

Risks

TUC 

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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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Total safety queried after refinery death

Safety standards at the oil giant Total, found guilty of safety breaches last month related to the Buncefield oil depot explosion ([Risks 462](#)), have been questioned by unions after the death of a worker at a Lincolnshire refinery. Unite member Robert Greenacre, 24, died after a fire and explosion at Total's Lindsey plant on 29 June ([Risks 463](#)). Unite national officer for construction, Tom Hardacre, said: "Unite puts the highest premium on health and safety in the workplace and we are calling for an immediate, independent and comprehensive inquiry into what happened at Lindsey. We would particularly like to know why further searches were not made when our member was unaccounted for in the roll-call when employees were evacuated." Phil Whitehurst, GMB's lead organiser for engineering construction, said he had been told by members "that a 'permit to work' was issued to allow safe working to take place on the pipework where the explosion happened. There needs to be a thorough investigation as to how the issuing of a 'permit to work', which is designed to ensure safe working, resulted in the death of one worker and serious injury to two others." He added that the Lindsey blast, coming days after the Buncefield verdict, "brings into question Total's safety record yet again. They have to be held accountable." Hertfordshire Oil Storage Limited, the operator of the Buncefield site and which was owned jointly by Total and Chevron, is due to be sentenced on 16 July 2010 at St Albans Crown Court for offences related to the massive December 2005 blast. The High Court ruled last year that Total was liable for damages caused by the Buncefield explosion which injured more than 40 people after defective petrol tanks ignited.

- [Unite news release](#). [GMB news release](#). [Morning Star](#). [Grimsby Telegraph](#).

Campaigners denounce Canada on asbestos

A protest outside London's Canada House was intended to "shame" Canada for promoting asbestos exports, the organisers said. The protest on 1 July, timed to coincide with official celebrations to mark Canada Day, took place as plans were being finalised to pump Canadian federal and state funds into an expansion of asbestos production and exports ([Risks 463](#)). Demonstrators carried banners bearing messages including: "Canadian asbestos – buy now, die later." Alan Ritchie, general secretary of the construction union UCATT, said: "It is disgraceful that Canada continues to wilfully produce and export a deadly substance. It is essential that nationally and internationally unions and other sympathetic groups, increase the pressure on Canada to end this lethal trade once and for all." GMB national health and safety officer John McClean said: "It is disturbing that Canadian asbestos is still killing British workers 11 years after asbestos importation was banned in the UK. It is even more worrying that asbestos from Canada continues to be exported around the developing world. Unbelievably the federal government of Quebec is offering a loan of \$58 million to the Jeffrey mine so it can be reopened to mine and export 200,000 tonnes of asbestos, every year, for the next 25 years." He added: "GMB joins in the call from Stephen Hughes, a GMB sponsored MEP, for the European Commission to investigate this loan as we feel it is

in breach of World Trade Organisation rules." Tony Whitston, who chairs the national forum of asbestos groups, said: "It is morally indefensible to export asbestos to developing countries when it is deemed too dangerous to use in developed economies, even those with sophisticated means of protection."

- [UCATT news release](#). [GMB news release](#). Asbestos Forum news release [[pdf](#)].
- [A worn-out welcome: Renewed call for a global ban on asbestos](#), Environmental Health Perspectives, 1 July 2010.

RMT sounds safety alarm over rail cuts

Transport union RMT has raised serious safety fears over rail maintenance as it emerged the transport budget is being lined up for cuts of up to 40 per cent as part of the government's public spending plans. The union said cuts of this magnitude would "savage" maintenance and renewals work. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "With cuts of up to 40 per cent in the transport budget we are looking at thousands of job losses amongst the staff who operate and maintain services with dire consequences for passenger safety as corners are cut." He added: "The public will be forced to pay through the nose to travel on condemned and crowded trains on creaking and dangerous track while the private rail companies are laughing all the way to the bank." Transport secretary Philip Hammond said government departments will not have to axe 40 per cent from their budgets - despite being ordered to plan for cuts on that scale. He said some departments may see cuts "a bit higher" than the 25 per cent announced in the budget and some "a bit lower." In his budget last month, chancellor George Osborne said departments would face average cuts of 25 per cent when the government's public spending review is completed in October, with only health and aid spending ring fenced. But Mr Hammond said other departments have been told to go through their budgets "line by line" for savings of between 25 per cent and 40 per cent.

- [RMT news release](#). [BBC News Online](#). [The Independent](#).
- [TUC Cuts Watch](#).

Scaffolder gets brain damage payout

A scaffolder who was left with a severe brain injury after a workplace fall has received a "substantial" sum in compensation. Unite member Patrick O'Malley, 35, spent four years in hospital after the injury, suffered while working for Powertherm Access Services. The firm eventually settled the claim out of court almost five years after Patrick fell 20ft after a scaffolding gantry collapsed. The platform had been built using the wrong type of bolts and the bolts failed when Patrick stood on it. His family were told initially that he would not survive. The claim was opened when Patrick's mother, Maisey, contacted Unite. Powertherm is now trying to recover its costs from Belgian contractor Montage Vermeesen, the firm responsible for building the platform. Maisey said: "I was devastated when Patrick had his accident. He was only 29 at the time of the accident and had all his life ahead of him but some

wrong bolts trashed his future. At first we had to get our heads round the idea that he wouldn't survive but after four years of intensive rehabilitation in hospital Patrick has been able to return home with full time care." Unite regional secretary Davey Hall said: "The union was there for Patrick and his family when they needed us most and we are pleased to have helped secure his future. His survival and his recovery have been remarkable, they are a tribute to him, the medical staff and the love of his family but a young man has been left with catastrophic and heart breaking injuries."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Ambulance workers under attack

There must be 'zero tolerance' of violence against ambulance workers, the union GMB has said. The union's new analysis of NHS data on assaults shows there were 2,705 assaults on ambulance staff in England in the two years to April 2009. GMB national officer for ambulance services, Justin Bowden, commented: "Every single day at least three ambulance workers are assaulted whilst doing their jobs. That is as shocking as it is unacceptable. Being attacked at work is not an occupational hazard for ambulance workers and the only way to confront this issue is with zero tolerance." He added: "Ambulance workers deserve full protection from their employers and the law." Detailed figures for the North West of England "show that there is some way to go before we achieve zero tolerance," he said, with fewer than half of the reported cases leading to prosecutions. "In some Trusts there is an automatic recourse to law regarding damage to property but not on attacks on staff. Also in one authority there is a proposal to remove stab-proof vests as a protection to staff. A change of attitude by management is needed on this." For each of the last two years, there have been over 500 verbal or physical attacks on North West Ambulance Service staff. The union says management has confirmed to GMB representatives that only between 40 and 50 per cent of these attacks result in legal action.

[GMB news release.](#)

Firefighters facing 'vicious' attacks

Protracted delays in publishing a Welsh Assembly report into violence against firefighters have been criticised by FBU. The firefighters' union has called for the immediate publication of the report, which it was told two years ago was in preparation. "The recent attack in South Wales on firefighters with an air rifle, in which one firefighter was injured, is just the latest of a catalogue of vicious and vindictive attacks," said Grant Mayos, FBU regional secretary. "We have seen fire crews called out by hoax callers and when they arrive, being ambushed with stones and bottles. Our members have been spat at, shot at, abused and harassed whilst protecting their communities and carrying our life saving duties. In some areas attacking fire crews has become a recreational activity. Yet as far as we know, not a single person has been convicted of an attack on firefighters within Wales in the past year." The Welsh Assembly said two years ago it was concerned, but was waiting for

a report to get an accurate picture on the extent of the problem. "This report has not materialised, attacks continue unabated, and nothing seems to be done about it," said FBU's Grant Mayos. "Recent legislation which was put in place in order to protect our members simply isn't being implemented. The FBU wants to see greater priority to this matter from the police, before one of our members is killed."

- [FBU news release](#).

Other news

HSE work death figure falls again

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) figures on the number of people killed at work in Britain fell last year to a record low. The HSE provisional data, which exclude work-related road, marine and air accident deaths and the entire occupational disease death toll, show that 151 workers were killed between 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010 compared to 178 deaths in the previous year and an average number over the last five years of 220 deaths per year. HSE chair Judith Hackitt said the reduction was "very encouraging", but added: "No doubt the recession has resulted in lower levels of activity in some sectors and a decrease in the numbers of new inexperienced recruits has also contributed to this fall in fatalities. We should also remember that 151 families are mourning the loss of someone who last year went out to work and never came home." Commenting on the figures, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said the fall was "very welcome, although it is mainly the result of far fewer people entering the workplace during the recession." He added: "Every single one of these deaths is a tragedy for the family that has been left behind and we owe it to them to make sure that we stop these events happening to others. Politicians and the press should focus on preventing such deaths rather than talking about health and safety regulations being a burden. None of these deaths were a result of over-regulation or risk aversion. In most cases they were caused by basic health and safety precautions not being taken." Mr Barber said HSE's fatality figures "are less than one per cent of the number of premature deaths caused by work. We must do far more to reduce the terrible toll from occupational diseases such as cancers."

- [HSE news release](#), [statistics webpage](#) and [latest fatality figures](#). [TUC news release](#).

Deaths down in construction

There has been a marked decrease in construction fatalities in Britain, the new Health and Safety Executive (HSE) figures show. In 2009/10 there were 41 deaths in the construction sector, down from 52 fatalities in the sector the year before. UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie welcomed the reduction, but added: "The reduction is primarily due to the economic downturn, which has not only meant that fewer people are working on construction sites, but has reduced time pressures, reduced working hours, and decreased the number of inexperienced workers on site, all of which are major factors in accidents." The union warned deaths could increase in the

future, as the industry continues to recover from recession. UCATT is also concerned that Lord Young's review of safety regulations, at the request of prime minister David Cameron, could lead to a weakening of safety standards ([Risks 463](#)). Alan Ritchie said: "The challenge for everyone concerned about safety is to ensure that the number of deaths in construction continues to be reduced as the industry recovers and activity increases. Rather than looking to reduce safety provisions the government should be ensuring workers are safe by increasing the number of inspections and enforcement activity."

- [UCATT news release](#).

Deaths up in agriculture

There has been a sharp upturn in the number of workers killed in agriculture. Health and Safety Executive (HSE) fatality figures for the period from 1 April 2009 and 31 March 2010 show 38 agriculture workers were killed at work. HSE says this marks a return to average levels of previous years, in contrast to the record low in 2008/09 when 25 workers died. The watchdog says the rate of fatal injuries in the sector of 8.2 per 100,000 workers makes it the most dangerous industry in which to work. Seven members of the public were also killed in work related incidents in the sector. HSE's head of agriculture Graeme Walker said the toll was "because of avoidable safety failings - proving once again that agriculture is the most dangerous way of making a living in Great Britain." HSE chair Judith Hackitt said: "No industry can or should regard high levels of death and injury as being 'part of the job'. It is time for British agriculture industry to wake up to the enormous toll of death and injury which occurs year on year and lead the way to improvement just as other sectors have shown is possible."

- [HSE news release](#).

HSE statistics omit most deaths - official

Unions and campaigners have warned that official workplace death figures only show a small part of the real toll – a point also recognised in an official probe. UNISON said Health and Safety Executive (HSE) fatality figures released last week "grossly underestimate the real figures." The union believes that the real death toll is ten times higher and warned that now is not the time for the government to relax health and safety legislation. UNISON head of health and safety Hope Daley said: "We estimate that 1,600 deaths are caused by work-related incidents each year – a huge difference from the official HSE, 151. On top of this there are up to 50,000 more deaths from work related illnesses, including cancers, respiratory illnesses and heart disease. These statistics also do not include deaths to members of the public, work related suicide and road traffic accidents whilst driving for work." She added: "The death toll at work is truly horrific and now is not the time for the government to relax health and safety laws. We need to clamp down on employers who do not follow regulations or report non-fatal accidents." The message was reiterated by the Hazards Campaign, which points to a critical May 2010 UK Statistics

Authority report on how HSE collates its figures. This checked HSE's figures against a code of practice for official statistics and indicated they do not make the grade, concluding "HSE does not produce an overall figure for work-related fatalities in Great Britain" and recommends HSE "investigate the feasibility of producing statistics on the total number of work-related injuries and fatalities." A government 'cutting red tape' committee met for the first time on 1 July. Deputy prime minister Nick Clegg also launched a 'Your Freedom' online "dialogue", where the public can nominate "unnecessary" laws they would like axed, including a specific section on cutting business regulation. Both business groups and the Conservative Party have said they consider health and safety regulation a "burden" which should be reduced ([Risks 461](#)).

- [UNISON news release](#). [Hazards Campaign news release](#). [BIS news release](#). [Green jobs, safe jobs blog](#). [Your Freedom](#).
- Assessments of compliance with Code of Practice for official statistics - 'Statistics on Health and Safety at Work (produced by the Health and Safety Executive), Report Number 42, UK Statistics Authority, 27 May 2010 [[pdf](#)].

HSE observes hi-tech horror show

Microelectronics firms in Britain have neglected health risks to workers, tampered with crucial safety alarms and have shown no consideration of the risks faced by entire groups of workers, an official report has found. An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) uncovered "weaknesses", "misunderstandings" and poor practices in vital safety procedures across the sector. Despite evidence of widespread and potentially deadly breaches of health and safety law, no prosecutions were taken by the watchdog, with just four targeted with a total of seven HSE improvement notices. HSE says the investigation last year involved inspectors visiting 17 companies in the UK involved in making semiconductors for the computer industry. The inspectors found monitoring to ensure compliance with safety rules in high hazard situations "was weak at several sites." The investigation report noted: "Often, there was no consideration of risks to others arising from maintenance and cleaning, for example from spread of contamination." Occupational health services for workers had not improved since a 2002 evaluation and were "often poorly targeted", it added. "Few companies had satisfactory auditing and review arrangements for their management system for hazardous substances." In a few cases companies had been "slow" to investigate abnormal results from monitoring workers, the inspectors found. And in "several" cases, gauges had been tampered with to prevent safety alarms from stopping production. The report warns: "High level, corporate oversight was often largely concentrated on safety rather than health issues." This is despite the industry having been linked in studies to elevated rates of several cancers ([Risks 396](#)). Unite was critical of the investigation, which did not consider conditions prior to 2002, when it believes exposures to hazardous substances were much higher. However it said a Micro-Electronics Joint Working Group (MEJWG) could be "a potentially effective means of agreeing and implementing" improvements, if it meets regularly and works to a formal action plan, which Unite said should be drafted at its 23 September meeting.

- [Unite news release](#). [Sunday Herald](#). [Rob Edwards website](#).

- [Control and management of hazardous substances in semiconductor manufacturers in Great Britain in 2009](#), HSE, July 2010 [[pdf](#)].

Pesticides linked to cancer increases

A 'dramatic' increase in a range of occupational and childhood cancers has been linked to pesticide exposures. A report published last week by CHEM Trust links exposure prior to conception or during pregnancy to higher rates of childhood cancer and warns that farm workers could also be developing cancers caused by pesticide exposures at work. It says several studies "strongly suggest" that pesticide exposures are associated with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL), leukaemia, prostate cancer and other hormone-related cancers. The report says environmental factors "must be partly to blame" for massive increases in the incidence of certain cancers since 1975. It says cases of NHL have more than doubled, prostate cancer has tripled, testicular cancer has doubled and breast cancer in women has increased by two-thirds, and in men has quadrupled. Stirling University's Professor Andrew Watterson, a co-author of the report commented: "Occupational and environmental cancers have been a neglected public health issue in the UK for decades. The report highlights the substantial nature of the threat from pesticide exposure." He added: "In the UK, oversight of pesticides has continued to err on the side of products rather than people and of course relies on data generated initially by the pesticide manufacturers. The regulatory response has usually been 'if in doubt, do continue using pesticides' when the scientific literature is littered with examples of products that have been cleared in the past emerging as known or suspect human carcinogens." The professor concluded: "There is a long-overdue and urgent need to mount a cancer prevention campaign on pesticides based on effective precautionary principles."

- Chem Trust news release [[pdf](#)] and report [[pdf](#)]. [Green jobs, safe jobs blog](#). [Scotsman](#).

Asbestos epidemic reminder from campaigners

More than 60,000 people in the UK will die in the future having previously been exposed to asbestos leading to a total death toll of 90,000 by the year 2050, campaigners have warned. But they say that despite the magnitude of the epidemic, prevention, research and treatment are all seriously neglected. Tony Whitston, who chairs the national forum of asbestos groups, said: "There is an absolute necessity for research to provide better treatment and improved palliative care. It is absolutely imperative that resources are found to provide hope for people suffering with this horrific illness." Speaking on Action Mesothelioma Day – 2 July – he said the previous government was reluctant to "engage positively" on the issue and he was "not optimistic that the new government will be better." He added: "These people have been let down for decades by past governments, employers and insurers. It is institutional negligence. There is a moral onus on any government to take responsibility." Roger Maddocks, an occupational disease specialist at Irwin Mitchell Solicitors, said: "The numbers of people dying of mesothelioma annually is in the thousands and increasing all the time – although it is expected to peak around 2015, the

effects will be felt for many years after that." He added: "Action Mesothelioma Day sees awareness-raising events taking place throughout the UK and is a powerful and poignant demonstration of the sheer number of lives that are torn apart by this disease." The event saw meetings nationwide, attended by thousands of asbestos disease victims and family members, bereaved relatives and workplace and community safety campaigners.

- [Asbestos Forum Action Mesothelioma Day events listing](#). [Irwin Mitchell Solicitors news release](#). [HSE news release](#). [BLF news release](#). [Morning Star](#). [Manchester Evening News](#). [North West Evening Mail](#). [Leicester Mercury](#).

Construction bosses fined after death

A Brighton-based construction company and two of its directors have been fined following the death of a member of the public on a building site. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) prosecuted PIB (UK) Ltd for criminal safety offences. The company pleaded guilty and was fined £30,000 plus costs of £6,500. Two of the company's directors, John Blankson, 55, and Steven Moore, 44, were charged with safety offences. Mr Blankson pleaded guilty and was fined £15,000 plus costs of £3,465. Mr Moore was fined £30,000 and costs of £6,500. He was also disqualified from being a director for five years. Lewes Crown Court heard how Edward Dean, 24, who had been out socialising, wandered onto the improperly secured site on Monday 30 June. He tripped over an unprotected edge and fell 2.4 metres into a basement courtyard. He was found dead later in the morning. Following the hearing, HSE inspector Denis Bodger said: "Edward Dean should never have been able to enter the site where there were unprotected edges. It was both illegal and irresponsible for PIB UK Ltd and the company directors to disregard the importance of security on this site - leaving obvious hazards that in this tragic case resulted in the unnecessary loss of a young life."

- [HSE news release](#).

Global firms fined for crushing death

Two global companies have been ordered to pay a total of £160,000 in fines after a man was crushed to death by a rolling lorry. Logistics company Exel Europe Ltd and Imperial Tobacco Ltd both pleaded guilty to criminal safety breaches. Nottingham Crown Court heard that on 7 September 2007, 42 year-old Gary Brooks, a heavy goods driver with Exel, was trying to collect a loaded trailer from the Imperial Tobacco site in Nottingham. As he moved to attach a trailer, the lorry rolled forward, trapping him between the front of the vehicle and a building. He suffered fatal head injuries. A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation found that drivers working for both Exel and Imperial did not routinely apply the trailer brakes to make sure the vehicles were safely parked. Some drivers had not been properly trained or assessed and no checks had been carried out to monitor the use of trailer brakes in the yard. Both companies had identified the risk to workers but had failed to implement appropriate control measures. The method of working ignored published safety guidance which meant that drivers, other

employees, visitors and third party contractors were all at risk. Imperial Tobacco Ltd was fined £80,000 and ordered to pay costs of £31,000. Exel Europe Ltd was fined £80,000 plus costs of £35,800.

- [HSE news release.](#)

Comet fined after fatal roof fall

Electrical chain Comet has been fined £75,000 and ordered to pay £24,446 legal costs after the death of a roof worker at a Wrexham store. Comet had previously admitted failing to ensure the safety of Paul Alker, who fell through a skylight in 2007. The Judge at Mold Crown Court, his honour Rhys Rowlands, said it was an "accident waiting to happen." A previous hearing was told Mr Alker, and a colleague, had not been supplied with roofing harnesses. Mr Alker was a labourer carrying out roofing work and died several days after falling 7.3m through the fragile roof. Scaffolding had been erected at the side of the store to enable the men to get on top of the roof, but neither Mr Alker nor his colleague Aaron Pugh had been supplied with harnesses. At the time, the men were employed by Steven Smith of Wrexham Roofing Services, who was jailed for two years in 2007 after being convicted of manslaughter by gross negligence (Risks 335). Smith had also pleaded guilty to committing acts intending to pervert the course of justice, by hiring safety harnesses after the fatality which he placed on the roof to try and mislead investigators. Judge Rowlands said: "If anyone would have visited the site it would have been immediately apparent that there were totally unacceptable risks being taken. That would have been plain to anyone who saw what was happening. In my judgment, this really was an accident waiting to happen. Both the deceased and Mr Pugh being exposed to real and pretty obvious risk." Following the hearing, Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspector Debbie John said: "This incident could have been avoided if the roof lights at the Wrexham store had been protected and Mr Alker had been provided with appropriate safety equipment."

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

International News

Canada: Workers see red at 'green' hotels

Hotel workers are paying a high personal price so hospitality employers can claim they have gone 'green'. Last year, US hotel staff complained they faced a back-breaking increase in workload as a result of a hotel chain's move to reduce laundry and energy bills. While the hotel claimed fewer bedding and towel changes were good for the environment, the move was accompanied by staffing cuts which left the remaining staff facing more work and more strains ([Risks 426](#)). Now workers in Canada are reaching the same painful realisation about their 'greener' jobs. Staff at the US-based Starwood Hotels chain - which is touting a 'Make a Green Choice' programme in its hotels across North America and which includes Westin and Sheraton hotels - say the initiative is a bogus green plan that does nothing for the environment. But it does result in reduced shifts and more work for housekeeping staff, said Michelle Travis of the union Unite Here Local 40, which represents staff in

British Columbia, Canada. "It's just a cost-cutting measure on the part of the hotel employer," she said. "Guests don't realise this particular programme has a negligible impact on the environment but a detrimental impact on housekeepers." She added that the union was taking up the issue in contract negotiations.

- [The Province](#). [Green jobs, safe jobs blog](#).

China: Steelworkers killed in bus fire

A shuttle bus carrying steel factory workers in eastern China burst into flame, killing 24 of those on board. A further 19 were reported injured, some seriously. The tragedy happened in Wuxi, in Jiangsu province near Shanghai, on a bus from the Wuxi Xuefeng Steel Company. The Chinese news agency Xinhua said the fire happened on the night of Sunday 4 July, with those on board being night shift workers. It took place in a highway tunnel, which was sealed off after the blaze. The steel plant was shut down temporarily after the tragedy. Xinhua quoted an unnamed insider as saying the plant stopped production in order to avoid panic among its workers. There were more than 400 workers at the plant and almost all of them commute by the company's shuttle bus every day. Xuefeng said it would stop the shuttle bus service and let the city's public transport authority take over the transportation of its employees.

- [Shanghai Daily](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Finland: Exhaustion trebles work death risk

Work-related exhaustion can be deadly for industrial workers, a new study has concluded. Finnish researchers found industrial employees who are under 45 years of age were almost three times as likely to die as other workers. The Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) scientists said their findings indicate there is an urgent need for action to prevent work-related exhaustion among younger employees. The study of 7,000 forestry workers did not find a similar early death association for older workers. Among the mildly or seriously exhausted younger workers, the most common causes of death were tumour (34 per cent), accident (26 per cent), suicide (26 per cent) and coronary disease (22 per cent). The study recommended that work-related exhaustion can be prevented by improving general working conditions and ensuring workloads are not excessive.

- [Trade Union News from Finland](#). Burnout as a predictor of all-cause mortality among industrial employees: A 10-year prospective register-linkage study, *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* volume 69, issue 1, pages 51-57, July 2010 [[abstract](#)].

USA: Cheap masks won't protect Gulf workers

Masks issued to workers in the Gulf of Mexico cleaning up the BP oil spill are not offering the necessary protection, an expert has warned. Industrial hygienist Eileen Senn, writing in The Pump Handle blog, reports the \$5 officially recommended masks are "not approved for organic vapours" meaning "this dust mask presumably will remove only small amounts of hydrocarbon vapours, so workers may still be exposed to them." These vapours are thought to be the principal hazard facing cleanup workers. Senn adds that "this dust mask is unlikely to protect against other symptoms being experienced by Gulf spill workers, for example, eye and skin irritation, dizziness, rapid heart rate, headaches, confusion, and nausea." She warns that "without excellent training, this dust mask may give workers a false sense of being protected from the volatile hydrocarbon components of crude oil, dispersants, and other chemicals used in the cleanup. With a false sense of security, Gulf spill workers may be less likely to avoid exposure by distancing themselves from exposure sources and using good work practices." She warns that the masks may in fact increase workers' exposures "by collecting oil mist and holding it over their nose and mouth where vapours may pass through the facepiece, despite the small amount of charcoal impregnated there." Some workers may get no mask at all, she adds, as their provision is not mandated, but is left at the discretion of the employer.

- [The Pump Handle](#).

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

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