

# Risks

TUC 

*e-bulletin*

Number 469 – 14 August 2010

**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](#).

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## **Sorry about that**

The TUC would like to apologise to those readers who received up to four copies of Risks last week. While you all look forward to receiving Risks, there are limits, and we know how annoying this may have been. The problem was caused by a server error at the company that handles the TUC web traffic. We are assured that this has now been fixed but will make every endeavour to make sure it does not happen again.

## *Union News*

### **Tube bosses are 'dicing with death'**

Rail union RMT an industrial action ballot of all Tube fleet maintenance staff after London Underground (LU) said it intended to slash the frequency of train safety inspections. The union says the company wants to carry out "safety critical" train inspections just once ever 28 days, compared to the current 14 days. "The inspections, of braking systems and other equipment that it is crucial to staff and passenger safety, are being cut in frequency as a blatant cost saving measure which is just part of the overall cuts drive being bulldozed through by Transport for London (TfL)," the union warned. It said all Tube fleet maintenance staff would be balloted for action short of a strike. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "Hardly a day goes by now without TfL and LU getting caught out playing fast and loose with staff and passenger safety. These fortnightly inspections identify worn brake blocks, cracks in securing brackets and other distressed components. Moving these inspections to monthly is literally dicing with death in the interests of saving money." He added: "RMT has a stark choice – ballot for action or sit back and wait for a disaster to unfold. We have chosen to ballot for action."

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

### **London fires fuel Tube job cuts concerns**

Transport union RMT has demanded urgent inspections of all fire detection equipment at London Tube stations following revelations that the system failed to alert staff to a fire at Euston station last month. The union says the potential for a major disaster was only avoided by the actions of a vigilant member of staff, who detected the smoke coming from underneath an elevator and activated the manual evacuation procedure. RMT wrote to London Underground on 9 August requesting an urgent inspection of all fire detection equipment, under fire regulations which were introduced after the 1987 King's Cross fire. A further fire at Oxford Circus station on 6 August was again spotted by staff members who evacuated the station. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said the two fires "show that it is trained staff at station level who are critical when it comes to spotting potential danger - yet these are the very staff that Transport for London are looking to axe in a cull of 800 Tube station posts." The Euston fire, which the union said had "close parallels" with the Kings Cross disaster in 1987, was caused by mechanical

friction in the closed chamber underneath an escalator igniting accumulated dust and grease. Fire detection systems failed and the smoke was spotted by staff members who activated the manual evacuation procedure and closed the station. RMT's Bob Crow said: "If anyone wanted a clear example of why we are currently balloting for action over the axing of safety-critical tube jobs they need look no further than the role played by staff at Euston and Oxford Circus. If those station staff hadn't been on duty we could have had major disasters on our hands." The union leafleted rush hour passengers at Euston station to raise awareness about the cuts on 11 August, the day strike ballot results were announced. RMT members voted by 76 per cent for strike action and by 88 per cent for action short of a strike. RMT said it would "now begin an extensive consultation with members, and with sister tube union TSSA who will announce their ballot result next week, over the tactical use of industrial action, alongside a political and public campaign, to stop the attack on jobs and safety."

- [RMT news release](#) and [news release on the ballot results](#). [Morning Star](#).

### **Prison fall leads to pay out**

A prison officer who suffered serious facial injuries when she tripped and fell during a night patrol has received an undisclosed compensation payout. The Prison Officers' Association (POA) member, whose name has not been released and who no longer works as a prison officer, fell over a metal lock back latch that was embedded in a concrete floor. She landed face down, smashing her forehead, shattering her glasses and suffering cuts around her eyes and cheek. She still suffers headaches and the incident aggravated her pre-existing tinnitus. Only one torch had been supplied to the two officers on patrol. Colin Moses, national chair of POA, said: "Our members' safety is our primary concern, whether it's when dealing directly with inmates or on other duties. Sending prison officers out on night patrol in badly lit areas and without adequate lighting equipment is irresponsible." Amanda Duffy, of Thompsons Solicitors, the law firm brought in by POA to handle the compensation case, said: "The area the officers were patrolling was badly lit and they had just one torch between them. There were obstructions on the area they had to walk around that should have been removed or made clearly visible."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

### **Union backs claim by member's son**

The son of a PCS member has received £950,000 for multiple head injuries sustained in a road traffic accident in February 2003. At the time of the accident the member's son, whose name has not been released, was just 16 and a rear seat passenger in a vehicle driven by a friend. The teenager, who wasn't wearing a seatbelt and whose compensation was reduced by 25 per cent as a result, was ejected from the rear window of the vehicle when it left the road and struck a wall and a lamppost. His injuries including an epileptic seizure, multiple fractures of the skull and a brain haemorrhage which led to him being in intensive care for 10 days. There have also been long

term consequences, the most severe of which being that the member's son is no longer able to manage his own affairs due to his brain injury. PCS legal services officer Phil Madelin said: "The union's personal injury legal service covers not just members for any accident but members' families too for non work accidents. This is a good example of what the union can offer, protecting a family at its most vulnerable."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release.](#)

## *Other news*

### **Deregulation's deadly reality gulf**

A 'deregulatory blitzkrieg' by the coalition government could create the conditions linked to incidents like the Gulf of Mexico oil disaster engulfing BP. 'Abuse of power', an article in the new issue of the workers' health and safety magazine Hazards notes: "Observers increasingly accept the disaster was a product of inadequate regulation, oversight and enforcement. It caused incalculable economic and environmental damage, has strained relations between the US and the UK and has led for calls for directors of BP to face criminal charges." But it says while the Treasury faces a loss of billions in revenue from the cash-strapped multinational, "the coalition has embarked on a deregulatory blitzkrieg." On 1 July, the business department (BIS) announced "a tough new Cabinet committee with the job of reducing the heavy burden of red tape on business", chaired by business secretary Vince Cable. Last week Cable announced a "fundamental shift" in policy, with plans to introduce a one-in, one-out system for any new regulations that impose costs on businesses. The BIS news release was headed: "New rules to hand over powers to individuals and companies by cutting red tape and bureaucracy." In a response to the proposal, the Forum of Private Business (FPB) included health and safety in its "most costly" concerns. Coalition initiatives announced earlier include a review of health and safety regulation (Risks 465) and 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. According to Hazards magazine: "Hand-wringing by prime minister David Cameron over the 'sadness' of the Gulf disaster is a seriously unsatisfactory alternative to protecting lives, livelihoods and the environment. To do that the government must behave responsibly, and that means more than just demanding responsibility from business. It means less time spent appeasing regulation averse boardrooms and more time regulating them. What business calls 'red tape' is for many workers their lifeline."

- [Abuse of power](#), [Hazards magazine](#), number 111, 2010. [BIS news release](#). [FPB news release](#). [The Independent](#). [BBC News Online](#).

### **Academics criticise HSE leadership**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has not defended effectively the watchdog's role and resources, two top safety scholars have said. Dave Whyte, a reader in sociology at the University of

Liverpool, commenting on a dramatic decline in HSE inspections, investigations and enforcement (Risks 465). In an online interview published this week, he added that while official inspections in environmental and food safety have declined rapidly too, "they have not fallen at as fast a rate as in health and safety or anything like it. The evidence shows clearly that HSE has raised the white flag a lot more readily than the other regulators charged with protecting our safety." Steve Tombs, a professor at Liverpool John Moores University, said: "HSE's senior 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." The academics rubbish the government claim that health and safety "red tape" is a burden on business, with Tombs dismissing it as "a classic case of a lie being repeated so often that it assumes the status of truth. But, empirically, there is simply no evidence for it - quite the opposite in fact." They say there needs to be more enforcement action, and a real threat of jail for the most irresponsible employers. According to Tombs: "Sadly, there are many employers who will take little notice of anything else. As was once famously said of company directors: a few go down, they all sit up."

- [Interview with Dave Whyte and Steve Tombs, Hazards Online](#), 9 August 2010.

### **Firm must pay for hospice cancer care**

The High Court has ruled a company responsible for a man's death from an asbestos cancer should contribute to his hospice care costs. The 'landmark' case involves James Willson who in 1951, aged 20, went to work erecting new boilers at Deptford Power Station. While working for Foster Wheeler Limited, he was regularly exposed to asbestos. In 2006 he was diagnosed with the asbestos cancer mesothelioma, dying in March 2007 after 23 days at St Joseph's Hospice, Hackney. Caroline Pinfold, the asbestos disease specialist with law firm Irwin Mitchell who represented the family, and said the judgment would provide comfort for many mesothelioma sufferers and their loved ones, and clarity for hospices providing them with terminal care. Mr Willson's daughters, Catherine Drake and Tina Starkey, won damages against the company for themselves, Mr Wilson's children and grandchildren. But they also put in a claim on behalf of St Joseph's. The judgment handed down by Judge Anthony Thornton QC at the Royal Courts of Justice found the defendant, Foster Wheeler Limited, should pay the costs for his care. He said: "The institutional care was provided because the family members were no longer able to cope and Mr Willson's condition had deteriorated to such an extent that home care was no longer possible." St Joseph's Hospice was awarded £10,021 plus interest from the time of Mr Willson's death. Caroline Pinfold said: "There is no doubt that justice has been done and that this landmark decision will be welcomed by the family of Mr Willson and other victims of asbestos related diseases, who rely on palliative care to relieve their suffering. It also now provides a legal basis for hospices to be repaid for the tremendously valuable work they do where their care has been needed as a result of someone else's wrong doing."

- [Irwin Mitchell Solicitors news release](#). [Loughborough Echo](#).

### **Blacklisting case heads to full tribunal**

An electrician blacklisted from the construction industry has won the right to take his case to a full tribunal. Steve Kelly, one of over 3,000 workers whose data was found on an illegal blacklist run by disgraced firm The Consulting Association, believes he was targeted because of his trade union health and safety activity. At a preliminary tribunal last week in east London Mr Kelly won the right to bring a case to a full employment tribunal against electrical sub-contractors ECS. He was employed by the firm in 2007 but was sacked within days, allegedly for poor work. However after obtaining his file from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) he discovered documentation which he believes shows that either the firm, which was a sub-contractor for Sir Robert McAlpine, or McAlpine's itself dismissed him due to his trade union activities. Both firms have denied the allegation, although McAlpine's is known to have subscribed to The Consulting Association's blacklist and was one of the most enthusiastic users of the service. Mr Kelly also believes that blacklisting cost him a number of other jobs in the industry. He told the Morning Star: "My only aim was to earn a living and improve health and safety conditions for myself and my workmates but I've been treated like a criminal. I've been robbed of the trade I decided to go into as a 16-year-old." He added he "was more fortunate than some, I've heard of people who lost their homes, their families, marriages split up. I know of five former workmates who have committed suicide since, primarily because they couldn't get work." The tribunal is scheduled for April 2011.

- [Morning Star](#). [Blacklist blog](#).

### **Director fined over high lead levels**

An employer has been fined after routinely exposed workers to excessive levels of lead at a Norfolk sheet metal manufacturing company. Staff at the Anglia Lead Ltd plant were exposed as they cast molten lead into lead sheeting, sold for various uses including roofing old buildings, such as churches. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which brought the prosecution, told Hazards magazine airborne levels of lead exceeded official limits on "various occasions" investigated by the watchdog. Blood tests showed a number of workers were "significantly exposed", with the action level of 50 micrograms/decilitre of lead in blood exceeded in some measurements. Serious health effects have been linked to exposures as low as 10 micrograms/decilitre. At Norwich Magistrates' Court this week the company and director Carlton Edwards admitted safety offences. Magistrates fined the company £10,000 and full prosecution costs of £10,556. Mr Edwards was fined £10,000. Breaches included failing to undertake a satisfactory risk assessment, failing to control lead exposures, no adequate clothes washing system, no adequate hygiene controls and failing to suitably investigate when occupational exposure level limits were exceeded and action levels reached. HSE inspector Julie Jarvey said: "Anglia Lead Ltd and its director failed to discharge their

duties, meaning the company's processes fell significantly below the expected standards required for working with the material." HSE revised its advice on the dangers of working with lead last year after a Stirling University/Hazards magazine investigation found it greatly under-estimated health risks that could be affecting over 100,000 workers ([Risks 432](#)).

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

### **Quarry firm fined after machine plunge**

A quarry operator has been fined £30,000 after a trainee driver was injured when a 30-tonne wheel loader vehicle overturned and slid almost 16ft down a sand stockpile. Humberside Aggregates and Excavations Ltd of North Cave, East Yorkshire, was also ordered to pay £10,590 in costs after pleading guilty to three separate breaches of Quarries Regulations 1999 in the prosecution brought by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Beverly Magistrates Court heard that the employee, who does not wish to be identified, was being trained as a wheel loader operator at the gravel extraction and processing facility. On 30 October 2009, he was transporting sand from a stockpile when the access ramp edge he was driving on gave way, which caused the machine to overturn and plunge almost 16ft because there were no edge protection barriers in place. The trainee lost consciousness, suffered concussion and was hospitalised for two days. The Health and Safety Executive prosecuted Humberside Aggregates and Excavations for failing to assess, identify and minimise potential risk, and for ultimately failing to protect the worker. Following the hearing HSE inspector Richard Noble said: "This accident could have been avoided had sufficient edge protection been put in place at minimal cost, which has been the standard within the quarrying industry for many years." He added: "Quarrying remains one of the most dangerous industries to work in. Since 2000 more than 3,000 workers have suffered an injury reportable to HSE and 24 people have been killed."

- [HSE news release](#).

### **Firm fined £200,000 over vineyard death**

A distribution company has been fined £200,000 for safety breaches linked to the death of a Cornish vineyard owner. George Musgrave, 66, died in April 2008 while helping to unload a delivery of empty wine bottles at Polmassick Vineyard at St Ewe, near St Austell. The load fell from a lorry tail lift, causing fatal head and chest injuries. The Gregory Distribution Ltd vehicle was being driven by an agency driver who was delivering a consignment of about 1,300 bottles. He had not been given specific safety advice before setting off. At an earlier hearing at Bodmin Magistrates' Court, the company admitted a safety offence. It was fined £200,000 with £16,993 costs at Truro Crown Court last week, following a prosecution by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). HSE inspector Simon Jones said: "This tragic accident highlights the dangers involved in unloading large and heavy loads using a tail lift. Employers should ensure that employees are given the right equipment, information, instruction and training to allow them to unload loads safely. Where employers use the services of agency staff they should ensure that those agency staff are aware of the systems of work in place and have the

skills and training to undertake the required tasks." The inspector added: "Tail lifts should be examined by a competent person at least every six months to ensure that they are safe to use. If these simple measures had been taken then this accident would not have happened and Mr Musgrave would not have died in these tragic circumstances."

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

### **Maintenance job leads to a broken back**

A Staffordshire company has been fined £8,000 after a worker fell more than two metres from a scaffold tower, fracturing one vertebra, crushing another and leaving him immobilised for more than six weeks. Barry Derbyshire, 61, was carrying out routine maintenance on a machine used to make exhaust pipes when he fell on 18 August 2009. A year later, he is still recuperating and has not returned to work. Newcastle-under-Lyme Magistrates Court heard that Mr Derbyshire, who was working for Klarius UK Ltd, had been stooping down to try and locate an oil leak when he stood up and possibly overbalanced, falling off the edge. An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) revealed there had never been a guardrail on one edge of the scaffold as it was felt it would interfere with access to the machines. Klarius UK Ltd pleaded guilty to a work at height offence and was fined £8,000 plus £1,892 costs. After the hearing, HSE inspector Lynne Boulton said: "Barry Derbyshire did nothing wrong, but as a result of this fall, he's been left with life-changing injuries. The company had a clear lack of appreciation of risk. If Klarius UK Ltd had used the right equipment and ensured there were guardrails on the scaffolding, it would never have happened." John Bennett, a Unite union shop steward and a senior welder who was nearest the accident on 18 August 2009, told a local paper he felt the fall may never have happened if the company's new health and safety officer had been appointed sooner.

- [HSE news release](#) and [falls webpages](#). [The Sentinel](#).

### **Jam costs cake worker two fingers**

One of the UK's leading food manufacturers has been fined after a worker had two fingers sliced off in one of its mixing machines. McVities Cake Company, part of United Biscuits (UK) Ltd, was prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) after an investigation into the incident on 9 April 2009 at a cake baking site in Halifax. Halifax Magistrates Court heard how an employee, who asked not to be named, lost two fingers on her right hand when she attempted to clear a blockage in an industrial mixer, used to combine ingredients for flapjacks. HSE's investigation found the employee had to scale a two metre fixed step ladder in order to reach the machine, empty the mixture inside, and then restart it. Though the mixer had stopped, the blades inside were still rotating and when she reached in her fingers were severed. The company pleaded guilty to a criminal safety breach relating to the incident. It was fined £10,000 and ordered to pay £2,889 in costs. After the hearing, HSE inspector Rachel Brittain said: "An incident like this should not happen in any company, but taking place in such a large scale food manufacturer such as this is absolutely unacceptable. Preventing access to moving parts and fitting guards is an

elementary and essential precautionary measure and inexpensive. By not putting these measures in place United Biscuits failed to fulfil its duty of care to its employees.”

- [HSE news release.](#)

### **Gangmaster ‘trapped’ workers in squalor**

A Lancashire gangmaster has had its licence revoked after it was found workers were “trapped” in dangerous and squalid conditions as a result of illegally low pay. Plus Staff 24 Ltd, based in Skelmersdale, was found to have breached 11 regulations. The owner of the company, Jose Rosa, employed more than 20 workers who had come to the UK from Latvia, Paul Whitehouse, chair of the GLA said. The GLA said its inspectors found workers lived in “filthy and dangerous houses without suitable bedding and any electrical safety documentation whilst having to use a toilet covered in mould.” Holiday entitlement and sick pay was not recorded or had not been paid to the workers despite this being included in their terms and conditions. And workers were ferried to the fields in an uninsured minibus sometimes driven by an underage driver. “The worst thing about it was that he was trapping these workers,” Mr Whitehouse said. “He would not pay them enough to live on so they would loan money from him - then he would make them pay it back with interest from their already meagre wages.” He added: “This is a flagrant abuse of power over workers. When a human being has worked hard for a month and gets paid nothing after deductions and even owes the gangmaster money, how are they supposed to survive?” The GLA chair said he believed Plus Staff 24 was set up as a front after Maria Baptista, who ran Maria Recruitment Solutions Limited, failed to get her licence renewed. He said he had “serious concerns” about her involvement in the business. Mr Rosa can appeal the decision, Mr Whitehouse said. If he carries on trading then he will be working illegally and criminal action could be taken against him.

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

### **Would you laugh at a plane crash?**

The boss of a health and safety company has hit back at those who deride the topic as a joke or pointless bureaucracy. Karen Baxter, managing director of the workplace risk specialists Sypol, said people who make jokes about “elf and safety” at work wouldn’t take the same attitude towards an air accident. “If a plane crashed and killed 180 people, we wouldn’t be having a good laugh and call it ‘Sky Pixie Syndrome,’” she notes in an online editorial. “Health and Safety has become the acceptable butt of everyone’s humour, partly because the media loves silly stories and partly because we’ve allowed ourselves to drown in acronyms and paperwork instead of addressing the real issues. As a result, small businesses in particular have been discouraged from adopting sensible practices.” She points to recent media stories have including children being prohibited from playing conkers, old people being refused doormats in case they trip over them, and shopkeepers told not to put down grit in icy conditions. “Most of these stories are apocryphal or driven by insurance requirements, not health and safety. Good health and safety is a combination of regulation, business benefits and moral cost,” she writes. “No-one who has

been involved in causing harm to someone at work ever wants to go through it again.” She adds that the business benefits health and safety include accidents avoided, fewer working days lost, improved recruitment and staff retention, improved customer confidence, reduced insurance premiums, and the ability to tender for large corporate and government contracts.

- [Sypol online article](#).

## *Resources*

### **We still didn't vote to die at work**

As the coalition government continues with a succession of initiatives to reduce 'red tape' on business, the 'We didn't vote to die at work' campaign to counter any moves to deregulate health and safety is growing in strength. It says the health and safety regulations the business lobby calls red tape, are in fact an essential lifeline for many workers. New resources on the *Hazards* magazine website are intended to complement the existing Hazards Campaign 'We didn't vote to die at work' initiative, which includes a well-received facebook group, campaign materials and very snazzy t-shirts.

- We didn't vote to die at work – [facebook group](#) and [Hazards webpages](#).

## *International News*

### **Global: Microelectronics investors demand better standards**

A coalition of over 40 European, Australian and US investment groups has condemned abusive workplace conditions in the global electronics supply chain and is demanding improvements. The group, led by Boston Common Asset Management, LLC, Trillium Asset Management Corporation, As You Sow and Domini Social Investments LLC, have told the electronics manufacturers in their portfolios they must ensure better working standards in their supply chain. The investment firms are all members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR). The microelectronics sector has been embroiled in a series of health and safety controversies, including a suicide scandal at Foxconn and links to elevated cancers at Samsung and other firms. “We believe this is a wake-up call for the electronic industry to intensify its efforts to improve working conditions and the quality of life for workers producing their products,” said Steven Heim, managing director of ESG Research and Shareholder Advocacy at Boston Common Asset Management. “We urge companies, suppliers, governments and investors to focus on building more sustainable supply chains that mitigate risks while building safe and harmonious workplaces.” The statement, with 45 investor signatories, urges the consumer electronics companies in their portfolios such as Apple, Dell, and Hewlett Packard to redouble efforts to strictly monitor the practices of their suppliers to insure safer, less stressful workplace conditions and to promote worker rights.

- [ICCR news release](#) and [full statement](#). [Good Electronics news release and resources](#).

## **Global: Top retailers in new sweatshop scandal**

Gap, Next and Marks & Spencer have all launched their own inquiries into abuses of working regulations at their Indian suppliers. The retail multinationals have also pledged to end the practice of excessive overtime, which is in breach of the industry's ethical trading initiative (ETI) and Indian labour law. The companies were responding to an Observer investigation that found staff at Indian suppliers House of Pearl and Viva Global were working up to 16 hours a day on poverty wages. Those in the factory supplying Gap and Next told the paper staff who refused to work extra hours were threatened and fired, a practice defined under international law as forced labour and outlawed around the world. Next said it had found the situation to be "deplorable." The factory has pledged to apologise and reinstate anyone who lost their job. House of Pearl chair Deepak Seth blaming demand for workers at the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in Delhi for leaving factories short of staff. Sudhir Kumar Makhija, chief operating officer for Viva Global, said the company was committed to ethical trading and claimed that some workers may want to harm the company by making unsubstantiated allegations.

- [The Observer](#).

## **USA: Metropolis faces deadly work peril**

Union members at America's only uranium conversion plant, in Metropolis, Illinois, have erected 42 crosses nearby in memory of workers who died of cancer. Twenty-seven smaller crosses symbolise workers who have survived the disease. Workers at the plant say work-related cancers are a central reason the union is refusing to accept the plant operator's plan to reduce pensions for newly hired workers and health benefits for retirees. A report in the New York Times says the memorial is a fitting backdrop for the contentious labour dispute that has shaken Metropolis — the self-proclaimed hometown of Superman, which sits on the Ohio River at the southern edge of Illinois. On 28 June, Honeywell, the plant operator, locked out its 220 union employees after contract negotiations stalled, accusing the union of refusing to give the company 24 hours' notice of a strike. The union has picketed ever since. "We deal with hydrofluoric acid," said Darrell Lillie, president of United Steelworkers Local 7-669, which represents the union workers. "We make fluorine. This is bad stuff. The least we feel like we could have is good medical benefits when we retire." The company converts milled uranium into uranium hexafluoride for nuclear reactors. With the union workers locked out, 152 salaried Honeywell employees have been running the plant, alongside contract workers and retirees reemployed by the firm. "They're trying to bring in old recruits who have been retired and train them to run the plant," said Jerry Baird, whose restaurant, Diamond Lil's, has been hauling barbecue, lemonade and ice to the picket line. "If they remember everything, it'll probably run. If they don't, they'll probably kill us all."

- [New York Times](#).

## **USA: Labour shortages increase offshore risks**

The US offshore oil industry is struggling to address the pervasive problem of undertrained and overstretched workers on deepwater rigs like the one used in the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe. A report in the Wall Street Journal reports concerns that as the number of huge, high-tech drilling rigs has soared in recent years, finding and keeping experienced staff has become a growing challenge for the offshore industry. The world's largest drilling contractor, Transocean Ltd, faced staffing problems long before its Deepwater Horizon rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico in April, according to documents reviewed by the paper. The blast killed 11 of the 126 workers aboard. In recent years, customers in surveys and safety consultants in a report have criticised the company for rising worker turnover and falling competence. In testimony before a federal panel investigating the Deepwater Horizon disaster, Transocean workers have complained that personnel cutbacks have left them shorthanded. While the explosion and sinking of the Deepwater Horizon was unprecedented in the US, the stresses on its workers appear to be commonplace at Transocean and at many companies operating in the Gulf of Mexico, according to reports from federal investigations, industry and regulator studies, and interviews with experts. Since 2008 Transocean has had at least two serious accidents, including a major fire, attributed to inexperienced workers, federal records show. Other companies have also had similar problems. BP, which hired the Deepwater Horizon rig, complained in an audit last September that turnover there had been high and experience levels had been declining, adding: "Any further dilution of experienced personnel may be detrimental to the performance of the rig." The deadly fire and explosion came on 20 April this year.

- [Wall Street Journal](#).

## *Events and Courses*

### **TUC courses for safety reps**

COURSES FOR SEP 2010 to DEC 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](http://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 HSE and the European Agency.