

Risks

TUC 

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**HAZARDS
MAGAZINE**



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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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Hidden toll highlights need for safety laws

More than 20,000 people in the UK are killed prematurely by their work every year, highlighting the need for strong, strongly enforced health and safety regulation, according to a TUC report. 'The case for health and safety' smashes the myth that Britain is one of the safest places to work, says TUC. Its analysis of the most conservative official safety figures shows that at least 20,000 people die early as a result of their work every year, through conditions such as occupational cancers and lung disorders, exposure to fumes and chemicals, and fatal traffic accidents. It adds that official figures indicate approaching 1.5 million worker are injured or made ill by the work each year, although many cases go unreported or are not reported correctly. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "Regulation works, as long as it is enforced, and it saves lives and prevents the contraction of unnecessary illnesses. That is why the UK continues to need strong regulation and enforcement. Every one of the 20,000 annual workplace-related deaths could have been prevented and if the level of HSE and local authority funding is cut, the effects will be even more catastrophic." The TUC leader added: "Fatalities are not just statistics - they are real people, with lives and families - and any fall in inspections and enforcement will lead to an increase in accidents, injuries and deaths, and will have a huge impact on the already grave problem of workplace diseases." TUC is calling on the government to ignore calls from the business lobby to reduce regulation and enforcement, but instead appoint a government health and safety "champion". It adds that the UK's network of 150,000 trained union health and safety reps must be used to even greater effect.

- [TUC news release](#). The case for health and safety, TUC, September 2010 [[pdf](#)].
- [BBC News Online](#). [Personnel Today](#). [Stronger Unions](#). [Morning Star](#). [The Herald](#).

Network Rail buried workplace injuries

Network Rail's chair Rick Haythornthwaite should claw back directors' bonuses because the company has systematically under-reported workplace injuries for at least two years, the union Unite has said. Seven directors earned £2.36 million in bonuses last year, with Network Rail's safety record one of the "key discretionary items" used by its remuneration committee to calculate the payouts. Unite says its findings on the suppressed accident figures have been confirmed by the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR), the industry's regulator. ORR described Network Rail's legally-required reporting of RIDDOR (Reporting of injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences regulations) incidents as "obscure and wrong." Network Rail had also put in place management league tables where managers have points deducted for RIDDOR incidents, which Unite believes provides an incentive for managers to under-report accidents. Unite's national officer Bob Rixham said: "It's outrageous that senior directors can walk away with huge bonuses when Network Rail wrongly boosted its safety record. Network Rail's chairman must ensure that part of the bonuses paid to directors are recouped." He added: "Behind the statistics are real people who

have been injured at work, it's scandalous that Network Rail has been underplaying these incidents. The directors should be held to account because these practices go all the way to the top." The ratio of major to minor incidents at Network Rail reported under RIDDOR was a not credible 1 to 1.12, said ORR, compared with the industry rate of 30 minor incidents for every major incident. The watchdog also confirmed that Network Rail had been designating incidents non-reportable if three days after an injury a worker could perform "light duties." RIDDOR states that by law all worker injuries that result in them being "unable to do their full range of normal duties for more than three days" must be reported.

- [Unite news release](#). [HSE RIDDOR guidance](#). [ORR webpage](#).

Reinstatement demand for sacked whistleblowers

Construction union UCATT is pursuing legal action in support of members who were dismissed after raising serious safety concerns. The union says problems at the Velindre Electricity sub-station construction site in Swansea began in February 2010, when the workers were suspended by J2M - a consortium of Morrison Utility Services, Jacobs Engineering and Mitsubishi Electric. The workers had earlier raised concerns that raw sewage was being pumped into nearby woodland and was leaching into water courses. They also drew attention to the very poor lighting provided for early morning and late evening work and a failure to prepare the legally required risk assessments and method statements. The disciplinary action against the workers were subsequently dropped as the company found there was "no case to answer". However, two of the nine affected workers were fired on 27 August as the client, South West Alliance, which is owned by the National Grid, would not allow the workers back on site. UCATT has now submitted claims for unfair dismissal after raising serious safety concerns against both J2M and South West Alliance. The union is seeking 'interim relief' from the Employment Tribunal, which would mean the workers would continue to be paid until a full hearing takes place. UCATT has also lodged separate claims for unfair dismissal under the Public Information Disclosure Act for other workers, who have already been dismissed. Nick Blundell, UCATT's regional secretary for UCATT Wales and South West, said: "This case stinks. Companies who flout safety laws and then sack workers who raise legitimate concerns cannot be allowed to get away with such practices."

- [UCATT news release](#).

Tube safety strike 'solid'

A Tube safety and staffing strike this week was 'rock solid', the unions involved have said. The 6 September 24-hour action by TSSA and RMT members was in protest at plans by London Underground Ltd (LU) to axe 800 station and other staff and close ticket offices ([Risks 471](#)). RMT said the action has ratcheted up the pressure on London mayor Boris Johnson and his transport officials to drop their plans and start talking seriously about a safe and secure future for the Tube network. The next phase of action, an indefinite overtime ban for both unions, is already underway. RMT

general secretary Bob Crow said: "RMT and TSSA members have shown through their solid support for this week's strike action, and the indefinite overtime ban, that they will not sit idly by while staffing levels are hacked to the bone and management turn the Tube system into a death trap through their dash for cuts." He added: "The LU claim that they are not planning to run unstaffed stations have been exposed as bogus. We already have examples of stations being run unstaffed on a regular basis in contravention of all safety practice and that scandal will escalate as management try and smuggle their cuts in via the back door though the non-filling of vacancies. Staffing levels are already at critical point and the talks must be reconvened on the basis that the back door introduction of cuts without negotiation and without agreement is brought to a halt. This on-going dispute is about the long-term future of a safe and secure tube system – these finance-driven, piecemeal cuts are a disaster waiting to happen."

- [RMT news release](#) and [follow up release](#). [The Independent](#). [Morning Star](#).

Sticky plastic led to arm injury

A Unite member has received a £90,000 payout after he broke his forearm in two places and fractured his elbow when he was caught in a printing press. Andrew Watts, 45, who had more than 20 years' experience working for packaging company Amcor Flexibles when the incident occurred, was setting up a printing press to apply different colours to plastic packaging. Because a camera on the press was faulty, he had to put his hand behind the plastic to check the colours against his skin. "As I put my left hand behind the plastic, the sticky material caught my arm and it was dragged down in and around the roll up to shoulder level," he said. The print worker was taken by ambulance to hospital where he underwent an emergency operation on his elbow. Seven days later he had to undergo another operation when two plates were inserted into his arm. Two years later, he cannot fully straighten his left arm and his elbow is still painful at times. He has limited movement in his index finger and thumb, and has been left with two scars on his arm. Amie Jeffcott from Thompsons Solicitors, the law firm brought in by Unite to act for Mr Watts, said: "Due to the accident, Mr Watts has been left with a long-term disability which will significantly affect his earning capacity in the future. We are pleased that, following negotiations, we were successful with our arguments in this respect and secured this significant settlement."

- [Thompsons Solicitors news release](#).

Union says safety first for Scottish ferries

Safety must come first in any changes made to Scotland's ferry services, a union has told the Scottish government. In its detailed response to a public consultation on the review of Scottish ferries, Nautilus noted that safety is by far the most important issue for users of the services. "Scotland's publicly-funded ferry services deliver a safety record that is second to none throughout Europe and the rest of the world," the submission states. "We believe any changes must not only respect and maintain this, but where

possible enhance the record." Nautilus warns that a common theme in recent accident investigations has been staff fatigue, and says it is essential that the review does not result in cutbacks to crewing levels on Scottish ferries. Urgent investment in new ships is also vital, Nautilus adds, so that safety is not compromised by an increasingly ageing fleet that requires additional maintenance. "Our extensive experience shows that 'flexibility' within the passenger and freight sectors always leads to cutbacks on training and on manning levels," the union warns.

- [Nautilus news release](#).

Repetitive job led to strain injury

A factory worker who developed a repetitive strain injury has been awarded £3,000 compensation for his injuries in a union-backed claim. Unite member Geoffrey Coleman, 41, an employee at an unidentified factory in Kendal, Cumbria, sustained his injuries while packing a new product in the finishing department. His duties involved packing large sheets of paper into a plastic bag with another member of staff. Once packed, the bags weighed around 50 kilograms. The highly repetitive work led to the strain injury. "There was this sharp shooting pain from my elbow down through my forearms and into my fingers," said Mr Coleman, who still works at the factory. "I couldn't grasp anything for a long period of time, and because of the pain I had to take time off work." Unite regional secretary Paul Finegan said: "To the company's credit they did all the right things once Geoffrey had been injured. Following the incident they did a root cause investigation, brought a specialist in and highlighted the problems that caused the injury and put a safer system of work in to prevent it happening again." Fiona Belgian from Thompsons Solicitors, the law firm acting for the union in the case, said the firm had failed to look into the safest way to do a new job. "Mr Coleman's employer had a responsibility to risk assess the job and ensure that employees doing repetitive work are rotated between tasks to avoid injury. Because the company failed to do this it is liable for Mr Coleman's injury."

- [Thompsons Solicitors](#).

Other news

Newsagent chain fined over robbery risks

A newsagent chain that failed to protect staff from a known risk of robbery has been fined. Cheshire West and Chester Council took action after the branch manager of a shop in the Martin McColl chain was seriously assaulted in an early morning robbery in November 2008. She was knocked unconscious and suffered a fractured eye socket. The company pleaded guilty last month to a criminal safety breach and was fined £5,000 with £5,505 costs at Northwich Magistrates' Court. The council's enforcement team found the company had failed to ensure that a risk assessment was in place to protect employees against violence and aggression, despite the foreseeable risk. The shop had a history of problems. A neighbouring local authority, Trafford Council, had issued five improvement notices to Martin McColl between 2008 and 2009

following several incidents where employees were assaulted at its stores in Manchester. In mitigation, the company told the court that it had no related convictions and had cooperated with the investigation. It said it now ensures that two workers are present when stores open and it has provided staff training on workplace violence.

- [Cheshire West and Chester Council news release](#). [USDAW news report](#).

BP spreads blame on oil spill

BP was not solely to blame for the Gulf of Mexico oil spill and the related deaths, injuries and environmental harm, the UK multinational's own investigation has concluded. Instead, "a sequence of failures involving a number of different parties", including cementing contractor Halliburton and rig owner Transocean, led to the explosion on 20 April that killed 11 workers and led to environmentally devastating oil pollution across the region. The company said it had accepted all the recommendations in the report, authored by its own global head of safety Mark Bly, and would implement them worldwide. In the 193-page report, BP said that decisions made by "multiple companies and work teams" contributed to the incident, which it said arose from "a complex and interlinked series of mechanical failures, human judgments, engineering design, operational implementation and team interfaces." It said that "over a 40-minute period, the Transocean rig crew failed to recognise and act on the influx of hydrocarbons into the well" which eventually caused the explosion. The report criticised the cementing of the well, undertaken by Halliburton, and repeated previous criticism of the blowout preventer. BP and Transocean staff incorrectly interpreted a safety test which should have flagged up risks of a blowout. "To put it simply, there was a bad cement job and a failure of the shoe track barrier at the bottom of the well, which let hydrocarbons from the reservoir into the production casing," said outgoing BP chief executive Tony Hayward. "The negative pressure test was accepted when it should not have been, there were failures in well control procedures and in the blow-out preventer; and the rig's fire and gas system did not prevent ignition," he said. An officially convened commission is expected to submit a report to President Barack Obama by mid-January next year. A Congressional joint investigation will submit a report later than month. The US Justice Department is also investigating the disaster, but its investigations will only conclude when lawyers and investigators have found evidence, or not, of criminal wrongdoing.

- [BP news release](#), [related video](#) and [internal investigation report](#). [BBC News Online](#). [More on BP's safety record](#).

Transocean accused on North Sea safety

Transocean, the American rig owner at the centre of BP's Gulf of Mexico oil spill, has been accused of compromising safety in the North Sea by "bullying, harassment and intimidation" of its staff. The allegations come in a damning report by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) seen by the Guardian newspaper. The offshore and transport union, RMT, argues that abusive behaviour and racism

towards an increasingly multinational workforce in the North Sea are widespread, and it wants a huge shake-up of the system in the light of a worsening safety record ([Risks 471](#)). HSE's 'specialist inspection report' resulted from a visit to four rigs operated by Transocean Offshore (North Sea) Ltd, in the summer and autumn of last year. The HSE report notes: "The company has not considered the human contribution to safety in a structured and systematic manner," and says the organisational culture is based on blame and intolerance. Most damagingly, the report says instances of unacceptable behaviour by offshore management were raised with HSE inspectors by Transocean staff on more than one rig visited. These included bullying, aggression, harassment, humiliation and intimidation, and were "causing some individuals to exhibit symptoms of work-related stress, with potential safety implications," HSE warned. Jake Molloy, regional organiser for the RMT's offshore branch, told the Guardian he feared that Transocean was far from unique, and said the increase in accidents recorded by HSE almost certainly underestimated the true position. "I know from the phone calls I get in this office that other really serious incidents are not being reported because of widespread bullying and intimidation. I cannot follow up these cases because it would expose the guys to losing their jobs," he said.

- [The Guardian](#).

Government told to think of the victims

The government should consider the victims of lax workplace safety standards when it fashions its policy on safety regulation, campaigners and bereaved families have warned. The groups, speaking ahead of Lord Young's report to the government on health and safety regulation, safety tragedies will only be prevented if strong regulation is backed up by strong enforcement. The conclusions of the Young report, expected to be published next week and commissioned by David Cameron, have been heavily trailed and are expected to include measures to reduce legal safety 'burdens' on business. Hazards Campaign chair, Hilda Palmer, commented: "No-one voted to die at work in the last election, but the coalition government policies so far, through the Lord Young review, other deregulatory policies, plus the planned cuts in public services, threaten the regulation and enforcement of workplace safety and health. They risk condemning more workers to death, injury and ill-health." Bereaved relatives campaign Families Against Corporate Killers (FACK) has sent a copy of its new DVD, 'Face the FACKs: the human cost of workplace killing', to Lord Young. FACK member Linzi Herbertson, whose husband Andy fell from an incorrectly assembled scaffold, said she hoped telephone assurances to FACK from Lord Young that his report would "pleasantly surprise us" would be realised. "If he fails to do this we will hold him to account and want to know why he can disregard the facts, the evidence and all the deaths caused by employers' negligence at work," she said.

- [Hazards Campaign news release](#). [FACK news release](#). 'Face the FACKs' DVD, £10 including p&p, order form [[pdf](#)]. [We didn't vote to die at work campaign](#) and [facebook group](#).

Scots safety unit gets speedy convictions

A specialist body set up in January 2009 to investigate workplace safety crimes in Scotland has led to more and speedier convictions. The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service's (COPFS) Health and Safety Division was created to examine cases reported to the procurator fiscal by the Health and Safety Executive ([Risks 377](#)). Statistics from the division's first year of operation show that more than 20 cases were resolved without the need for trials by securing early guilty pleas from the accused. Its 16 staff work closely with HSE, local authorities and other agencies who report health and safety cases to COPFS. Division health Elaine Taylor said: "Sadly, most of the cases with which our Division deal involve the loss of life or serious injury arising from incidents in workplaces in Scotland. The early resolution of these cases by way of plea has spared families and victims from what can be a very distressing and traumatic experience of reliving these events through lengthy court process. It has also freed up the courts' time and reduced costs involved in potentially lengthy trial proceedings." HSE's director for Scotland, Dr Paul Stollard, said: "We have valued being able to work with them to ensure that those responsible for death and injury in Scotland's workplaces have been held to account, and we look forward to further building on the relationship between HSE and the COPFS Health and Safety Division over the coming year." STUC assistant secretary Ian Tasker said the unit's creation had been welcomed by unions because "it is vitally important that health and safety cases are prosecuted effectively and quickly." He added: "One of the positive messages we are picking up from bereaved families is the improved communication between families and prosecutors - one of the main complaints families raised with us before the division was formed." He said, however, "we have to remember that over 20 families lost a loved one in the last year in Scotland and, sadly another 20 families began the process of grieving and seeking answers."

- [COPFS news release](#).

Boarding school fined after demolition death

A Shropshire boarding school has been fined £25,000 after a demolition worker was killed when a 2.4 tonne roof fell on top of him. Four of the victim's colleagues cheated death after a dumper truck on the site created an escape route for them when the roof caved-in. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) prosecuted Moor Park Charitable Trust Ltd which runs Moor Park School, after it arranged for a team of inexperienced building workers to demolish a large wooden classroom on 14 August 2007. The HSE investigation revealed the workers had no effective plan in place and removed integral supports within the classroom's structure, causing the roof to collapse while five men were inside. Mark Evans, aged 40, of Ludlow suffocated when the roof fell on top of him. The four other men survived without serious injury thanks to the chance positioning of the dumper. Shrewsbury Crown Court heard that Moor Park School had arranged for Christopher Morris, a self-employed general building worker who was undertaking some minor roofing work on the site, to carry out the work. He asked four other self-employed building workers to assist in the demolition even though none of them had training or relevant experience. The school failed to make any reasonable enquiries into the competence

of the men to undertake the demolition work prior to the work beginning. HSE inspector Nic Rigby said: "There were five men inside this building when it collapsed. Mr Evans paid the ultimate price for the school's failings. But for sheer good fortune, all five of them could have been killed. But Mr Evans and the other workers should not have been put at such increased risk. Had Moor Park School taken reasonable steps to properly consider the demolition work, they would have appointed a competent and experienced contractor, and avoided the roof collapse." Moor Park School of Moor Park in Ludlow pleaded guilty to a criminal safety breach and was fined £25,000 and ordered to pay £15,000 in costs.

- [HSE news release. Construction Enquirer.](#)

Director fined after dodgy dock plunge

A Scottish shipbreaking and scrap metal company and its director have been fined after a night watchman was injured falling into water from a decrepit quay. RM Supplies (Inverkeithing) Ltd had pleaded guilty at an earlier hearing to two breaches of the Docks Regulations 1988 and was fined a total of £14,000. This week at Dunfermline Sheriff Court, 56-year-old RM Supplies director Thomas Muir, whose firm was responsible for the condition of the quay, pleaded guilty to the charge of failure to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessment, in breach of the Management Regulations 1999. He was fined £2,750. The operation in which the watchman was injured involved the berthing of a vessel at a quay that was in a severely dilapidated condition. This was done at night, even though the quay lacked any lighting. In the course of this operation, Charles Greenhill, 47, fell into the water between the quay and the berthing vessel. Due to a lack of adequate means of escape or rescue, Mr Greenhill had to be rescued by the vessel's lifeboat. HSE inspector Michael Orr said: "This was a significant breach of health and safety law which could have resulted in death had it not been for the intervention of the ship's crew. The conditions on site were unacceptable. There was no suitable or sufficient risk assessment, or attempt at planning which could have identified the state of the quay as unacceptable for use for any dock operations. This case should serve as a warning to all employers to ensure that routine and infrequent activities are effectively planned."

- [HSE news release.](#)

Bakeware firm fined after worker burned

An industrial bakeware company has been fined £10,000 after a worker received 60 per cent burns following an explosion at a Nottingham factory. The 33-year-old welder from Ilkeston, who has asked not to be named, was working for Fluorocarbon Bakeware Systems Ltd on 16 December 2008 at its unit in Beeston. Nottingham Magistrates Court heard that the worker was cutting metal, when a spark ignited vapours from a nearby can of thinner. The can exploded, showering him with hot liquid. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which brought the prosecution against Fluorocarbon Bakeware Systems, found that although flammable

liquids were stored correctly in other parts of the site, there was no provision for the storage of the thinners in this area. No risk assessment had been carried out. HSE inspector Sian Tiernan said: "This incident was entirely preventable had simple precautions been taken. This must have been a terrifying incident for the worker, and it was only by chance that his colleague had left the work area a few moments earlier otherwise he too could have been injured." She added: "HSE's investigation showed that there was little in the way of direct supervision of the work and no risk assessment was undertaken for the activities carried out in the workshop. Thinner is highly flammable and a risk assessment should have shown how it should have been stored safely. No appropriate store was provided for the thinners and the designated storage area was too close to the work area, with terrible results." Fluorocarbon Bakeware Systems Ltd pleaded guilty to breaches of the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002 and was fined £10,000 plus £5,227 costs at Nottingham Magistrates' Court.

- [HSE news release.](#)

Builder fined after hand is disfigured

A London building firm whose employee had his hand mangled has been fined £1,000. Rondeo Schoeman, 32, was machining a wooden handrail using a spindle moulder. As he was working a corner piece, the spindle moulder's blades caught part of the piece and Mr Schoeman's hand was pulled towards the cutter tools. Maplestead Limited was prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for a criminal breach of safety regulations. It was fined £1,000 and ordered to pay costs of 2,000. Mr Schoeman suffered severe damage to his left hand and spent a month in hospital. He has undergone three operations to transfer bones in each foot to replace bones in his hand, and to graft skin from other parts of his body. HSE's investigation found poor planning did not highlight specific hazards for making curved pieces on the spindle moulder. Maplestead Limited failed to provide suitable machine guarding for the work, and had no 'limited cutter projection tooling', a device fitted to machines to reduce the severity of injuries should a machine operator's fingers touch rotating parts. There was also a lack of adequate supervision and training, which could have prevented the injury. HSE inspector Jack Wilby said: "It is the responsibility of all companies to make sure that this work is properly planned and that adequate supervision and training is provided. Limited cutter projection tooling is a recognised standard of guarding for spindle moulders that has been compulsory since December 2003." He added: "Had any of these reasonably practicable precautions been taken, then it is unlikely that Rondeo Schoeman would have suffered these horrendous injuries."

- [HSE news release.](#)

Sickness benefit health tests 'unjust'

A coalition of charities has warned that a controversial health test being pushed by ministers to decide who will get long-term sickness benefits is not working. There is mounting evidence, say the

charities, that people with serious illnesses are being judged fit for work when they are not. A total of 36 organisations including the Papworth Trust, Remploy, mental health charity Mind and the MS Society have written to the head of the government review of the test saying they are being "overwhelmed by evidence showing the assessments are inaccurate and unjust". The charities point out that of the 166,000 people so far found fit for work, a third went on to appeal. They say people who are not in visible distress are often wrongly being found fit for work. There are complaints that the assessors are not trained to deal with learning disabilities, mental health issues and long-term health problems. In one case highlighted by the Papworth Trust, a 52-year-old woman attempted suicide after she was told that because she could "walk, talk and dress nicely" she would not qualify for state assistance. Previously employed in a high pressure job in social care, she had snapped under pressure a few months earlier. "My doctor and psychiatrist both wrote saying I was unfit to work but the young woman in the assessment said that you can speak, hear, see and are not incontinent so you can work. She was very sorry. But it was crushing. I had lost my job, my house, my car," said the woman. Soon after being turned down for benefits, which amounted to £65 a week, she was rushed to hospital with a drugs overdose. "It was the final straw for me," she said. "I thought, what else can I do?"

- [Papworth Trust news release](#). [The Guardian](#).

Teachers exhausted by unreachable targets

Unrealistic goals and the high expectations of others are making teachers stressed and exhausted, researchers have warned. A study by Kent University revealed that teachers who were asked to do more than they were capable of delivering had higher stress levels and were more at risk of stress-related illnesses and burnout. The report, conducted in association with the Teacher Support Network, concluded that to reduce stress teachers should be allowed to set their own standards rather than having them imposed by managers. "Most teachers only suffered from burnout if they were highly stressed," said study co-author Julian Childs. "Yet teachers who thought other people wanted them to be perfect had high burnout and low well-being whether they were highly stressed or not." The study of 197 teachers, completed twice over three months, found teachers who felt that other people demanded more than they were capable of giving had higher levels of stress, stress-related ill-health and burnout, as well as lower levels of well-being. "Teachers need to discuss clear and achievable work goals with their managers," said Julian Childs. "Managers then need to make sure teachers have the resources to achieve these goals and are able to talk about conflicting duties and how these can be prioritised."

- [Teacher Support Network news release](#). [Morning Star](#).

International News

Global: Asbestos use must stop, confirms ILO

Asbestos industry lobbyists pushing the deadly fibre on the developing world must not claim to have the support of the

International Labour Organisation, the United Nations body has indicated. The Chrysotile Institute, which takes the lead in the global promotion of asbestos exports, routinely cites ILO documents and claims they are supportive of its asbestos use position. The issue has caused renewed controversy in recent months, as the institute has been trying to secure government and private funds to dramatically expand asbestos production in Quebec, Canada ([Risks 472](#)). The Chrysotile Institute's 'Safe use manual' claims it "builds on the principles of controlled-use embodied in ILO Convention 162, Safety in the Use of Asbestos." Concerned at the repeated use of ILO's name to support asbestos use, the Geneva-based body this month issued a position statement. As well as encouraging governments to sign up to ILO conventions, the statement highlights ILO's commitment to "promoting the elimination of the future use of all forms of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials." Fiona Murie, health and safety director of the global construction union federation BWI, said: "This confirms what the industry has known all along – ILO, alongside major respectable scientific and medical organisations the world over, opposes the ongoing use of a fibre that kills hundreds of thousands of workers every year. The asbestos industry, aided and abetted by the governments of Canada and Quebec, must now cease and desist its callous and cynical subterfuge on asbestos and should accept no-one including the ILO wants its deadly product."

- [The ILO position on safety in the use of asbestos, ILO, September 2010 \[pdf\]](#).

USA: Injury reports crackdown snags firm

A promised official crackdown on US firms that fail to report workplace injuries had led to a large fine for a company the US government's safety watchdog says provided 'grossly incorrect' figures for two years. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) initiated its 'National Emphasis Program on Recordkeeping' last year after studies showed a wide gap between the number of injuries reported by employers versus the totals drawn from other sources, such as hospital and workers' compensation records. OSHA last week bared its enforcement teeth on the issue, and proposed fines of more than \$1.2 million against a Houston-based company it says did not properly report 72 per cent of its employee injuries and illnesses over a period in excess of two years. Goodman Manufacturing Co, which says it will contest the fines, came under investigation after the agency received a complaint about concealed workplace incidents at an air conditioning equipment plant in Houston. OSHA said it found that Goodman provided "grossly incorrect" information about the severity of workplace injuries from January 2008 until March 2010, and cited the company for 83 "wilful violations." According to the Houston Chronicle, the injuries included back, shoulder, neck and wrist strains, as well as respiratory illness, an eye injury and an instance in which an employee's stomach was burned with freon. US Labor secretary Hilda L Solis said: "Accurate workplace injury and illness records are vital tools for identifying hazards and protecting workers' health and safety. Workers and employers need this information to recognise patterns of injuries and illnesses, and prevent future hazards."

- [OSHA news release](#). [Houston Chronicle](#). [FairWarning](#).

USA: Explosion hits strikebreaking uranium plant

A US uranium processing plant that shipped in replacement workers after locking out its union workforce has suffered an explosion. Workers at the uranium enrichment facility in Metropolis, Illinois have been locked out for two months after contract negotiations broke down over owner Honeywell's demand that workers give up their retiree health care coverage and pension plans. The union workers say cancer and other occupational diseases linked to the firm make the benefits doubly important ([Risks 469](#)). Concerns have been raised by local community members and union officials that replacement workers at the Honeywell facility cannot safely operate the plant since they have no site-specific experience in this unique type of conversion facility. Last week, nuclear regulators allowed Honeywell to start up core production at the facility, a procedure which had been shutdown for over two months due to concerns about the training of replacement workers. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission delayed reopening the plant for several days after questions were raised about the unusually high levels of uranium that were appearing in the urine tests of several nuclear workers. The following day, a hydrogen explosion rocked the plant. The blast shook the ground in front of the plant and could be heard a mile away, according to local reports. Union spokesperson John Paul Smith said those who worked at the plant for decades reported very minor explosions had occurred, but no explosion of such a magnitude that it could be heard outside of the plant. Honeywell's long history of safety violations, the poor training of replacement workers at the Metropolis facility, and now the hydrogen explosion, have led local workers and community members to call on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to shut down production until the contract dispute can be resolved. "This just simply isn't normal, what's happening at the plant," said union spokesperson John Paul Smith.

- [Huffington Post](#).

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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