current climate has not been conducive to good working relationships, as worryingly the research reveals that one in five people (22 per cent) feel they are not believed when calling in sick, unless their illness has been witness by their employer." The survey found those working in the retail, leisure and catering industries seemed to be under the most pressure, with more than half (58 per cent) not taking any sick days in the last year. TUC has warned repeatedly that punitive sickness absence policies that encourage "presenteeism" are counterproductive, as sick workers can spread disease to other workers and jeopardise or slow their own recovery. Earlier this year it warned there had been a sharp increase in the number of "mucus troopers" turning in to work when sick ([Risks 393](#)).

- [Simplyhealth news release](#) and [Bothered Britain report](#). [Personnel Today](#).

Asbestos lurked in teacher's cupboard

A former Eastbourne school teacher died of cancer likely to have been caused by asbestos in the classroom, an inquest has found. Neville Beck was head of history at Ratton School between 1972 and 1997. Two years ago he found he had the asbestos cancer mesothelioma. He died of a blood clot caused by the disease in April this year, aged 71. An inquest last week at Eastbourne Magistrates Court heard a witness statement the teacher prepared while he was ill. Mr Beck explained there was a store cupboard with shelves made of asbestos in the classroom where he was based for the majority of the 25 years he worked at the school. He used the cupboard daily, picking up and putting down books and paperwork on the asbestos shelves. Coroner Alan Craze concluded that although no asbestos fibres were found in an initial examination of a tissue sample taken from one of Mr Beck's lungs, "on a balance of probability" Mr Beck had "an industrial disease." In a statement, a spokesperson for East Sussex County Council (ESCC), the education authority responsible, said: "All ESCC owned and occupied buildings, including schools, are surveyed on a regular basis by specialist licensed consultants. Where the presence of asbestos is identified in any of our buildings it is removed or encapsulated through a controlled and managed process to minimise risk in accordance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006."

- [Eastbourne Herald](#).

BP 'failed' to make safety changes

London-based multinational BP's claims to have long since addressed the safety malaise in its refineries have been discredited after the latest intervention by the US safety regulator. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) told BP last month it had failed to make agreed-upon safety improvements at its Texas City refinery following the March 2005 explosions that killed 15 workers. In an agreement with the federal agency, BP promised changes at its refinery and paid a \$21.5 million fine to settle safety violations OSHA found during its investigation into the 2005 blasts. In a 3 August letter to BP Texas City refinery manager Keith Casey, OSHA's Mark R Briggs said that if specific improvements were not made by 23 September it "would constitute a failure to comply with the terms of the 2005 agreement and/or failure to abate" safety hazards at the refinery. Briggs detailed dozens of problems, including BP's failure to review instrument alarm systems that "are critical to process safety" and failure to conduct a comprehensive valve study on its process units as required. A failure of equipment and the use of an outdated pressure release system on a sub-unit at the refinery were at the heart of a "geyser" release of flammable material that ignited, causing fatal blasts that killed 15 and injured more than 170. Briggs also wrote, "for some identified hazards, BP either has not specified or allocated the specific layers of protection needed." While not addressing specifics of OSHA's letter, BP told the Galveston Daily

News it is committed to building upon the safety investments and improvements at the refinery. "BP places the safe, compliant and reliable operations of all of our manufacturing facilities as our highest priority," BP spokesperson Daren Beaudo said. "We believe we are in full compliance with our commitments."

- [Galveston Daily News](#).

International News

Global: Protect workers, not just bankers

Unions have demanded that world leaders stop concentrating on protecting the bankers of the world, and give some attention to protecting workers, including the children who are among those doing some of the most dangerous, unregulated jobs. Workers Uniting, the organisation bringing together US union USW and the UK's Unite union, says a video, 'Where ships go to die', gives a shocking insight into the plight of shipbreaking workers in Bangladesh who are forced to do what could be the most dangerous job in the world with virtually no protections. A letter last week from Workers Uniting to G20 heads of state, demanded "our world leaders do something positive and concrete to protect some of the most vulnerable workers anywhere in the world." It adds that 30,000 shipbreaking workers in Bangladesh - many of them children just 10 to 13 years old - break apart huge decommissioned tanker ships. On average a worker is killed every three weeks. The Workers Uniting letter added: "Child workers use hammers to break apart asbestos - there is an average of 15,000 pounds of asbestos on each ship, which they carry out and dump on the beach. On Saturday, September 5, two workers were burned to death and three were critically injured when a gas tank on a South Korean ship they were dismantling exploded."

- [USW news release](#). ['Where ships go to die' video](#). [Workers Uniting letter to G20 leaders](#).

India: Dozens die in chimney collapse

Dozens of workers have died after a giant chimney collapsed in bad weather at a partially built power plant in central India. The 100-metre chimney, which was only one-third completed, came crashing down on the afternoon of 23 September on a cafeteria where workers were having tea during a rainstorm, police said. Other witnesses said that workers were sheltering from the rain around the chimney at the Bharat Aluminium Co (Balco) power plant, part-owned by the British mining company Vedanta, in the central state of Chhattisgarh. A recent estimate put the death toll - reports have varied between 30 and 100 plus - at 46 fatalities. Officials said that they were struggling to determine how many people were missing because Balco had been unable to say how many workers were on the site at the time of the incident. Vedanta's safety standards are likely to come under close scrutiny as a result of the tragedy. "A probable reason for the incident appears to be the excessive rains and lightning at Korba," the company said in a statement. "The

exact cause for this will, however, be ascertained only after a detailed investigation is concluded.”

- [Vedanta statement. The Times. Times of India.](#)

USA: ‘Green hotel’ claim is dangerous greenwashing

A jobs agency supplying workers to a top US hotel chain is imposing debilitating work rates on the out-sourced staff while boasting the measures are creating a “green hotel”. Rick Holliday, president of the temporary agency Hospitality Staffing Solutions, told the Boston Globe he has given the formerly directly employed Hyatt housekeepers a “start” on the “American Dream” by paying them \$8 per hour to clean 25 rooms per day. He said the “green programmes” in which sheets are not automatically changed, enable workers to nearly double their workload. Marcy Goldstein-Gelb, executive director of the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH), is not impressed. “You show up at work and learn that your new employer is a temporary agency. Then you’re told you must clean 40 per cent more rooms per day – 25 instead of 15, from 30 minutes to less than 17 minutes per room, because you work in a ‘green hotel’ and will change sheets less frequently. You still have many other tasks per room – scrubbing toilets, cleaning tiles, washing coffee makers, dusting, wiping mirrors, vacuuming carpets, mopping floors, and lifting heavy mattresses for rooms that need sheets changed. To meet the higher quota, you skip breaks and lunches.” She added: “Because these tasks require 8,000 back- and shoulder-breaking postures, you are likely to suffer severe work-related pain (77 per cent to 91 per cent of housekeepers do). To get through the day, you may need pain medication (65 per cent of housekeepers do). There’s a fair chance you will become permanently disabled.” She concludes: “Not green with envy for this American Dream? The flag Rick Holliday’s waving isn’t red, white, and blue – it’s greenwashed.”

- [ITUC/Hazards green jobs, safe jobs blog.](#)

USA: Work exposures rise as inspections fall

The US official health and safety regulator OSHA is doing fewer health inspections despite more workplace exposures to toxic and hazardous substances, according to an analysis by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). It says while workplace exposures are linked to the premature deaths of 10 times more workers than all workplace accidents combined, OSHA now spends less than 5 per cent of its limited resources on workplace health protection. The analysis says occupational exposures are the eighth leading cause of death in the US, resulting in more than 40,000 premature deaths per year from cancer, neurological disease, cardiopulmonary disease, and other maladies. Yet OSHA figures show a slump in health sampling that began in 1991. The number of exposure measurements taken is few and getting fewer, PEER says. For the most recent year (2007), OSHA took about 53,000 samples nationwide, whereas it was collecting

nearly three times as many samples in 1988, at the end of the Reagan administration. PEER says at its current rate of health inspections, it would take OSHA about 600 more years to make any chemical exposure measurements at half the nation's industrial facilities that handle hazardous substances. The figures were derived from preliminary analyses of a massive database of exposure measurements for all federal and state inspections obtained by Dr Adam Finkel, PEER board member and former director of health rulemaking for OSHA, through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit. He said: "OSHA must reverse its 'out of sight, out of mind' attitude about the most important part of its mission." PEER executive director Jeff Ruch added: "Workplace exposures have spawned a silent epidemic in America." He said: "The health risks in some occupations are so high that your career choice can determine your life expectancy."

- [PEER news release](#).

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

The person responsible for the Risks e-bulletin is Hugh Robertson
Email: healthandsafety@tuc.org.uk