

Risks

TUC 

e-bulletin

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**HAZARDS
MAGAZINE**



**Asbestos -
The hidden killer**

Hazards at Work

updated second edition
now available

Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 18,000 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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Unions slam 'work until you drop' move

Unions have condemned government proposals to raise the retirement age, which could leave former workers in some of the poorest parts of the country receiving less than two years pension on average before they die. Announcing plans to raise the state pension age to 66 and to abolish the default retirement age, work and pensions secretary of Iain Duncan Smith said: "People are living longer and healthier lives than ever, and the last thing we want is to lose their talent and enthusiasm from the workplace due to an arbitrary age limit. We also need to recognise that to meet the challenge of providing an affordable, stable pensions system in a society with ever increasing life expectancy, people will need to work longer." But GMB national pensions officer, Naomi Cooke, said there weren't the jobs for older workers, adding: "Increasing the pension age to 66 will lead to Glaswegian men living only two years beyond pension age while those in Kensington & Chelsea can still expect a 22 year retirement. Given those living in areas of the lowest life expectancy are most reliant on their state pension it is obvious who is hit hardest by the government's latest regressive announcement." Construction union UCATT said the majority of construction workers are forced to retire before the age of 65 as they are no longer able to perform their jobs due to ill health or injury. General secretary Alan Ritchie said: "By increasing the retirement age the ConDems are effectively forcing many construction workers to work until they drop." He added: "Construction workers are particularly vulnerable to premature death, not only does heavy manual labour take a long term toll on the body, but construction workers are now the group most at risk of developing asbestos related diseases such as the incurable lung cancer mesothelioma. Given the long latency period of these diseases, they often manifest themselves when workers near retirement or soon after they retire." Dave Prentis, general secretary of UNISON, said: "It may be a choice for the fit and healthy to keep on going for another year at work, but for some, work takes a terrible toll on their health. Many workers across the public and private sector do very physically demanding jobs where carrying on until 66 is not a safe or practical option."

- [DWP news release](#). [When should the state pension age increase to 66? – A Call for Evidence](#). [GMB news release](#). [UCATT news release](#). [UNISON news release](#). [TUC news release](#).

RMT warns of 'huge' rail safety risks

Rail union RMT has warned that a failure to update the country's rail system will create 'huge safety risks'. RMT was responding to an indication from the secretary of state for transport that train fares are going to be jacked up while modernisation and renewal work is to be shelved. Transport secretary Phillip Hammond told the Financial Times that fares could be increased by more than the expected 6 per cent. At the same time, electrification and high speed service developments are to be shelved and rolling stock renewals are to be scrapped, the minister indicated. Speaking from RMT's annual general meeting in Aberdeen, general secretary Bob Crow said: "It could not be clearer, the government are planning to bleed rail passengers dry and attack essential modernisation

programmes while ring-fencing the profits of the train operators." He added: "We could see fares jacked up by as much as 10 per cent while passengers are crammed into ancient carriages running on creaking track with huge safety risks the length and breadth of the country." He said the union was planning a fightback by rail workers and rail users "that will stop the government in their tracks."

- [RMT news release](#). [Financial Times](#). [The Herald](#).

Six figure payout to injured shunter

A GMB member who was seriously injured when he was flung from a barrow truck while working at a haulage company has received £245,000 compensation. The man, whose name has not been released but who worked as a shunter at GCT in Thorne, was helping to load pallets on to wagons. As he reversed the truck to straighten it up and move forward it suddenly slid and spun around, throwing him off. His leg was trapped between one of the bars at the side of the truck and a barrier on a wall. It was crushed and he suffered a broken tibia. He continues to suffer constant pain and has limited mobility in his leg following the October 2006 incident. Les Dobbs, a senior organiser with GMB, commented: "Haulage is a dangerous industry and unfortunately our members working in it do suffer serious injuries. All too often there is insufficient or non-existent observance of health and safety systems that will prevent or reduce accidents." Carol Wild of Thompsons Solicitors, the law firm brought in by the union to handle the compensation claim, said: "This was a serious accident that could have been avoided if the employer had ensured that there was proper maintenance and care of the workplace, which would have been a lot cheaper long term for the employer than having to pay substantial compensation to their injured employee."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

Unfit fitter finished by flawed floor

A Unite member has been forced to take early retirement as a result of injuries sustained when he tripped over a fire hydrant cover at work. Thomas Mirehouse, 63, from Maryport in Cumbria, has been left with a significant disability in his left shoulder after suffering the injury while working for United Utilities. The specialist high voltage electrical fitter was collecting equipment from the Porter Chadburn substation in Distington when the incident happened. A new link box had been poorly installed in the pavement and a fire hydrant cover had been left sticking out above the surface of the pavement. It caught his foot and he fell down banking, dislocated his shoulder and ended up with a massive tear to the rotator cuff which needed surgery. He can no longer lift his arm above shoulder height and cannot lift. His injuries were so bad he has been unable to return to work since the incident four years ago and was forced to take voluntary severance. In a union-backed compensation case, the company responsible for the poor tarmac, Carillion, admitted liability and settled the claim out of court. Mr Mirehouse received a £125,000 payout. He said: "Being forced to give up my job when I had gone so far in my career has been unbelievably frustrating. I loved what I did and I had been undertaking training for a promotion for a year before the accident."

Now I've been forced to take early retirement and I can't enjoy the things I always imagined I would do during when retired because of my injuries. I can no longer play golf and have to get someone in to do any major work in the garden."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Tube standards under threat from cuts

This week's confirmation by London mayor Boris Johnson that Transport for London has completed its takeover of the failed Tube Lines operation, has prompted a warning that planned job cuts on London Underground will undermine standards and safety. Rail union RMT says more than one in six Tube Lines posts are under threat. Following two days of strike action, RMT has confirmed a further 48 hours of action on Tube Lines between the evenings of Wednesday 14 July and Friday 16 July. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "With TfL and the Mayor now taking control of the failed Tube Lines operation he has no excuse whatsoever for not intervening in the dispute over jobs and conditions which has left 535 out of 2,915 staff facing the prospect of being thrown on the scrap heap." He added: "The simple fact is that the job cuts being cooked up would make it impossible for the Mayor and his officials to get the tube upgrade works back on track and would have dire implications for tube safety as essential maintenance works back up in the system." Mr Crow warned: "Our members remain absolutely determined to fight to protect their jobs, their living standards and safety and service delivery across the tube network and will not sit idly by waiting for a tragedy to bring the management to their senses."

- [RMT news release.](#)

Warning on government safety review

A government review of health and safety must not be allowed to undermine essential workplace protection, unions and campaigners have warned. David Cameron last month formalised a government call for Lord Young to review health and safety regulation, a process started pre-election by the Conservatives and which has already faced strong criticism from unions ([Risks 462](#)). The Tory peer has already indicated emergency services could be exempted from safety regulations, suggesting controls should primarily fall on traditional hazardous industries. New official statistics, however, record 42 deaths in the 'safe' service sector last year. The government's plans topped the agenda at the conference of mining union NUM last week, with miners revealing that the industry has become more dangerous in the last few years. NUM Yorkshire area executive member David Hopper said everyone had the right to go to work and come back safely. "The increase in fatalities is an indictment of private industry," he said. Calling for a tightening of corporate manslaughter laws, Mr Hopper said firms only get fined a few thousand pounds for any wrongdoing. Campaign group Families Against Corporate Killers (FACK) has asked for a meeting with Lord Young. It says it is "so concerned about his unbalanced views and that he only seem to consider the so-called 'burdens on business' rather than the burdens on workers and their families, and the very real burden of employers externalising their cost onto the whole of society." In an open letter to the peer, FACK indicates Lord Young

should heed the lessons from BP's gushing oil well in the Gulf of Mexico. "No-one watching the events in the Gulf can fail now to understand how one corporation's avoidance of health and safety measures can be externalised onto the wider community, not forgetting, as often is, the 11 workers killed, those injured and all their families' heartbreak and life long suffering."

- [FACK letter to Lord Young. Morning Star. Daily Telegraph.](#)

Other news

Enforcement bad on safety, terrible on health

Enforcement action by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has plummeted on almost all major indicators, the watchdog's board has been told. A paper to HSE's 30 June board meeting, prompted by an expression of concern by the board at formal enforcement levels, also indicates that while average fines have increased, a dramatic fall in the numbers of prosecutions mean the total amount levied in fines has fallen. The report notes: "The number of prosecutions approved in 2009/10 is 46 per cent of the 1999/2000 level." It adds: "For enforcement notices, there is a downward trend from 1999/2000 to 2007/08, with then an upward movement. The 2009/10 level is 87 per cent of that of 1999/2000." Investigations "have also reduced significantly", the report says, so "the 2009/10 investigation level is 37 per cent of that of 1999/2000." The report to the HSE board suggests prosecutions on health issues are exceedingly rare – an HSE guesstimate indicates they are outnumbered 7-to-1 by safety prosecutions - despite work-related ill-health causing five times as much lost time as that resulting from injuries. HSE estimates work-related diseases also outnumber officially reported workplace injuries by five to one. The watchdog appears to have little confidence it can remedy this enforcement bias, with the report noting "careful consideration of the effort put into prosecution activity needs to be made as to what the return of our efforts will be. It is not, therefore, an 'open and shut' case that automatically we should put more effort into prosecution activity for health if it displaces other activity, eg. service of notices that may be more efficient and effective way of improving standards." This admission elicited a withering response from the Hazards Campaign's Hilda Palmer. "It seems if you want to hurt or kill someone at work, you should choose to cause them to suffer long-term. It appears HSE has little intention of applying either the law or justice when it comes to diseases caused by work – with negligent employers causing often fatal long-term diseases at least 35 times less likely to end up in dock as those injuring workers."

- Review of enforcement by FOD, paper to the HSE board, 30 June 2010 [[pdf](#)].

Son of Workplace Health Connect flops

An attempt to tweak a failed official initiative to provide health and safety advice to smaller, non-union firms has also been an expensive flop. An evaluation of the 'Healthy Workplaces Milton Keynes' pilot, a partnership between the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Milton Keynes Council advising small and

medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), found it replicated the failings of its predecessor, Workplace Health Connect, with firms “unlikely” to seek out health and safety advice and with demand for the service “low”. The pilot, which ran from February 2008 until March 2009, “was not cost-effective and its costs are likely to have outweighed its benefits”, the evaluation for HSE found. It also found the service was used primarily by more enlightened firms, noting: “There is still a need to find ways to engage less motivated SMEs with improving health and safety provision in the workplace.” The original failed Workplace Health Connect project ([Risks 330](#)) was created to replace a highly successful project using union ‘Worker Safety Advisers’ to provide advice to smaller, non-union, firms ([Risks 124](#)). An evaluation of this union-led project found: Nearly 73 per cent of employers said awareness had increased on health and safety matters and a third said communications had improved; over 75 per cent of employers said the pilot had led to them changing their approach, including revising or introducing new policies and procedures (61 per cent), having regular health and safety discussions with staff (21 per cent), and carrying out risk assessments (11 per cent). Nearly 70 per cent of workers said there was more discussion on health and safety. “The government should accept roving union safety reps are the answer to improved safety in smaller firms, rather than unworkable, unwanted advisory services,” commented Hazards magazine’s Jawad Qasrawi.

- [Healthy workplaces Milton Keynes pilot: Evaluation findings](#), HSE research report RR809, June 2010 [[pdf](#)].

Directors need statutory safety duties

Most company directors are not taking health and safety seriously at boardroom level, so statutory directors’ duties on safety are the only alternative, the findings of a government commissioned review suggest. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) board was ordered in 2008 to oversee an independent evaluation of voluntary measures taken to strengthen director leadership of health and safety. The newly published findings show that although awareness Institute of Directors (IoD)/HSE voluntary guidance had by November 2009 increased since a similar survey completed in September 2008, it was still only a minority (36 per cent) that had any idea of the existence of the October 2007 guide ([Risks 330](#)). Fewer than one in five (19 per cent) had read even a part of document, and less than half of these (48 per cent) took any action as a result. TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson said: “This report confirms what we already knew - that most company boards don’t know about the voluntary guidance and fewer still care to act on it. Company directors have had approaching three years to prove they are willing to make health and safety a boardroom issue. They’ve done nothing of the sort – most have done nothing at all – so the case for statutory duties is now unanswerable.” Calling for statutory safety duties on employers, UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie said: “This report demonstrates that self-regulation simply does not work. If companies are not compelled to do something they won’t.”

- [The report of the Steering Group overseeing an independent evaluation of measures taken to strengthen director leadership of health and safety](#), HSE, June 2010 [[pdf](#)]. [UCATT news release](#).

Controversy over fitness to work tests

Iain Duncan Smith has denied reports that ministers are considering trebling 'fitness to work' tests on people claiming incapacity benefit. The work and pensions secretary said the government has at the moment "absolutely no intention" of changing the 10,000 a week rate begun under Labour. Over 2.5m people are on incapacity benefit or employment support allowance - costing about £12.5bn a year. The Guardian reported that ministers were considering trebling the rate at which "work capability assessments" of people on employment support allowance from the current 10,000 a week. Concerns were raised after comments this week from the chancellor, George Osborne, who signalled that efforts to take more of those on incapacity benefit off welfare will form a significant part of plans to cut the deficit. "Incapacity benefit and employment and support allowance is a very large budget," he said: "We have got to look at all these things, make sure we do it in a way that protects those with genuine needs, those with disabilities, protects those who can't work but also encourages those who can work into work." But Mr Duncan Smith told MPs said he knew there had been "some speculation in the media" but the government intended to stick with its plan to launch a "work programme" in 2011. "We have absolutely no intention of changing this current plan", he said, adding the rate of assessments would remain at "10,000 claimants a week over the period." Under assessments carried out under Labour on new employment support allowance claimants between October 2008 and August 2009, 39 per cent were deemed 'fit for work' and a further 37 per cent withdrew their claim before the test was complete. But welfare campaigners say those who have been assessed as fit for work include people with advanced Parkinson's disease or multiple sclerosis, or with severe mental illness, or awaiting open heart surgery ([Risks 449](#)).

- [The Guardian](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Personnel Today](#).

Wood dust caused nose cancer

A widow has received compensation after her husband died of a work-related nose cancer. Barry Haw contracted the condition after being exposed to wood dust while working as a craftsman for Robert Thompsons Craftsmen Limited. Mr Haw spent much of his career working with hardwoods such as oak and beech. He became seriously ill in 2006 and died as a result of his cancer in late 2007. Sino-nasal cancer is rare, but studies have shown that exposure to wood dust significantly increases the risk of developing the disease. Mr Haw's widow Heather said: "I lost my husband through this awful disease. All that Barry did, just like his father, was go to work in order to provide for his family. From the time he first developed the illness, he endured an awful lot from horrendous surgery to radiotherapy and chemotherapy. I would not want anyone else to go through that." Ian Bailey, a specialist in occupational cancers with personal injury law firm Irwin Mitchell, said: "It seems that there are some jobs where the incidence of the disease is relatively high and this includes furniture manufacturers and joiners. The link between the disease and exposure to hardwood dust is particularly strong with exposure to oak, beech and mahogany. Although this is not a widely known cancer it is something that craftsmen working with wood need to be aware of to allow them to take the

appropriate precautions to protect their health." The law firm is also seeking information to help in the case of Jonathan Cooke from Stourport on Severn, who died age 39 of stomach cancer on 4 December 2007. At the time of his death, neither the clinicians treating his illness nor an inquest made the link between Mr Cooke's cancer and his job. However, it has since become apparent his work at Dura Automotive for over 20 years could have exposed him to the potent human carcinogen vinyl chloride.

- [Irwin Mitchell Solicitors news release](#).
- [Information request](#): Anyone who worked at Dura Automotive in Stourport is being asked to contact [Satinder Bains](#) at Irwin Mitchell Solicitors on 0870 1500 100.

BP's unsafe UK record exposed

The troubled oil giant BP has been caught breaking health and safety regulations 54 times over the past five years in the UK, according to Health and Safety Executive (HSE) records. The official action against the British multinational relates to a series of maintenance and operating lapses which put workers and the environment at risk from major leaks, fires and accidents in the North Sea and elsewhere. As a result HSE has served BP companies with 21 legal enforcement notices since 2006, requiring lax and dangerous practices to be improved. The company, however, has not been prosecuted by the watchdog since 2005. The analysis of the HSE enforcement database by Scotland's Sunday Herald shows that four BP companies – BP Exploration, BP Oil UK, BP Chemicals and BP Shipping – have been hit with legal notices in the last five years. There have been 54 breaches of eight health and safety laws or regulations. A BP spokesperson said the company's safety record compared well to that of others, adding: "We are never complacent and are continually looking at ways to reduce even the smallest of leaks." But Juliet Swann of Friends of the Earth Scotland said: "Companies like BP have for years been taking shortcuts with safety that risk human life, the environment and people's pensions."

- [Sunday Herald](#). [More on BP's safety record](#).

Government to adopt BP business model

John Browne, Tony Hayward's predecessor as chief executive of BP, has been appointed by the UK government to oversee moves to make Whitehall "more businesslike." Lord Browne was the architect of the much criticised BP cost- and safety-cutting strategy implicated in the Texas City refinery disaster, which killed 15, and a sequence of other safety and environmental crimes. The scope of the peer's shake-up of government will include all ministries, including those responsible for workplace safety and the energy industry. Commenting on his appointment as a 'lead non-executive director' in government, Lord Browne said: "There is a great need for the best of the business community to be involved during these challenging times for the UK." Minister for the Cabinet Office, Francis Maude, said: "His experience will be a real benefit in our drive to make Whitehall work in a more businesslike manner and I am looking forward to working with him to implement our vital reform programme." Criticism of the company in the US continued last month. George Miller, chair of the US House Education and Labor Committee, said on 23 June BP was "a multinational corporation with a dismal safety record in this country." Much of this record relates to the time the company was under the direction of Lord Browne – Tony Hayward took over the reins in 2007.

- [Cabinet Office news release](#). [Green jobs, safety jobs blog](#). [BBC News Online](#). [AFL-CIO Now blog](#).

Man killed in oil refinery blast

A worker has been found dead after a fire and explosion at an oil refinery in North East Lincolnshire. The man, whose name was not released in the immediate aftermath of the blast, was working near a crude oil distillation which exploded at Lindsey Oil Refinery in North Killingholme on 29 June. Two other people suffered minor injuries in the incident. More than 50 firefighters from Humberside Fire and Rescue Service were called to the plant where black smoke was seen billowing into the sky. Oil giant Total, which runs the refinery, said in a statement: "It is with deep regret that Total Lindsey Oil Refinery can confirm that there has been a fatality following the fire and explosion at 11.57. The deceased has yet to be formally identified." It said that formal investigations were being carried out by the police and the Health and Safety Executive. "We are fully co-operating with these inquiries in order to understand exactly why this tragic incident occurred," it added. The death was the second at the site in 10 days. Michael James Price, 51, was found hanged at the refinery on 19 June.

- BBC News Online on the [29 June](#) and [19 June](#) fatalities at the Total refinery site. [Hartlepool Mail](#). [Peterlee Mail](#).

Chemical leak at food depot injures 28

Twenty-eight people have been injured, seven requiring hospital treatment, in a chemical leak at a frozen food distribution centre in Staffordshire. The remaining 21 affected workers were treated at the scene. One man suffered severe ammonia burns to his arms in the incident in a compressor room at Brakes Chilled Food Distribution in Tamworth on 25 June. A spokesperson for West Midlands Ambulance Service said: "The most seriously injured was a man in his 30s with 15 per cent burns having been contaminated by the chemical involved. He was decontaminated with water by firefighters and was taken to Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham." A spokesperson for Brakes said the leak happened during routine maintenance. "Following the incident the centre was immediately and safely evacuated," he said.

- [Birmingham Post](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Company fined £280,000 after horror death

A brick firm worker who had only been on site for two weeks was killed when his head was crushed between concrete blocks and a metal platform. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) prosecuted brick manufacturing company Hanson Building Products Ltd, after the death of Peter Clarke, 57, at the company's distribution plant in Coleshill on 26 April 2008. The company was fined £280,000 and ordered to pay costs of £29,204. Warwick Crown Court heard that

Mr Clarke, was working next to a conveyor that transferred groups of concrete blocks from a kiln to a packaging area. His job was to remove samples of blocks for quality checking. Mr Clarke was standing next to a low bridge over the conveyor when he leaned forward to remove some blocks from the machine. Another worker changed the direction of the conveyor, crushing Mr Clarke's head between the concrete blocks on the conveyor and the metal platform. The operator of the 30-metre conveyor could not see Mr Clarke because his view was obscured. An HSE investigation into the incident found that the company had only identified the risk of workers trapping their fingers between the blocks and the stairway. Mr Clarke's widow, Barbara, thanked HSE inspector Peter Snelgrove for the sensitive way he dealt with the family. She added: "Pete's death has devastated our family and for him to have lost his life due to a work-related incident is beyond belief. He was a much-loved husband, father and grandpa and our lives will never be the same without him."

- [HSE news release](#). [Coventry Telegraph](#).

International News

Europe: Safety is an investment not a cost

Recession-hit firms should not let health and safety slip down the list of priorities, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) has said. "Spending on workplace health and safety should be seen as an investment and not a cost," commented EU-OSHA director Jukka Takala at the launch of the agency's 2009 annual report. He warned against organisations "abandoning long term benefits for short term gains, by reducing their health and safety budgets in difficult times. With 80 per cent of European managers reporting workplace accidents as the main concern, we cannot afford to make cuts in workplace health and safety." EU-OSHA noted that workers are also facing the increasing likelihood that long-term absence from work will result in them never getting back into employment. According to Jukka Takala, "the more enlightened employers have been introducing more part-time work and job rotation, to try to avoid redundancies among their workforce while still reducing their wage bills – they realise that retaining their experienced staff is an investment for the next upturn."

- [EU-OSHA news release](#), [Annual Report 2009](#) and [Summary](#).

Global: Condemnation of Canada's asbestos ruse

Moves to use public money to underwrite the cost of a massive expansion of asbestos mining in Canada are attracting condemnation in Canada and worldwide. This week, in a letter sent to Quebec leader Jean Charest, the Canadian Cancer Society urged the premier not to approve a Can\$58 million (£36.6m) loan guarantee to Jeffrey Asbestos Mines, based in Quebec. Granting a loan guarantee to the mine will help spread the global epidemic of asbestos-related cancers and damage Canada's reputation as a global leader in public health, says the letter. The society said it was compelled to send the letter because of its own commitment to

eliminating asbestos-related disease, as well as receiving many letters and emails from concerned health advocates in Quebec and from around the world. "Resoundingly, these groups asked that we write to share our message of concern about the possible loan guarantee," said Jimm Simon, the society's chair. The letter closes by recommending that Quebec's asbestos workers be supported by re-directing this money to a transition fund to help communities move away from asbestos mining. The Canadian Cancer Society is urging Canada's federal government to adopt a comprehensive strategy to address all aspect of the asbestos issue, including setting an immediate and clear timetable for phasing out the use and export of asbestos and providing transition support for affected communities. This 'just transition' model has been advocated by unions worldwide as a mechanism to address the social and employment consequences of 'sunsetting' hazardous industries. Demonstrations against Canada's support for asbestos exports have taken place in several cities around the world in the last week, including Seoul, New York and London.

- Canadian Cancer Society [news release](#) and [position statement](#). [Public Citizen news release](#). [Montreal Gazette](#). [CBC News](#). [RightOnCanada](#).

Ireland: Voluntary fails, inspection succeeds

A dramatic decline in workplace fatalities and injuries has been delivered in Ireland after its safety agency boosted the number of official workplace inspections. A previous policy, where the watchdog introduced a US-style voluntary programme, was abandoned after it was followed by a marked upturn in workplace deaths. Ireland's Health and Safety Authority (HSA) says there were 43 reported fatalities in 2009, the lowest number reported since the establishment of HSA in 1989. There was also a decrease in the number of non-fatal accidents reported, down to 6,707 from 8,390 in 2008. The report showed that during 2009, HSA conducted 18,451 workplace inspections, an increase of 15 per cent on 2008. HSA chief executive Martin O'Halloran said there was an emphasis on support in the inspection programme for 2009. "The main focus of our inspections is to help workplaces improve health and safety standards with the overall goal of reducing accidents," he said. "The vast majority of employers and employees want this." In 2005, after a move towards self-regulation, HSA increased health and safety enforcement after witnessing a shock increase in workplace deaths ([Risks 194](#)). The move meant HSA had sidelined after less than a year a high profile pilot US-style 'voluntary protection programme', an approach which has been criticised by unions in the US and elsewhere as a dangerous alternative to health and safety enforcement ([Risks 165](#)).

- [HSA news release](#). [RTÉ News](#).

USA: Sometimes deadly behaviour does not pay

Employers and corrupt public officials frequently get away with deadly behaviour – but not always. A contractor is now under house arrest and a crane inspector who accepted bribes is serving jail time after being linked to deadly workplace incidents in the US.

Pennsylvania roofing contractor Christopher Franc was sentenced to three years' probation and six months' house arrest for wilful safety violations that resulted in the death of a worker, 29-year-old Carl Beck, who plunged 40 feet to his death while working on a steep roof last August. Investigators found that Franc had failed to provide any fall protection equipment to his workers. The US Attorney's office for the Western District of Pennsylvania prosecuted the case against Franc. It was handled by the Western Pennsylvania Environmental Enforcement Task Force, a 15-member group that meets regularly to address federal crimes against occupational health and the environment. The task force includes representatives from the FBI, the Department of Labor, the criminal division of the Environmental Protection Agency, and state and local authorities. Franc was also fined \$539,000 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). In a separate case, New York's former chief crane inspector has started a prison sentence of two to six years for taking bribes. Appearing in State Supreme Court in Manhattan for sentencing, the inspector, James Delayo, 62, said: "I'd like to apologise to the city in general for letting them down." He had pleaded guilty in March to approving cranes that he had not inspected, and issuing operator's licenses to people who had not earned them. The charges were brought in 2008 in the wake of two crane collapses, one that left seven dead and another with two fatalities. The bribes had not involved the type of crane involved in those collapses.

- [In These Times](#). [New York Times](#).

USA: Roofers face work-related early retirement

A combination of poor health and musculoskeletal disorders is forcing roofers into early retirement, a new study has found. The study of 979 roofers between the ages of 40 and 59 found that 10 per cent left the roofing trade within a year, and of those leaving, 60 per cent left their job due to chronic pain, work-related musculoskeletal disorders and poor health. When that group was examined in a one-year follow-up, researchers found that they were four times more likely to suffer mild economic impact, 19 times more likely to suffer moderate economic impact, and 6.5 times more likely to experience severe economic impact from their early retirement. The findings, based on a study of unionised workers in the US, are published in the July issue of the American Journal of Industrial Hygiene. "We believe our research may understate the social and economic impact of injuries and diseases among aging workers in this industry," said Laura Welch, the principal investigator and lead author of the paper. "Our research drew from a population of union workers. Other research shows wage and benefit levels of non-union roofers are lower than that of union roofers, who have a retirement and disability pension system available to them." The risk factors for leaving the trade identified in the study – age and physically demanding work – point to a need to modify work practices, a change in work organisation or modifying risk factors to prevent disability and the attendant economic impact, the authors said.

- CPWR news release [[pdf](#)].

Events and Courses

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR SEPTEMBER 2010 to DECEMBER 2010

- [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