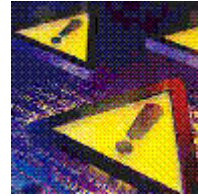


Risks

issue no 59 – 22 June 2002



Editor: [Rory O'Neill](#) of *Hazards* magazine. Comments to [Owen Tudor](#).

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Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 4,000 subscribers and 1,000 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 statement](#). The TUC website lists future health and safety events in [What's On](#) – [new events](#) are covered below.

UNION NEWS

Employers short-sighted on VDU vision risks

Over a third of screen-based workers are not being told of their right to a free eye test. Speaking at the parliamentary launch of a week of action run by The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association to draw attention to the effects of visual display units (VDUs) on people's eyesight, TUC general secretary John Monks said: "Personal computers and other visual display units are revolutionising not just the work we all do, but the risks we run. Those risks bring with them responsibilities. The main responsibility lies with employers who must assess the risks and then inform and train their workers. In particular they should be informing them about their rights to regular breaks and regular eye tests. Unfortunately, Guide Dogs have found out that far too few employers - less than two thirds - tell their workers about their right to a free eye test."

- [TUC news release](#). Also see: [Computer vision syndrome](#) – *Hazards* magazine factsheet
- **Guide Dogs' "one vision" [campaign pages](#), including a [screen saver](#) and a [vision test](#)**

Five million lose workplace health cover in a decade

Five million workers have had their workplace health services taken away in the last 10 years, latest research shows. Just 1 in 7 workers in the UK now have the benefit of comprehensive occupational health support, and only three per cent of companies get top marks for their provision. Responding to research published by the HSE and the Institute of Occupational Medicine, TUC general secretary John Monks said: "At a time when we need to get more sick and injured people back to work, it is a tragedy that employers are actually scrapping workplace health services rather than expanding them." He added: "We need a legal right to workplace health services like they have in Scandinavia, and the government is going to have to step in and put

some of the extra NHS money to work for people at work." Bill Callaghan, chair of the Health and Safety Commission said: "With only three per cent of UK companies using all of what we would consider to be the key elements of occupational health support, a lot more needs to be done to help prevent people becoming ill because of their work."

- [TUC news release](#) and [TUC briefing on the research](#)
- [HSE news release](#)
- [Survey of use of occupational health support](#), HSE Contract Research Report CRR 445/2002, ISBN 0-7176-2394-7, price £20.00 from [HSE Books](#)

End violence to traffic wardens says union

A new survey from public sector union UNISON reveals 90 per cent of wardens and parking attendants experienced some form of violence in the past year. Almost one in three said they had been physically assaulted, with 10 per cent attacked or threatened with an offensive weapon. Ben Priestley, UNISON national officer, said: "These workers get hassle from all sides - the public and their employers. We know that some local authorities, or more particularly the private companies working for them, are exploiting drivers and attendants alike in their ruthless pursuit of making money out of fines. This has a knock-on effect on the health and safety of attendants, putting them at even greater risk of violence in an already dangerous job, and this has got to stop." UNISON is concerned at the lack of adequate training to help staff defuse potentially violent situations and deal with aggressive people. Only 62 per cent had received any training.

- [UNISON news release](#)

TGWU safety warning on proposed EU ports law

Flaws in the draft EU Directive on Ports Services, including inadequate measures to address dockyard safety, are "still giving us cause for concern," Ron Webb, Transport and General Workers' Union national secretary has said. Commenting on progress reports from the current European Union transport ministers' meeting, he said: "the underlying concerns of the TGWU have not been addressed... cargo handling is still not covered and I remain to be convinced that the self-handling proposals will adequately address our fears for dockyard safety." The directive now faces a second reading in the European Parliament where MEPs can table further changes and amendments. The European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) has also said it "strongly opposes"

the current version of the directive.

- [TGWU news release](#). [European Transport Workers' Federation \(ETF\) news release](#)

TGWU urges government to stand firm on drivers' hours

The Transport and General Workers' Union has written to transport minister John Spellar to urge him not to support the Spanish government's eleventh hour legal action over implementation of the European Working Time Directive for transport workers. Spain is seeking to remove self-employed owner drivers from the scope of the Directive, which could lead to undercutting of employed drivers' safety standards. Danny Bryan, TGWU national secretary for transport, writes: "I am amazed that having gone through the process of making a decision, which was endorsed democratically within the transport ministers' structure, a member state, when they do not like the consequences of democracy, believes they have the right to overturn the decision using the courts. Discussion on the Working Time Directive is entering a very important stage here and we need to understand very clearly where you and your government colleagues stand on this matter."

- [TGWU news release](#)

Overworked chickens are coming home to roost, says ATL

The government will have to deal with the overwork crisis blighting the teaching profession if it is to overcome problems recruiting and retaining staff, a teaching union has warned. Commenting on the latest OFSTED report on teacher recruitment strategies, Peter Smith, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) said: "This report gives more evidence that the chickens are coming home to roost... Good teachers will continue to leave the profession until the fundamental problems of teachers' excessive workload are resolved."

- [ATL news release](#) and [OFSTED press release](#)

OTHER NEWS

Insurance pressures influence safety

New research published by the HSE shows that insurance premiums can be one means of pressing employers to make work safer – but these premiums are still far too low, the TUC has warned. TUC's Owen

Tudor said: "Employer liability insurance can be the spur to better health and safety management, although its primary purpose is to compensate the victim. This report shows that employers are only paying some of the cost of the consequences of their actions, while the taxpayer and the victim shoulder the majority of the costs. Our main demand is that the polluter should pay for all the costs of their actions, not least because that will encourage employers to address the causes of workplace injuries and illnesses. The research also makes clear how far Britain lags behind in joining up prevention, rehabilitation and compensation. The government needs to spend more on rehabilitation and less on trapping people on inadequate benefits."

- [HSE news release](#)
- [Changing business behaviour – would bearing the true cost of poor health and safety performance make a difference?](#), HSE Contract Research Report CRR436/2002, ISBN 0 7176 2362 9, price £20 from [HSE Books](#)

Footballer describes team-mate's death

A former youth player with Charlton Athletic football club has told a court how a team-mate drowned when an army sergeant led them through a freezing lake. Pierre Bolangi, 17, died as he tried to swim across the weed-infested pond. Physical training corps instructor Dean May denies the manslaughter of Mr Bolangi through gross negligence and a failure to take care of the health and safety of staff and trainees of the football club. Team-mate Chris Taylor told the court the youths were on a five-day residential course when the tragedy happened during an endurance run on Aldershot Common, Hampshire in August 2000.

- [BBC News Online](#)

Ryanair denies pilots "exhausted"

Ryanair has denied allegations that pilots are facing so much pressure they are disobeying instructions from air traffic controllers. Chief executive Michael O'Leary told the BBC his pilots were not overworked and said safety was their top priority. His comments followed accusations in the *Times* newspaper that a Ryanair pilot was sacked for allegedly refusing to take off when exhausted. Earlier, a whistleblower's safety report published on the internet had claimed pilots were cutting corners in order to save time and avoid delaying

flights. Mr O'Leary, speaking on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme, said: "For every pilot flying commercial aircraft in Europe today, the only pressure they are under is to prioritise safety." Carolyn Evans, technical secretary of the pilots' union BALPA, said where the union had formal arrangements in place with "no frills" carriers, there was no problem. She added that Ryanair, an Irish regulated airline, had no formal arrangements with the union.

- [BBC News Online](#) and [BALPA news release](#)

UK flight controllers warn of "overload"

Air traffic controllers at Britain's flight nerve centre at Swanwick are reporting an increasing number of "overloads." Staff are making more than twice as many official complaints about their workload than this time last year, it has emerged. A controller reports an overload when he or she feels they are having to deal with too many planes in too short a space of time. The National Air Traffic Services said there have been 30 formal overload reports so far this year, compared to 12 in the first five months of last year. But it denied safety was being eroded, saying there had been fewer actual incidents of near misses since Swanwick opened in January.

- [Ananova](#) and [BBC News Online](#)

Sharp increase in NHS violence

The number of violent or abusive incidents against NHS staff has jumped by almost a third. Figures from the Department of Health show there were 84,273 attacks against doctors, nurses and other staff in England between April 2000 and March 2001. This compares to 65,000 reported incidents during the previous 12 months. Ministers have pledged to reduce incidents of violence against NHS staff by 20 per cent by 2002. Those figures will be published next year. The government launched a zero tolerance campaign to combat violence against NHS staff in October 1999.

- [BBC News Online](#)

Second-hand smoke "causes cancer"

Exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke increases the risk of developing a wide range of cancers, international experts have said. A working group from the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has concluded that second-hand smoke increases the risk of

cancers of the uterus, cervix, liver and kidneys. They suggested non-smokers who are exposed to second-hand smoke are between 20 per cent and 30 per cent more likely to develop cancer. Marsha Williams, of the anti-tobacco campaigning group ASH, said urgent action was needed to prevent passive smoking: "People are harmed and killed by it and it is time industry, government and smokers themselves woke up to this fact."

- [IARC news release](#) and [BBC News Online](#). Also see [news from the USA](#)

Union asbestos court victory - that legal ruling in full

The full court ruling on last month's historic trade union court victory on behalf of asbestos disease victims ([Risks 54](#)) has been published. Law Lords, sitting in the highest court in the land, overturned earlier rulings that could have robbed tens of thousands of asbestos compensation. In his judgment, Lord Bingham of Cornhill said: "I am of the opinion that such injustice as may be involved in imposing liability on a duty-breaking employer in these circumstances is heavily outweighed by the injustice of denying redress to a victim. Were the law otherwise, an employer exposing his employee to asbestos dust could obtain complete immunity against mesothelioma... claims, by employing only those who had previously been exposed to excessive quantities of asbestos dust. Such a result would reflect no credit on the law."

- [BBC News Online story](#) and [background](#) and [APIL news release](#)
- [Full Law Lords judgment](#)

Asbestos claims to cost firms £3.5bn

Asbestos related compensation claims look set to cost UK firms around £3.5 billion during the next 40 years, latest estimates suggest. Research by Credit Suisse First Boston says UK insurers face a "prolonged increase" in the number of claims from victims. It estimates that UK insurers will have to pay out around a third of the £3.5 billion total, with the rest being met by the companies claimants worked for. But it adds that insurers have sufficient reserves to handle any increase in claims.

- [Ananova](#)

National Simon Jones Campaign film tour

Groups across the country have got together to organise a unique film tour highlighting the dangers of increasing casualisation in the workplace. The film *Not this time – the story of the Simon Jones Memorial Campaign* chronicles the death of Simon Jones on his first day as a casual worker - and the fightback. The 20-date film tour has its first British date at the Glastonbury festival on 29 June on the same bill as Billy Bragg and Mark Thomas. Sixth form students in Stokesley, North Yorkshire, contacted the campaign to see if they could organise a showing. Jessica Braithwaite, one of the students, said: "I heard about the campaign from the Mark Thomas TV show, went to the website to find out more then emailed the campaign. I think it's really important that people are aware of what happened to Simon because it could happen to anyone. Me and my friends are just leaving school and we think it's worrying that you can end up doing a really dangerous job so easily."

- **Tour [dates](#)**
- **[Details](#) of how to get the video**
- **Simon Jones campaign [website](#)**

INTERNATIONAL

Australia: Minister picks up manslaughter baton

New South Wales Industrial Relations Minister John Della Bosca wants to put teeth into the way his state deals with culpable employers. "I am concerned to ensure we have the best system to deal with criminal culpability in industrial manslaughter," Della Bosca has said. He has suggested working with the union group the Labor Council on terms of reference that will bring workable recommendations from the Workplace Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety Council. His interest was sparked when unions expressed disquiet over the lack of action on criminal sanctions available in the state's Occupational Health and Safety Act. That statute provides for imprisonment and first offence fines of up to Aus\$550,000 (£210,000) for employers judged criminally liable for the deaths of employees but the provisions are rarely, if ever, used. Labor Council secretary John Robertson hailed the initiative as a step in the right direction.

- **[Workers Online](#)**

Europe: Work stresses and accidents under scrutiny

New reports from the Bilbao-based European Agency for Safety and

Health at Work have examined the stress and work-related accident incidence in Europe's workplaces. The European Agency says its statistics show stress is "one of the major challenges currently facing us all – as employers, employees, prevention professionals, policy-makers, researchers and so on, in all sectors and in organisations both large and small." On accidents, it says: "Each year about 5 500 EU employees are killed at work, and many more are injured – figures that remain unacceptably high. Most of these accidents could be prevented and action to tackle this problem is essential if we are to reduce the human and financial toll."

- **European Agency on [stress](#) and [accidents](#)**

South Africa: Facing the legacy of putting profit above safety

South Africa must face up to the human cost of putting profits before safety, an editorial in *Business Report* has said. It says: "In many cases, in the mad rush for profit, not much care was given to whether they were or not; the lives of workers tended to be expendable. Today, particularly in the more than century-old gold mining industry, we have to live with that legacy. It is one of the reasons that gold mines continue to record a high rate of avoidable occupational accidents and deaths." Reports have put the gold mine fatality rate at one death per ton of gold mined.

- **[Business Report](#)**

USA: Sleep-deprived women face greater heart risk

Women who regularly don't get enough sleep are more likely to suffer from heart disease, a study has found. Dr Najib Ayas of Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts studied 71,617 women enrolled in the Nurses' Health Study who were aged 45 to 65 and had no reported heart disease. He told the Associated Professional Sleep Societies' annual meeting he and his colleagues had information on study participants' lifestyles, including factors that can boost heart disease risk such as "diabetes, snoring, hypertension, depression, shift work, alcohol use and smoking and use of aspirin."

- **[Reuters Health](#)**

USA: Workplace smoking bans work

Blue-collar or service workers in the US seem to remain at greater risk of passive smoking than their white-collar peers, a new study has

shown. On the up side, researchers also found that workplace exposure to secondhand smoke has been greatly reduced due to bans and restrictions on smoking. A team led by Dr Pascale M Wortley of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention used data from a 1988 to 1994 national health and nutrition survey to investigate exposure to secondhand smoke in the workplace. Their study included 4,952 workers aged 17 and older who were non-smokers and reported no exposure to cigarette smoke at home. Overall, the workers' average levels of cotinine – a nicotine metabolite - were lower in 1991-1994 than in 1988-1991, and the percentage of individuals who said they smelled smoke at work decreased from 39 per cent in 1988-1991 to roughly 25 per cent in 1991-1994, study findings indicate. Waiters showed the evidence of the highest exposures to passive smoking at work.

- [Reuters Health](#)
- **Pascale M Wortley and others. Exposure to secondhand smoke in the workplace: Serum cotinine by occupation, Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine vol, 44, pages 503-509, 2002. [Abstract](#) of the research paper**

RESOURCES

HSE asbestos campaign website

The Health and Safety Executive's asbestos campaign website has been updated. You'll find details of the campaign, events and new asbestos laws and developments, including the duty to manage.

- [HSE asbestos campaign website](#)

New government websites

The government has pulled together its transport and work safety web pages on the Department for Transport website.

- [General page with health and safety, rail safety and other safety-related sites.](#) [Work safety pages](#)

Feeling the heat? – GMB gives seasonal advice

Working in a hot environment can be extremely uncomfortable and even hazardous. The latest GMB guide for safety reps gives information on the health and safety issues for summer working, the legal position and suggests some solutions to reduce the temperature

and risks from sunshine.

- [GMB guide](#)

Annual reports omit safety

The Health and Safety Commission has made available on the web the research that discovered four out of ten FTSE 100 companies are still failing to report on their health and safety performance, a year after the HSC asked them to come clean and publish their health and safety plans and record ([Risks 54](#)). This research looked at the quality and quantity of health and safety information found in the annual reports of the top UK companies. HSC says: "At present, publicly listed companies are not legally required to include health and safety matters in their annual reports. The current Health and Safety Commission (HSC) Strategy Statement, however, contains an action point which focuses on public reporting of health and safety issues by larger companies."

- ***A study of the provision of health and safety information in the annual reports of the top UK companies***, HSE Contract Research Report 446/2002, from [HSE Books](#) or free on the HSE website [[pdf format](#)]

EVENTS

Only newly announced events, events next week and very important events will be listed here in future. But there is a comprehensive listing of [health and safety events](#) on the TUC website – bookmark it for easy reference!

National Simon Jones Campaign film tour, 29 June to 11 August

- [See the story in the main text](#)

TUC/CCA Conference on safety law enforcement, 8 July

In January 2002, a coalition of trade unions, safety groups and families, bereaved from work-related deaths and disasters, came together around a series of demands for reform on safety, law enforcement and corporate accountability. This conference will explore this and the Government's agenda for reform. Registration costs £25.

- [TUC/CCA conference details](#)

Hazards 2002, National Hazards Conference, 6-8 September

The National Hazards Conference will be held in Manchester for the second year running. Further details from [Greater Manchester Hazards Centre](#). There is a [financial appeal](#) to keep registration costs down, backed by the TUC.

European Week of Health and Safety 2002, 14-21 October

This year's week will take place in Britain from 14 October, on the theme of stress – there is a special [page](#) on the TUC website devoted to the week. Unions and union branches planning Euroweek activities should contact the TUC's stress week co-ordination team at [Worksafe](#), tel. 01535 664462, with details of what they are doing and what support they would like. More background: [European Agency](#) and [HSE](#) Euroweek webpages.

USEFUL LINKS

Visit the TUC 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](#).

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR APRIL TO JULY:

[Wales](#), [Scotland](#), [North West](#), [Midlands](#), [South East and East Anglia](#), [South West](#)

COURSES FOR SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER

[Midlands](#), [Scotland](#)

For details of courses in the Northern, Yorkshire and Humberside regions, contact the [TUC Regional Education Officer](#)

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.

