

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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Contents

Union News

TUC calls for 3R's – rules, resources and rights
There is no compensation culture
Coalition not serious on safety
Tribunal fails to protect safety rep
Acid eye damage from duff goggles
Injured elbow points to neglected safety
Stressbusters target not-for-profits

Other news

Deregulation is already bad for you
We didn't vote to die at work
Who pays BP's disaster bill? You do
Lab staff exposed to deadly bacteria
Cleaner killed at plastics firm
Farm worker crushed in his cab
Roofing firm fined £2,000 after teen's plunge
Cactus sap put worker in hospital
Prefab demolition led to asbestos death

International News

South Africa: New spate of mine deaths
USA: Coalition for Workplace Safety a big con
USA: 'Appalling conditions' on tobacco farms
USA: Campaign wins ban on deadly floor coating

Events and Courses

TUC courses for safety reps

Useful Links

TUC calls for 3R's – rules, resources and rights

Securing safe and healthy workplaces requires good regulations, proper enforcement and decent rights, TUC has told a government-commissioned enquiry. The TUC comments to Lord Young's review, which is expected to report in the coming weeks, notes that the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) fatalities figure represents on "a tiny proportion" of those killed by work. And the union body adds that neither do the official figures show "the number of people who have to give up work, or move to another occupation because of years of exposure to an occupational hazard," noting in many professions "very few workers manage to remain working until they reach retirement age, such as scaffolding, hairdressing, and some heavy labouring jobs." The TUC submission says "there is a strong need for greater investment in health and safety." It adds: "We want to see our political leaders acting as champions for occupational health and safety." TUC argues while regulation has been effective on safety, "much more needs to be done to tackle the health issues." There is no case for exempting employers or groups from the protection of health and safety law, it adds. Workers injured or made ill by their jobs "should be entitled to compensation," the submission says noting: "Although most workers do not claim compensation, and there is absolutely no evidence of any 'compensation culture' in the employers' liability field we would welcome discussions on what steps could be taken to speed up claims and thereby reduce costs." The union body also backs the role of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). "TUC believes that the HSE is a world-class organisation whose staff provide an invaluable service that is second to none," the submission says, concluding "we would strongly argue for an enhanced role for the organisation."

- [TUC news release.](#)

There is no compensation culture

There has been a dramatic decline in compensation claims for work-related injury and ill-health, union legal advisers have told a government-commissioned enquiry. A submission to Lord Young's review from Thompsons Solicitors, a law firm providing personal injury legal support to unions, notes: "Over the last decade the numbers of union-backed personal injury claims have fallen and the overall number of employers' liability claims (union and non-union) have fallen." It points to the government's own Compensation Recovery Unit (CRU) statistics which show "that employer liability claims have fallen 69 per cent from 2000/01 to 2009/10 – from 219,183 in 2000/1 to 78,744 in 2009/10." It notes that research suggests fewer than a third of those eligible to make a workplace injury claim actually do so. Claims are also down for clinical negligence and public liability, with only road traffic accidents on the upturn. The law firm says the way to reduce work-related claims, is to make work safer. "The reality is that it is the inadequate enforcement of health and safety legislation, the under-resourcing of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the insufficient numbers of inspectors and the too few prosecutions of employers that leads to thousands of people continuing to be injured and killed at work," the Thompsons' submission notes. It

backs explicit directors' duties on safety, linking fines to turnover and "ring fencing the HSE's budget so that inspector levels can at least be brought up to pre-2004 levels." The submission agrees with Lord Young that the "perception" of health and safety being a problem is the real problem, and advises the former Tory minister to back the HSE's 'myth of the month' rather than undermine the already limited legal safety protection. HSE union Prospect also urged Lord Young "to tackle the negative media reporting blighting the sensible and proportionate health and safety regulation that seeks to enable, not stifle, work and community activities." Prospect's deputy general secretary Mike Clancy warned, however, that the union would not support proposals to deregulate. "The flexibility of health and safety legislation has stood the test of time. It saves workers' lives and promotes their health and productivity. Safety pays, danger costs."

- [Thompsons Solicitors submission](#). [Prospect news release](#).

Coalition not serious on safety

The health and safety of Britain's workforce is not being taken seriously by the coalition government, Unite has said. Joint general secretary, Tony Woodley, accused former Tory cabinet minister Lord Young, who is heading a government review, of being "offensive". The comments came after Lord Young was quoted in The Times as saying "people occasionally get killed, it's unfortunate but it's part of life" and "do you know anything dangerous in offices?" The union leader responded that the review should "look at the lack of effective investigation of workplace accidents, incidents and causes of ill-health and the widespread failure by employers to report injuries and diseases and dangerous occurrences. Regrettably the remarks reported in the press from Lord Young are deeply hurtful and offensive, particularly to the families of those killed at work." Unite called for improved enforcement of safety law, adequate funding for enforcement, application of legal safety coverage to all workplaces and all workers, explicit legal safety duties on company directors and a recognition of the lifesaving role of union safety reps.

- [Unite news release](#). [Daily Mirror](#).

Tribunal fails to protect safety rep

Penny Gower, a safety rep with the Scottish teaching union EIS, has criticised the flimsy protection provided by employment tribunals to those who stand up for safety. The college lecturer believes she was fired because of her activities as a trade union safety rep. "The ET ruled that I had been unfairly dismissed due to the College summarily sacking me without an appeal, but concluded that they had been right to dismiss me anyway," said the sacked Carnegie College tutor. The college first disciplined Penny in 2007, after she investigated the risks to a lecturer working alone in a prison. "By the time I was sacked on 1 May 2009, Carnegie College had blocked nine separate safety inspections over four years," she said. "The decisive event was in March 2009, during a period when I could not return to teaching in the prison until jail security training had been

completed. I had given written notice and carried out an inspection of the three campuses as the sole EIS safety rep. For having the temerity to exercise a safety rep's legal rights to inspect, I was dismissed." The tribunal, though, offered no support. "The judge concluded that for me to be elected as a safety rep was a red rag to a bull. I was not carrying out health and safety activities; I was just being 'bloody minded'. This despite the 26 page health and safety report I completed after the inspection which took two days when I had no classes." Penny praised her union, EIS, which was "was 100 per cent supportive throughout."

- [Defend health and safety reps' rights blog](#) and Penny Gower's safety rep inspection report [[pdf](#)].

Acid eye damage from duff goggles

A 25 year old man left with an injured tear duct and permanently needing to treat his eye with lubricating drops after acid entered his right eye at work. GMB member Phillip Heeney was injured at Omya UK limited of North Ferriby while moving a drum of liquid acid with a colleague. As they tried to get the cap off the drum, acid splashed into Mr Heeney's face entered his mouth and his right eye. He was wearing prescription safety glasses which aren't sealed but have guards on the side. The injury to Mr Heeney's right eye has caused problems with his tear duct meaning that he now has to use lubricating drops on a permanent basis. His right eye lid also droops slightly. Lawyers brought in by the union argued the 5 weeks Mr Heeney had to take off work of extensive treatment following the incident, together with the his long term eye damage, was due to the negligence of his employers. They said Omya UK had failed to provide a safe container for the acid and had failed to provide proper fitting goggles for the job. After court proceedings were issued the case settled for £10,000. Mr Heeney said: "The employers knew there was a problem with the containers the acid was stored in and they knew that I didn't have any goggles. I feel lucky that I wasn't blinded" Les Dobbs, Senior Organiser of the GMB said: "Every school kid knows that acid is highly dangerous. "For Omya UK to run the risk that a known problem with the containers and no fitted safety goggles could have blinded our member is totally unacceptable." Laura Hadfield of Thompsons solicitors said: "Omya UK Limited failed in their duty of care to Mr Heeney and he now has to live with the consequences. This case shows both why we need Health and Safety laws and, unless we are going to go back to the days of the Victorian factory why, when they are flouted, people should be compensated."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

Injured elbow points to neglected safety

Problems spanning several years with water leakage from cooling racks eventually claimed a victim at GlaxoSmithKline in Ulverston, Cumbria. Dorothy Kirby, 52, slipped and fractured the elbow of her right arm. The Unite member already suffered from severe arthritis in the elbow, and was scheduled to have an operation to replace the joint just 11 days after her fall. The firm agreed a compensation payout of £3,500, which reflected the short time she was affected

before the operation went ahead. Lawyers for the union discovered the cooling racks had been leaking for more than five years, during which time a series of complaints had been made. Inspections that were scheduled to occur every 12 months either didn't take place or recommendations from them were ignored. Mrs Kirby said: "The employers knew full well that there was a problem with water leaking from the cooling racks and yet, for whatever reason, they did nothing or nothing effective about it for years. The pain in my elbow was agony but at least I was allowed to go ahead with the operation and I now feel much more confident with the arm. Thank goodness I didn't crack the other elbow." Unite North West regional secretary Paul Finegan said: "Credit to GlaxoSmithKline, they put their hands up very quickly to being at fault here but so they should, this was just waiting to happen. This was a very basic health and safety failure by GlaxoSmithKline for which Mrs Kirby suffered."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

Stressbusters target not-for-profits

Unite reps in the not-for-profit sector have embarked on a 'Stressbusters' campaign. All the union's reps in the sector are being asked to participate in a national stress survey. To sort out stress problems, the union said it "is calling on activists to use the tools provided to bring change in your workplace. Suggestions include forming a working party with management, but even before that, once the survey has been conducted and analysed, the next step is to call a meeting with the management." It adds: "Even if there are policies and processes in place, it is important to review their effectiveness and upgrade action plans where necessary. A working party may be part of a negotiations and consultations committee, health and safety committee, or a new sub-group." In September, Unite is to issue reps a new guide on work-related stress, "which will provide the information needed to put good policies and practices in place. Unite will also run training for representatives to ensure they are equipped to lead the campaign in the workplace."

- [Unite Stressbusters campaign.](#)

Other news

Deregulation is already bad for you

The UK's workplace safety standards have been undermined by changes in the official approach to health and safety regulation over the past decade, a new report has found. Academics from the University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University found the policy changes have affected the ability of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to enforce effectively health and safety law. Their report, 'Regulatory Surrender: death, injury and the non-enforcement of law', found the number of inspections of business premises each year has fallen by 69 per cent in the 10 years to 2008/09 and investigations of health and safety incidents has declined by 68 per cent. The report also shows a 48 per cent

reduction in prosecutions of companies who have breached safety regulations. Report author Dr David Whyte, reader in sociology at the University of Liverpool, said: "The idea that health and safety has 'gone mad' does not seem to hold true. The collapse in inspection, investigation and enforcement has dramatically reduced the chances of businesses being detected and prosecuted for committing safety offences. Most serious injuries now are not even investigated. For example, only a third of amputations are now investigated by the Health and Safety Executive." Co-author Professor Steve Tombs, of Liverpool John Moores University, said: "HSE's senior's management have effectively surrendered to the government's lighter touch regulatory agenda. Not only is the agency now more vulnerable to further 'reviews' of regulation, but workers too are increasingly vulnerable - as managements are far less likely to respond to workers' demands to comply with the law in the absence of a credible enforcement threat."

- [University of Liverpool news release](#). Regulatory Surrender: death, injury and the non-enforcement of law, [Institute of Employment Rights](#), July 2010. [Purchase details](#) from IER, The People's Centre, 50-54 Mount Pleasant, Liverpool L3 5SD, or call 0151 702 6925 or [email IER](#).

We didn't vote to die at work

The Hazards Campaign has launched a national 'We didn't vote to die at work' campaign. The initiative, which was premiered at last week's National Hazards Conference in Keele, has already attracted wide support from unions and safety reps. The campaign also has its own dedicated Facebook group. This declares the campaign is "against the Con-Dem government attacks on workplace safety and health." It adds: "We need to fight against: the deregulation of health and safety law; the misrepresentation of health and safety as silly, unnecessary, red tape instead of our human right; the lie that health and safety is a burden on business when in fact good health and safety pays for itself and business externalises the cost of poor health and safety on to us all, paying less than 25 per cent of the cost of the massive burden of death injury and ill-health caused by poor health and safety standards; and cuts in enforcement proposed by the new coalition government." 'We didn't vote to die at work' posters have proved so popular, stocks were exhausted in three days and a reprint is underway. And don't be surprised if you see someone wearing the t-shirt - hundreds have sold already.

- Join the ['We didn't vote to die at work' Facebook group](#). If you want to get hold of campaign resources, contact the Hazards Campaign, Windrush Millennium Centre, 70 Alexandra Road, Manchester, M16 7WD, or [email](#) or phone 0161 636 7557. T-shirts cost £6 (that includes postage) and are available in small, medium, large, XL, XXL and XXXL (send a cheque made out to 'Hazards Campaign').

Who pays BP's disaster bill? You do

If you thought the multi-billion dollar costs of destroying refineries and oil rigs (and killing workers, ruining livelihoods and wrecking

the environment in the process), might have a chastening effect on BP, you might need to think again. An entry this week on the blog of nationally syndicated US journalist Thom Hartmann notes: "It looks like the ironic outcome of the BP mess will come in the form of a truly poetic gesture that involves a middle finger offered by BP's treasurer to British and American taxpayers." The entry cites the Financial Times, which reported that "BP is forecast to pay about \$10bn less tax over the next four years as it meets the costs of its huge oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, hitting the revenues of Britain and the US that receive hundreds of millions of dollars from the company each year." Because the laws of both the US and the UK allow companies to deduct from their taxes what are called "business expenses" - and that includes cleaning up messes caused by doing business the wrong way, cutting corners and violating safety and environmental laws - "BP will transfer about a third of all their costs of dealing with the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster away from the company and directly onto the taxpayers of the US and the UK by deducting all these costs from their taxable profits," says the blog. The Financial Times noted: "Of its principal expected liabilities, only the fines that might be imposed by the US authorities would definitely not be tax-deductible."

- [Thom Hartmann blog](#). [Financial Times](#). [Green jobs, safe jobs blog](#).

Lab staff exposed to deadly bacteria

The Health Protection Agency has been fined £25,000 for a spillage of the deadly bacterium E.coli 0157 at its centre in Colindale, north London. Three employees were put at risk of contamination although nobody was infected, the Old Bailey heard. Prosecutors described a "general complacency" about the way infectious waste was handled at the Colindale centre. Judge Martin Stephens said the agency should feel "acute embarrassment" over its failings. The bug was being carried in bins which had defects, even though these faults had been noted 18 months earlier. Between 100ml and 200ml of liquid was spilt, containing up to 10bn E.coli organisms. The agency pleaded guilty to a breach of health and safety laws. In addition to the fine, it was ordered to pay £20,166.10 costs. HSE specialist inspector Jennifer Higham, commented: "E. coli 0157 is a highly infectious and potentially deadly bacterium and there are well established practices for handling this safely. But in this case, these practices were not met, exposing several staff and potentially their families to a real risk of infection." In the US, new rules on biotech safety are under consideration after a series of incidents. The casualties include a US Agriculture Department scientist who spent a month in a coma after being infected by the E. coli bacteria being used in experiments conducted by her colleagues ([Risks 459](#)).

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

Cleaner killed at plastics firm

A Rochdale plastics manufacturer has been fined £140,000 after a Portuguese cleaner was crushed to death by a pallet of bags weighing nearly one and a half tonnes. TS (UK) Ltd was prosecuted for failing to ensure the safety of its employees and not having a

worker trained in first aid on duty. Manchester Crown Court heard Abel Lages was cleaning up a spillage in the yard on 15 July 2005 when a wooden pallet, containing 55 bags of polypropylene, fell on him. The material, which is used to manufacture washing up bowls, buckets and other plastic products, is dangerous to stack as it can pour out if there is a tear in a bag, making the stack unstable. Mr Lages, 38, was found trapped under one of the collapsed pallets and died from his injuries at the scene. Health and Safety Executive inspector John McGrellis said: "Mr Lages died because TS (UK) Ltd didn't treat the health and safety of its workers as a priority. There were labels on the polypropylene bags that made it clear how they should be stored safely but this advice was ignored. The company didn't provide guidance about how to stack the pallets, and no one trained in first aid was on duty to help try to resuscitate Mr Lages when the pallet fell on him." In addition to the fine, the company was ordered to pay £10,588 towards the cost of the prosecution.

- [HSE news release.](#)

Farm worker crushed in his cab

Farming and haulage company Pearn Wyatt & Son has been fined £21,000 with £54,000 costs after a 24-year-old agriculture worker was crushed to death on a farm in Norfolk. Sam Foley had been using a tractor to tow manure to a field at Grange Farm, in Snetterton, on 8 July 2007. He was dumping manure out of a tipper trailer when the drawbar broke and crashed forwards through the back of the tractor, fatally crushing him in the cab. Mr Foley died at the scene. An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found the tipper trailer had not been adequately maintained and was not suitable for handling solid manure. Timothy John Wyatt and Jonathan Pearn Wyatt, trading as Pearn Wyatt & Son and based at Grange Farm, Snetterton, Norfolk, were sentenced at Norwich Crown Court after admitted safety offences at an earlier hearing. HSE inspector Malcolm Crowther said: "This sad death of a young man in his early 20s should never have happened." He added: "In this case, it was down to Pearn Wyatt & Son to ensure the equipment was maintained properly and safe for the farm workers to use - something the company did not do."

- [HSE news release.](#)

Roofing firm fined £2,000 after teen's plunge

A roofing company has been prosecuted after a teenage worker fell three metres through a fragile roof, breaking his arm. Apprentice Shaun Jacob, 18, was removing the ridge from a metal sheet roof when a sheet he was standing on buckled and he fell to the ground. His employer, Randell and Janes Roofing Specialists Ltd, pleaded guilty to a breach of the Work at Height Regulations 2005 when it appeared before magistrates in Ammanford. The company had been hired to replace a roof at a single-storey cottage in Ffairfach, Carmarthenshire, where the incident occurred on 7 October 2009. A Health and Safety Executive (HSE) investigation revealed that there had been no specific risk assessment carried out for the job, and there was nothing to break a fall placed beneath the roof as it was

being removed. Mr Jacob also had no training in using roof ladders, and his supervisor also had no health and safety training. Randell and Janes Roofing Specialists Ltd was fined £2,000 and ordered to pay £1,500 costs. HSE inspector Phil Nicolle said: "It is disappointing that a company whose primary business is roof work displayed such significant failings. Employers have a legal requirement to properly plan work at height and ensure it is appropriately supervised, but this did not happen in this case. There are several ways to reduce the risk of injury from falls and though the company owned a large number of bean bags which would have served this purpose, they were not used."

- [HSE news release.](#)

Cactus sap put worker in hospital

A worker was hospitalised and suffered long-term eye damage after being squirted with cactus juice. Carl Woodbridge, a technician working for Ambius, a subsidiary of Rentokil Initial UK Ltd, was working at a Milton Keynes shopping centre in October 2008, to carry out pruning on several large cacti, one of which had become unstable. After pruning several of the cactus plants he cut into a branch and liquid sap squirted into his right eye. The sap also splashed his face, neck and arm, causing a rash. Mr Woodbridge was taken to Milton Keynes Hospital and treated for injuries to his eye, neck, face and arm. Investigators from Milton Keynes Council found Rentokil Initial UK Ltd had failed to provide adequate information, instruction and training to ensure the safety of its staff carrying out their work. The company pleaded guilty to safety offences, including failure to report the incident in the prescribed time. Milton Keynes magistrates fined the company £12,000 plus costs of £3,967.26. As a result of the damage to his eye, Mr Woodbridge now has to wear glasses with an anti-glare lenses. A council spokesperson said: "This was an entirely preventable situation if the work had been properly planned and implemented. This employee suffered considerable physical discomfort as a result of not receiving adequate training or guidance."

- [Milton Keynes Council news release.](#)

Prefab demolition led to asbestos death

A man who developed cancer after being exposed to asbestos while demolishing prefabricated houses received a compensation payout just weeks before his death. John Mannix, from Leigh in Greater Manchester, died of mesothelioma on 1 July. But he lived to see the company he worked for in the late 1960s agree to pay out after a legal battle that ended in a three day trial at the Royal Courts of Justice. Mr Mannix worked for the demolition company Mee and Cocker (Leigh) Limited. He was employed to demolish thousands of prefabricated houses so that the aluminium used in their construction could be reclaimed. At the trial, Stanley Mee, a former company director, admitted that he did not know what materials were in the buildings being demolished and that no checks were made to ensure they didn't contain asbestos, or precautions taken to protect his workers from asbestos. He then admitted that the

prefab roofs may have been underlined with asbestos. Only then did Mee and Cocker's lawyers offer to settle Mr Manniex's compensation claim. Steven Dickens, of Thompsons Solicitors, said: "We had a real fight on our hands to succeed in Mr Manniex's claim." He added: "Mr Manniex felt vindicated when they finally agreed to settle his claim. He was also motivated in pursuing it to warn the many other men who worked alongside him demolishing prefabs that they may have been exposed to asbestos."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

International News

South Africa: New spate of mine deaths

Seven miners were killed in three separate underground mine accidents in South Africa in the space of a week, including five contract workers at Aquarius Platinum's Marikana mine in the Bushveld area near Rustenburg, North West Province. The other deaths occurred at AngloGold Ashanti's Tau Lekoa gold mine on 7 July, where an explosion took the life of a miner, and at Imperial Platinum's Rustenburg mine, where an underground rock slide crushed a worker. Aquarius last week temporarily closed the No.4 shaft of Marikana, which supplies the Australian-based company, the world's fourth largest platinum producer, with 50 per cent of Marikana's production. The Marikana project is a joint venture between Aquarius - the world's fourth largest platinum producer - and Anglo American's Anglo Platinum division. The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) said there would be a mandatory one-day period of mourning once the mine reopens. "This is a disaster," said NUM general secretary Frans Baleni. "At a time when the industry brags of so-called improved safety, we now have disasters raising their ugly heads again." NUM has called for a full investigation. The death at Impala Platinum's Rustenberg mine came 50 weeks after nine miners died at the Lease Mine No.14 near Rustenburg. Impala, the world's number two platinum producer, led all producers in South Africa in mining deaths last year. South Africa mines and processes 80 per cent of all global platinum, which is used in electronics, catalytic converters, and jewellery.

- [ICEM news report.](#) [The Guardian.](#)

USA: Coalition for Workplace Safety a big con

The 'Coalition for Workplace Safety' sounds virtuous enough. But it turns out to be an industry front organisation, bent on derailing attempts to tighten US workplace safety rules. Instead, the organisation puts the Big Coal in coalition and is fighting to take safety out of workplaces. The US government's traditional support for a hands-off, business friendly enforcement regime finally began to wear thin after a series of major disasters, including double figure mine fatalities and the Deepwater Horizon oil well explosion. US safety expert Celeste Monforton, from Washington DC's George Washington University, said the Coalition "is another well-funded attempt by the National Association of Manufacturers, the US Chamber of Commerce, and more than 20 other industry groups to

oppose fundamental improvements to the 40 year old OSHA law.” Not that the coalition advertises its industry backers. The only explicit indication on the homepage that it might be an anti-regulation industry lobby group is a small print copyright notice by the National Association of Manufacturers at the bottom of the website. Instead, it says: “The Coalition for Workplace Safety is a group of associations and employers who believe in improving workplace safety through cooperation, assistance, transparency, clarity, and accountability.” After Monforton examined the website, she said she “was hard pressed to find any information about actual workplace safety.” Instead the content concentrates on rubbishing moves to beef up mine safety and general workplace safety regulation. She suggests the coalition gets serious about the workplace safety part of its name, stating: “Business leaders say they want a system that promotes fair competition. They should embrace an OSHA enforcement system that identifies companies that cut corners on safety or outright violate the law, and get the book thrown at them.”

- [The Pump Handle](#). [Coalition for Workplace Safety](#). [The Seminal](#). [The Hill](#).

USA: ‘Appalling conditions’ on tobacco farms

Tobacco farm workers in the US are enduring deadly conditions, global farm unions’ federation IUF has revealed. Reynolds American Incorporated (RAI), in which British American Tobacco (BAT) holds a 42 per cent share, sources most of its tobacco leaf from the company’s home state of North Carolina. Tobacco field workers in the state are mostly migrant workers from Mexico and Central America. IUF says the ‘vast majority’ are undocumented workers supplied by labour contractors. IUF affiliate the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) is currently working to secure rights and decent working conditions for 25,000 tobacco farm workers – but is facing stiff opposition from the industry. FLOC says tobacco field workers suffer long hours stooping in the fields under the burning sun. In recent years, nine tobacco workers have died in North Carolina, with most of these deaths due to heat stroke. They live in insanitary labour camps, and are obliged to use their meagre wages to buy food at high prices from the camp supervisor. FLOC adds they that tobacco field workers are often exposed to noxious nicotine and pesticides and are at risk for green tobacco sickness (GTS), which is caused by nicotine absorption through the skin. Labour camps often lack adequate facilities for washing clothes contaminated by pesticides and tobacco residue. IUF says: “We are calling on our affiliates to write to BAT corporate management insisting that they assume their responsibility and use their influence to persuade RAI to meet with FLOC and begin working to improve the working and living conditions of the poorest and most vulnerable workers in their supply chain.”

- [IUF news release](#). [Tell BAT to stop the abuse](#).

USA: Campaign wins ban on deadly floor coating

A landmark bill banning the commercial use and sale of a wood floor finishing product linked to fires that left three floor finishers

dead has taken effect in Massachusetts. The new law, which was introduced at the urging of an industry-union-community taskforce, targets "lacquer sealer", a floor finishing product containing nitrocellulose and synthetic resins that can burst into flames at the slightest trigger. "This groundbreaking law will save lives and end floor finishing fires that have caused so much pain and destruction," said Marcy Goldstein-Gelb, executive director of the Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (MassCOSH), who convened the taskforce. In 2004, two Vietnamese floor sanders were killed and two of their co-workers burned in a fire that ripped through a home. Less than a year later, a floor refinishing contractor – also Vietnamese - lost his life in a fatal fire. Both fires are widely believed to have been caused by the highly flammable lacquer sealer used in floor refinishing. The floor finishing industry in Massachusetts is largely concentrated in the Vietnamese community. Viet AID, a community-based organisation that has been a leader in the taskforce, has been working with MassCOSH and other groups to raise awareness about the dangers of using lacquer sealer. "The floor finishing industry provides critical self-employment opportunities for many Vietnamese immigrant and refugee adults," said Long Nguyen, interim executive director of Viet AID. "This law provides an opportunity for the Coalition to help hard-working hardwood floor businesses to protect themselves and their workers as well as to improve their business bottom line."

- MassCOSH [news release](#), [factsheet](#) and [report](#).

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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