

# Risks

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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 4,500 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.

## FEATURE: You can't do safety without unions

Reports continue to flood out showing that it is unions that make the difference to workplace health and safety. This week, we report on three new studies which all demonstrate the union effect. And for more examples, see the *Hazards* magazine [union effect webpage](#).

### **Safety reps are the only hope for construction safety**

The presence of safety reps is the best - the *only* - guarantee of good health and safety on construction sites, according to a new report. Research conducted for the safety authorities in Northern Ireland and Ireland looked at construction sites with good and bad safety records, and assessed the impact on that record of a range of factors. George Brumwell, TUC spokesperson on health and safety, and general secretary of building workers union UCATT, said: "The number of construction workers being killed on building sites is still far too high - the equivalent of a Potters Bar rail crash every single month. This report highlights what we have always believed - that only safety reps can make any real difference. The slaughter has to stop. Safety reps should now be made compulsory on all large sites in the UK, as they are going to be in Ireland." Summarising the research findings in *Hazards*, the TUC-backed health and safety magazine, TUC safety specialist Owen Tudor said: "the evidence is clear and unequivocal - wherever you look, safety reps have a positive impact on health and safety. Evidence-based policy making demands more support for safety reps."

- [TUC news release. Safety is better organised: More evidence of the trade union safety effect](#), [pdf format] *Hazards* magazine, no.79, 2002.
- [Safety behaviour in the construction sector](#) [pdf format], Nick McDonald, Dept of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin and Victor Hrymak, School of Food Science and Environmental Health, DIT

### **Unions produce better health studies**

Occupational health researchers say active union participation was key to the success of a study of skin problems in print workers. Writing in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* the researchers, who worked closely with print union GPMU, say an exceptionally high

response rate “was largely a result of the positive contribution and active participation of GPMU Central Branch staff and the high degree of trust held among its members. This was also evident in the successful liaising with union representatives during the personal delivery of questionnaires to individual companies and the high uptake of clinical appointments by both cases and controls.” GPMU national health and safety officer Bud Hudspith told *Risks*: “This work proves the value of trade unions to health and safety research, without the GPMU and its members this work could not have been done. There is no way that the researchers could have gathered the experiences of ordinary printers without the support of the GPMU and its branch structure.” He added: “Work is now continuing on identifying the best way to introduce effective skin protection programmes, which tackle the root of the problem as well as providing effective skin care.” The study found that one-in-four printers was suffering from dermatitis and that many cases were caused not by chemicals but by friction and irritation due to repeated washing.

- **Livesley EJ, Rushton L, English JS and Williams HC, [The prevalence of occupational dermatitis in the UK printing industry](#) [abstract], *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 59, pages 487-492, 2002**
- **More on [union safety research](#)**

### **Good management needs worker participation**

Worker involvement is crucial to good health and safety management, a new report has found. *The use of occupational safety and health management systems in the Member States of the European Union*, the report of a study from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, concludes: “Management must be fully committed to the initiative and provide the necessary resources. At the same time, employees need to participate in the programme from the outset, either directly or via representative bodies, such as safety committees.” The Agency adds that other prerequisites for a safety management system should be: Setting measurable goals, following a baseline hazard assessment; focusing on staff safety when implementing the system; communicating progress and “room for improvement”; and working towards continual improvement.

- **[European Agency news release](#). *The use of occupational safety and health management systems in the Member States of the European Union*. Available in English only Cat No: TE-42-02-**

**480-EN-C Price: €7 (summary fact sheet 26  
available in all 11 Community languages Cat.No:  
TE-02-02-006-(XX)-D)**

## UNION NEWS

### **Most active ever Workers' Memorial Day says TUC**

Workers' Memorial Day this year was the most successful yet in the UK. The 28 April event saw activities nationwide, ranging from conferences, to publicity stunts to church services. A report prepared for TUC by Hilda Palmer of Greater Manchester Hazards Centre includes a lengthy listing of a small proportion of the events nationwide and adds: "All trade union journals carried articles on Workers' Memorial Day and put out information to their members. We do not have feedback from every event that occurred, it is more important that we make the tools - information, suggestions, contacts, inspiration - available for any safety rep, trades union council, regional TUC or trade union branch to carry out an activity in the workplace or the community." Information will remain on the TUC website with links to other resources and organisations. The report says: "Next year's Workers' Memorial Day is on 28 April 2003, nine months away, so start organising now."

- [Workers' Memorial Day, 28 April 2002: remember the dead: fight for the living. TUC report of activities in the UK. Also see details of Workers' Memorial Day activities worldwide at the Hazards WMD resource page](#)

### **TUC's simple message on work chemicals**

The TUC wants to see chemical risks properly managed in workplaces and a simplified exposure limits system, so that working people and members of the public are protected as far as practicable. In its response to a HSC discussion document on occupational exposure limits for workplace chemicals, TUC says there must be one easily understood type of exposure limit, rather than the current system of MELs and OESes. TUC says workplace union safety reps have identified the main problems with the existing systems of control as: inadequate use of the hierarchy of control, so that substitution and elimination of toxic substances is used as a last rather than first resort; inadequate information for end users (ie workers); a failure to measure levels or follow the rules on occupational exposures; a lack of understanding of the system; and a failure to enforce the laws on toxic substances

vigorously. TUC also wants safety reps to have a legal right to obtain safety datasheets from manufacturers and suppliers, and more resources for HSE to allow better enforcement.

- [\*\*One limit, many risks: controlling toxic chemicals - the TUC response to the HSC's discussion document on the Occupational Exposure Limits \(OEL\) framework \(DDE19\). Discussion document on Occupational Exposure Limits \(OEL\) framework, \(DDE19\), HSC\*\*](#)

### **Government figures show "Burn-out Britain" persists**

Burn-out Britain is alive, and probably quite unwell as a result. Responding to figures from the Office of National Statistics, TUC general secretary, John Monks, said: "This latest research confirms what the TUC has been arguing. We now live in 'Burn-Out Britain', where one in six people work more than 48 hours a week and one in 10 men work more than 55 hours a week." He added: "We are not mounting an argument for the work-shy but an argument for British business' productivity. Long hours are bad for workers and bad for business. This is case of shared responsibility: the government needs to ensure minimum standards and unions and employers need to work together to find flexible solutions to cutting long hours." Long hours have been linked to stress, heart disease and higher accident and sickness absence rates.

- [\*\*Labour market trends. August 2002, ONS \[pdf format\]. TUC news release, work-life balance web pages and working time publications. See the Hazards Get a Life! webpage for more on working hours and health and safety\*\*](#)

### **Train company conduct "compromises safety"**

Rail union RMT has said safety is again the victim in the long-running dispute with Arriva Trains Northern. The union says the company's "vindictive" policy has led to regular safety briefings being shelved. "Conductors on Arriva Trains Northern usually have a six-monthly safety briefing," said regional organiser Stan Herschel. "But the company's vindictive rest-day working and overtime ban has led to a severe shortage of conductors - and the vast majority are now well overdue a safety briefing. The company is so blinded by its determination to starve our members into submission that it is

prepared to compromise safety as well." He added: "The company has already stopped RMT members attending health and safety courses, now it is shelving safety briefings. Like the rest of their bullying and intimidation, this latest tactic will only harden the resolve of our members in their fight for a fair pay rise." Companies have a legal duty to give union safety representatives paid time off to attend union safety courses.

- [RMT news release](#)

## OTHER NEWS

### **Crash paramedic back behind the wheel**

An ambulance driver who lost an eye when a lump of concrete was thrown through his windscreen has driven again for the first time since the attack. Nick Horobin vowed to return to work after he received severe injuries last September. He suffered serious head injuries and lost an eye when his ambulance overturned after the crash at on the A52 in Derbyshire. Hugh Robertson, head of health and safety at health union UNISON, commented: "This is another in a long line of attacks on paramedics who are being assaulted as part of their job. UNISON is delighted that, in this case, the worker involved will return to work, however in many cases staff subjected to a vicious attack are unable to return to work and are lost to the service forever. In an already under-staffed service this is an even more tragic loss." He told *Risks*: "For several years, UNISON has been campaigning for a new offence of assaulting a public service worker in the course of their duty, similar to the offence of assaulting a police officer. That might help deter such mindless and vicious attacks."

- [BBC News Online](#)

### **School trip safety guidance updated**

Schools in England are finally getting new official guidance intended to improve the safety of educational visits. The three-part advice for education authorities, schools and activity group leaders follows a number of fatal accidents on school trips within the UK and abroad. Among other things it suggests every school should nominate a staff member, an educational visits co-ordinator or EVC, to co-ordinate visits. "This does not mean that the school should create and fund a new post. Rather, the formal recognition of the EVC function will help the school fulfil its health and safety obligations for visits," the guidelines say. "The EVC should be competent in those tasks and have

the authority to carry them out." However, Chris Keates, deputy general secretary of teachers' union NASUWT, said the co-ordinator proposal was "ill conceived", adding: "NASUWT already strongly advises members to think very carefully before organising or becoming involved in school trips. We will undoubtedly extend that advice to the co-ordinator's role and caution them against accepting such an onerous responsibility."

- [BBC News Online](#)

### **HSE lectures workers on protective clothing to TUC dismay**

The TUC has called for a reality check after the HSE issued research which lectured workers on protective clothing use. Responding to HSE's comments on a study on the use of overalls when using pesticides, Tom Mellish, TUC health and safety expert said: "Blaming workers for not wearing protective clothing is futile and outdated. Employers frequently provide unwearable clothing because they don't bother to ask the wearers what they need and what will work. And even in Britain, soaring summer heat can make protective clothing more of a hazard than a protection. We need fewer and less pesticides, more consultation and better working conditions, not more clothes advice from the style squad!" HSE had said workers "should make sure they wear suitable protective overalls correctly when spraying biocides or pesticides" because pesticide contamination gets everywhere during spraying operations. However, earlier research has show even protective equipment worn "correctly" can be penetrated when pesticide spraying leading to dangerous contamination.

- [HSE news release](#). *Dermal exposure resulting from liquid contamination*, RR004, ISBN 0 7176 2530-3, price £25, from [HSE Books](#) or [free on the HSE website](#)

### **Britain objects to EU hydraulic press standard**

Britain's safety watchdog has warned that a European safety standard could undermine hydraulic press safety. The HSE says a formal complaint has been lodged with the European Commission against the European Standard (EN693) that deals with the safety requirements on hydraulic presses being sold in the UK and the rest of Europe. HSE believes the standard, which stipulates two-hand controls, will lower existing legal safety levels in the UK. Nick Hitchcott of HSE's engineering and utilities sector warned: "The HSE believes that if two-hand controls are allowed as the sole means of guarding, the number

of serious accidents seen will undoubtedly increase. HSE is prepared to take enforcement action against suppliers if hydraulic presses are not adequately guarded." The Engineering Employers' Federation, the Safety Assessment Federation, the Machine Tool Technologies Association and the Confederation of British Industry are backing the complaint.

- [HSE news release](#)

### **Manual handling in food and drink**

HSE national injury statistics appeared to indicate that some foods sector industries that handled heavy loads (eg. brewing/malting) had a higher manual handling injury rate than others (e.g. dairies and soft drinks). This report of research commissioned by HSE to verify this finding also looks at the link between loads lifted (eg. light and heavy sacks) and manual handling injury/absence from injury. HSE hopes the findings can be used to encourage food and drinks companies to reduce the heavier loads still common in the sector.

- ***Manual handling in food/drink industries. Injury rate v weight of unit loads lifted, RR 007, HSE***  
[\[download page\]](#) and [full report in pdf format](#)

## INTERNATIONAL

### **Australia: Unions sceptical about minister's hours call**

A key union says it will believe Employment Secretary Peter Boxall's call for a better work-life balance when it is written in his own department's work contracts. Dr Boxall told a conference that bosses should lead by example by being seen to work reasonable hours. He said it was obvious that if a workforce was happy and management understood life was a juggle, "then clearly you will have a more committed workforce, higher productivity and a hence a higher paid workplace." The assistant national secretary of the Community and Public Sector Union, Margaret Gillespie, said Dr Boxall's sentiments were "worthy" but needed to be put into practice in the public service. "When we see Dr Boxall's views and opinions reflected in the fine print of enforceable certified agreements, we'll know he's not just flying a kite."

- [The Canberra Times](#), [Sydney Morning Herald](#), [Courier Mail](#)

### **China: Capitalism and work hazards rise together**

Huge numbers of China's industrial workers are falling ill or suffering injuries on the job. Unrestrained by unions – independent unions are illegal in China - or a strong legal system, businesses seeking to maximise profit have allowed job hazards to proliferate. China has adopted work safety rules, but enforcement is lax because local officials often can be bribed, and they are worried about chasing away factories that pay taxes. By the government's own count, 25 million workers in China are in regular contact with hazards such as toxic chemicals and coal dust, and 13,000 new cases of job-related illnesses are reported every year. Tens of thousands of other workers are injured or killed in industrial accidents. In Guangdong province, a recent study conducted by a provincial task force found that 96 per cent of businesses contained dangerous levels of hazardous chemicals and dust in the air or were otherwise in violation of health standards, and concluded occupational disease was rampant. The Chinese government says the annual cost of work-related accidents and diseases exceeds \$1.2 billion.

- [The Washington Post](#)

### **Europe: Illegal workers do Europe's heavy lifting**

As many European countries put up new barriers against what is increasingly perceived as an invasion of immigrants, little thought is being given to how Europe's envied standard of living has come to depend on the manpower the illegal workers provide - or how it might fall if immigration were curtailed. As many as 3 million migrant workers across Europe work in restaurants, on farms and at construction sites, doing jobs that pay little but often require the kind of heavy lifting that many Europeans now shun. "There is a lot of hypocrisy," said Jean-Philippe Chauzy, a spokesperson for the Geneva-based International Organisation for Migration. "The jobs are there, and they basically act as a magnet." He noted that there was talk of keeping illegal workers out, but not of cracking down on people who employ illegal workers. To do that, he said, would not be "a vote-winner."

- [International Herald Tribune](#)

### **Global: Directors, shareholders should pay for work harm**

Company directors and their shareholders should be called to account where safety breaches cause harm to workers, a Canadian legal expert has said. Law professor Harry Glasbeek of York University told a

conference in Australia: "I would suggest we go as far as charging the shareholders of grossly negligent companies. Just as you would charge someone who benefited from the criminal behaviour of a thief by receiving stolen goods." He added: "The employer has limited risks, certainly no physical ones and the costs are usually passed onto workers and consumers. So the people who take the most amount of risk have the least to say. Unions need to campaign for joint health and safety committees with worker majority. There should be a universal compensation system and criminal penalties for grossly negligent employers."

- [VTHC OHS Rep](#)

### **Northern Ireland: Hospital staff to protest over threats**

Staff at the Mater Hospital in Belfast are to stage a protest following death threats to workers. The health union UNISON said its members would hold a stoppage at the hospital. It is thought staff at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast and the Ulster Hospital in Dundonald are also likely to protest against the threats. Telephone threats were made against six unnamed workers with links to the security forces at the Royal and Mater hospitals. They were followed by similar threats against Catholic workers at the Ulster Hospital. Patricia McKeown of UNISON said the threats were unacceptable. She added: "We are not just going to walk out the door and leave the public unattended to. We cannot do that and the people who made this threat know that. They have made it in a very despicable way."

- [BBC News Online](#)

### **South Africa: We go to work, not to die**

A workplace safety enforcement blitz in South Africa has found widespread safety breaches, some so serious the workplaces were immediately shutdown. The Department of Labour's deputy director general Van Mkosana warned in a statement: "The Department of Labour will not hesitate to close any business where workers lives are systematically and unnecessarily put at risk, such as in these instances." He added: "The Department is also concerned that companies that incur additional costs by providing a safe working environment for staff are facing unfair competition from these unscrupulous operators." In one day the department raided 12 Johannesburg companies, closing down two for serious breaches of safety laws. During raids on the other 10 businesses, 37 safety contraventions were identified and 15 prohibition notices issued,

stopping operations. Mkosana said: "I want to emphasise what the Minister has said on a number of occasions, that the Department of Labour believes workers go to work to work and not to die."

- [Business Day](#) and [News 24.com](#)

### **USA: Bush praises coal miners; union slams enforcement cuts**

Even as President Bush met with nine Pennsylvania coal miners whose stunning rescue July 28 from a flooded mine captivated the US, union officials and Democrats criticised Bush for undercutting mine safety initiatives with his budget axe. Bush, in the region to fundraise for a Republican candidate for governor, told the miners that the teamwork they displayed in the flooded shaft during their three-day ordeal — and the undaunted efforts of rescuers above — “serve as an example for others in a time of crisis.” However, the President’s concern does not extend to supporting mine safety enforcement. In his first budget proposal, Bush sought to cut staffing at MSHA, the mine safety agency, only to have the action reversed by Democrats in Congress. Bush’s budget proposal for next year would cut the agency’s budget by 6 per cent, and union leaders and Democrats are again crying foul. “We call on the Bush administration to fully fund the Mine Safety and Health Administration to ensure that coal mines are inspected more thoroughly and that the mine act is enforced more stringently,” said Cecil Roberts, president of the miners’ union, United Mine Workers Association.

- [Seattle Times](#)

## RESOURCES

### **It’s the *Hazards*, stupid**

If you want union-friendly, top class health and safety news, views and guidance, get hold of the brand new issue of *Hazards* magazine, the TUC-backed health and safety quarterly. The “It’s the hazards, stupid” cover feature in the new issue challenges “blame the worker” behavioural safety schemes. Other features highlight the TUC’s rehabilitation campaign, a union guide to protection from victimisation and latest news on the union safety effect. All this plus photofiles, international news and resources.

- [Hazards magazine](#). Also see new *Hazards* webpages on [rehabilitation](#), [behaviour safety scams](#), [victimisation](#), [union campaigns](#) and the [union](#)

[safety effect](#) on the international award-winning *Hazards* website. [Subscribe to Hazards](#)

### **Legionnaires' disease**

Public sector union UNISON's legionnaires' disease factsheet is available free on the web. The union says there has been an upsurge in interest on the topic from reps since the Barrow outbreak, which has so far led to 106 confirmed cases and two deaths.

- [UNISON information sheet on legionnaires' disease](#).  
**Also see: BBC News Online [medical notes](#)**

### **A better way to work**

*A better way to work*, the TUC schools resource pack, has been developed to take into account the introduction of "citizenship" studies into the school curriculum. It provides activities to help teachers to prepare students for work experience and other work-related activities. Many of the activities in this pack look at the role of employees within the context of being good citizens with a sense of social responsibility. It includes sections on: The role of trade unions; rights and responsibilities; health and safety; equal opportunities; and the future of work. A Citizens at Work 2002 event, hosted by the TUC, will take place on 15 October 2002.

- **More info on [the pack](#) and on [Citizens at work 2002](#), and [registration details](#). The pack is free for each secondary school or college, although a contribution of £7.00 is charged to cover postage and packing. From: EDS, Education House, Castle Road, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3RL**

### **Health and safety news for LAs**

The August issue of HSE's Local Authority Unit *Health and safety newsletter for local authorities* is now available on the web, covering issues in the local authority-enforced sector (essentially private sector services).

- **Webpage for *Health and safety newsletter for local authorities* [recent issues](#) and [August issue](#) [pdf format]**

EVENTS

Only newly announced events, events next week and very important events are listed here.

### **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/](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 SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER:**

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

**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](#).

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