

# Risks

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MAGAZINE



Editor: [Rory O'Neill](#) of [Hazards](#) magazine. Comments to [Owen Tudor](#).  
EUROPEAN WEEK OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK: 14-21 OCTOBER  
If you have information about what is happening locally or in your branch, send it to [tuc@worksafe.org.uk](mailto:tuc@worksafe.org.uk)

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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.

## ACTION

### **All stressed up? Somewhere to go....**

The TUC and the UK Work Stress Network will open this year's European Week of Health and Safety at Work on Monday, 14 October with a major national conference for union safety reps and officers. *Tackle the hassle: strategies for stopping stress and beating bullying* will emphasise that, although stress is a big problem, it can be dealt with. A mix of keynote speeches and panel sessions, and the option to put questions in writing and by email, will ensure that delegates get the chance to participate fully and come away with the confidence to tackle stress and especially bullying problems in their workplace. Speakers include: Prof Cary Cooper CBE; HSC Commissioner Abdul Chowdry; Louise O'Donnell (union member of the Irish Health and Safety Authority); Amicus Joint General Secretary Roger Lyons; EEF Chief Medical Officer Sayeed Khan; and union health and safety experts from education, manufacturing and public services.

- [Details and a booking form](#)

## FEATURE – tackling the hassle

### **UK workers want a rich life not riches**

Britain's stressed-out, overworked employees would rather work more sensible hours than win the lottery, according to a new survey into working patterns across the UK. The survey, carried out by the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) Work-Life Balance Campaign and *Management Today*, revealed that one in five workers want a better work life balance and that there has been a steep rise in the number of people who work excessive hours. The research found 1 in 6 (16 per cent) of the workers surveyed now work over 60 hours a week compared to just 1 in 8 (12 per cent) of all UK workers in 2000. One in 5 (19 per cent) men have visited the doctor because of stress, rising to one quarter (23 per cent) of over 40s. Trade and Industry secretary Patricia Hewitt said: "Stressed workers with frayed nerves cannot perform to their maximum and employers know the damage this can do to commercial success... That is why it is down to employers and employees to work together to find sensible work-life

balance solutions, which will result in better results, higher productivity and increased commitment." TUC general secretary, John Monks said the government was right to highlight long hours and a lack of work-life balance, but added "the power to address the problem lies with them. At the stroke of a pen, they could bring Britain in line with the rest of Europe and end the UK's individual opt out in the Working Time Directive and enforce a maximum average working week of 48 hours."

- [DTI news release](#) and [BBC News Online](#)
- **Resources:** [TUC Changing Times webpages](#) and [DTI Work-Life Balance Campaign](#)

### **EU newsletter on stress**

A special work stress issue of the magazine of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work is now available on the web.

- [Working on stress](#)
- **More on** [European Week](#)

## UNION NEWS

### **Wales TUC greets first blow against NHS violence**

Wales TUC has welcomed new measures to protect NHS staff in Wales from violence, but says more must be done. Welsh Assembly Government minister for health Jane Hutt announced this week that health authorities have been told by March 2003 they must be operating schemes to cope with disruptive members of the public. David Jenkins, Wales TUC general secretary, responded: "Violence against staff in Wales has been the unacceptable face of public service for a number of years, and the Wales TUC has lobbying both the Welsh Assembly Government and employers to draw up protection policies, especially in the NHS... No member of the healthcare team wants to see hospitals turned into fortresses because they recognise that families are often put into very stressful situations, but they do have a right to care for and save lives free from assault."

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

### **TUC dismay as Tories oppose asbestos duties**

The TUC has responded with dismay to claims by Conservatives that new asbestos laws are unnecessary because white asbestos is "low risk" and because unscrupulous contractors are overcharging for asbestos surveys and removal. The Tories have demanded a

parliamentary debate before the new asbestos management regulations, due to take effect in the autumn, are introduced. John Bercow MP, shadow minister for work and pensions, said the government's plan to introduce the regulations before parliament reconvened was "extraordinarily cavalier". In a letter to Andrew Smith, the government work and pensions secretary, Mr Bercow said: "Many experts argue that there is no evidence that white asbestos is ordinarily harmful, still less lethal." TUC's Owen Tudor responded: "The HSC has been consulting on these Regulations for four years. That consultation has shown that the only people opposed are the asbestos industries who reject all regulation as unnecessary, and the cost benefit assessment shows that the HSC's proposals will actually save Britain money. The evidence of the risks from white asbestos is so overwhelming that even the World Trade Organisation, a group with the primary aim of protecting free trade, accepted that the white asbestos ban introduced across the European Union is entirely justified." The TUC indicated sympathy with arguments about overcharging, but stressed that these problems should be and were being tackled separately.

- [FT.com. Conservative Party press release](#)

## OTHER NEWS

### **Bus crime crackdown launched**

A team of experts is to consider ways of combating the thousands of attacks and threats to bus passengers and drivers that blight public transport every year. Transport minister John Spellar says he hopes the government-led partnership, Safer Travel On Buses and Coaches Panel (STOP), will create a safer environment for bus and coach crews and passengers, and get more people out of the car. Mr Spellar said: "Ultimately we want to ensure that bus and coach crews and passengers can be confident of travelling in safety." The first meeting of the panel will be held in the autumn of this year. The Department says it will invite representatives of bus operators, unions, transport and local authorities, passengers and the police to become members of the panel. Nearly 7,000 crimes were reported on London buses alone last year, ranging from stabbings, graffiti, stone throwing and other serious incidents of violence.

- [Department for Transport news release. BBC News Online](#)

### **KFC fined over racist attacks**

The fast food giant KFC has been found guilty under health and safety legislation for offences relating to a series of violent and racist attacks on its employees over a two-year period. Ealing Council prosecuted KFC after an environmental health officer investigating an accident at the company's Greenford branch discovered that the Sri Lankan staff were being subjected to serial attacks by racist gangs. According to the police, KFC staff in six Ealing outlets had reported 17 serious incidents against them between 1999 and 2001. The council charged the fast food company with six health and safety breaches relating to the attacks and other safety offences. A district judge found the company guilty of five of the six charges and fined it £9,500, plus £6,500 costs. In summing up, deputy district judge David Goodman said: "The company has closed its eyes to the problem at Greenford."

- [Environmental Health News](#)

### **Firefighter shot on the way to a call**

A firefighter has been shot in the head with an airgun pellet while attending a routine call, police have revealed. Strathclyde Police said the firefighter was with a crew attending a "genuine assistance call" in Hamilton when he was shot. The fire engine diverted to Hairmyres Hospital where the air pellet was removed and the 44-year-old man was kept in overnight for observation. He was not seriously injured. Detective constable Jim Conway said: "This could have had very serious consequences for both the firefighter and the member of the public they were attending to assist." Police said members of the fire crew were unable to describe the person responsible for the attack. Fire service bosses have urged the public to help in stopping attacks on crews.

- [BBC News Online](#)

### **Stretching "fails to stop muscle injury"**

The new age trend to get workers to limber up before exerting themselves at work is a waste of time, new research suggests. Scientists writing in the British Medical Journal have cast doubt on the benefits of stretching before and after exercise as a way of reducing soreness and the risk of injury. Stretching does not produce useful reductions in injury and has barely any impact on the development of muscle soreness, the researchers found. Data from two studies on army recruits in training, whose risk of injury is high, show that muscle

stretching prevents on average one injury every 23 years, they say. TUC's Owen Tudor commented: "Workers are over-stretched already. Proper workplace design, adequate equipment, regular rest breaks and less pressure and less work are the answer to workplace strain injuries. Flexibility – physical and organisational – is no substitute for a safe job."

- [BBC News Online](#). **Effects of stretching before and after exercising on muscle soreness and risk of injury: systematic review, BMJ, volume 325, pages 468-70, 2002 [full paper, pdf format]**. Editorial: **Muscle soreness and risk of injury due to exercise, BMJ, volume 325, pages 451-2, 2002 [related editorial, pdf format]**

### **Widow's plea for help in asbestos death law struggle**

A widow is searching for her late husband's former workmates after he died of asbestos-related cancer. Christine Ratcliffe hopes that pals of her husband Robert will provide evidence of his repeated contact with asbestos to support a fight for compensation. Robert died in January aged 62 - one of tens of thousands of victims of the asbestos cancer mesothelioma. Mr Ratcliffe joined Hudswell Clark locomotive foundry at Holbeck in Leeds in 1952, aged 15, where he was a fitter for eight years. In 1960 he went to work for British Rail, then moved to IMI Yorkshire Alloys at Stourton, Leeds in 1969, remaining there until 1997. The two factories have since been shut and BR privatised. Mrs Ratcliffe said: "Before Robert died I promised him I would fight for justice, but we need his colleagues to help us by giving statements about their working conditions."

- [Yorkshire Evening Post](#). **Colleagues at Hudswell Clark, British Rail or IMI Yorkshire Alloys should contact Adrian Budgen at Irwin Mitchell Solicitors on 0870 1500 100**

### **Rail crash police appeal to whistleblowers**

Police investigating the Potters Bar rail crash have set up a hotline so that rail and maintenance staff can contact officers in confidence. Seven people died when a West Anglia Great Northern train derailed at a faulty set of points just outside Potters Bar station on May 10 this year ([Risks 53](#)). British Transport Police detective superintendent Paul Crowther, who is leading what is being called Operation Declare, said:

"We feel that there are people in the rail industry with knowledge of the work and working practices in the Potters Bar area who still have useful information to give us." He added: "We are getting good co-operation from the companies involved, but it is inevitable that some staff feel constrained." A report into the crash published last month by the Health and Safety Executive said the points were not up to standard and nuts on other points in the area were not fully tightened. HSE concluded that nuts missing from a part of the points caused the points to 'fail catastrophically.' In June, HSE made its own confidential appeal, promising to share any information with the British Transport Police ([Risks 60](#)).

- [British Transport Police news release. Ananova.](#)
- **BTP Hotline number: 020 7887 6864. Alternatively, [Contact the HSE Investigation Board Secretariat](#) or phone HSE's Les Philpott on 0207 717 6939**

## INTERNATIONAL

### **Canada: Workers squeezed for five unpaid days a month**

Canadian employers, especially large companies and organisations, are wringing an average of five days a month in unpaid overtime from increasingly stressed-out employees. Employees have less and less control over the amount of overtime they work, whether paid or unpaid, and men are exploited worse than women. These findings are included in a massive new study commissioned by the official agency Health Canada into the conflict between working and family life in Canada. The *2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study* found one in four employees now works 50 hours of week or more, up from one in 10 a decade earlier. Downsizing has been carried to the point of 'organisational anorexia,' the study found, with too few employees left to do the work and too few managers to strategise and plan. A Canadian Labour Congress "Is work working for you 2002?" survey also confirms that working conditions are deteriorating, and finds that union membership is the best guarantee of decent working conditions.

- **National Union of Public and General Employees [news release](#)**
- **2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study [summary](#) and [complete report](#) (in pdf format)**
- **CLC [news release](#) and [Is work working for you 2002?](#) survey findings**

### **Germany: Rail crash deaths trial opens**

Two German rail managers and an engineer are in court accused of responsibility for the country's worst post-war rail disaster. The men are blamed for the deaths of 101 people who were killed when a high-speed train smashed into a bridge near the town of Eschede in June 1998. The two high-ranking Deutsche Bahn officials and the engineer went before a court in the northern city of Celle charged with manslaughter and causing bodily harm through negligence. They deny the charges. An accident report blamed a broken wheel that had suffered 'material fatigue.' The three men are accused of not ensuring that the wheels were properly tested before fitting or that systems were in place to detect defects. The court must decide whether it is right to blame the tragedy on individuals. Deutsche Bahn has already offered to pay almost half a million dollars (£320,000) for each victim. More than 200 million euros (£127m) has already been distributed between the families.

- [BBC News Online](#)

### **Greece: Passive smoking causes work-related heart disease**

Non-smokers who are exposed to environmental tobacco smoke for at least 30 minutes a day are at far greater risk of developing heart disease compared with people who are not exposed – and the risks are greatest for those exposed at work. Research published in the journal *Tobacco Control* found "never smokers" reporting occasional or regular exposure to cigarette smoke had a 47 per cent higher risk of developing heart disease compared with never smokers who were not exposed to environmental tobacco smoke. The Greek study found exposure at work was associated with a greater risk compared to home exposure. The risk rose exponentially with the number of years non-smokers were exposed to other people's smoke. Among the heart disease patients, 86 per cent had been exposed to second-hand smoke for more than 30 minutes a day. Among those without heart disease, only 56 per cent had been exposed to smoke. The researchers conclude that "the only safe way to protect non-smokers from exposure to cigarette smoke is to eliminate this health hazard from public places and workplaces, as well as from the home." A ban on smoking in workplaces might be an effective way to reduce exposure to environmental tobacco smoke, they add.

- [Reuters Health](#). **Association between exposure to environmental tobacco smoke and the development**

**of acute coronary syndromes: the CARDIO2000 case-control study. Tobacco Control, vol.11, pages 220-5, 2002 [[full paper in pdf format](#)]**

### **India: US boss faces Bhopal homicide charge**

A court in the Indian city of Bhopal has rejected an attempt to reduce charges against a US former Union Carbide official arising out of one of the world's worst industrial disasters. Thousands of people in Bhopal died in December 1984 after a gas leak at a chemical factory owned by Union Carbide, a company since taken over by Dow. The Indian government wanted the culpable homicide charge against the American former chief of the company, Warren Anderson, to be reduced to negligence ([Risks 62](#)). But a judge in Bhopal rejected the government's application, arguing that Mr Anderson had not applied to any Indian court to have his charges reduced. The judge, Rameshwar Kothe, said steps to extradite Anderson should now be speeded up. Mr Anderson faces up to 20 years in prison if found guilty of culpable homicide. More than 20,000 deaths have been linked to the disaster. Bhopal campaigners are now asking for tip offs as to the whereabouts of Warren Anderson, who is in hiding and classed by authorities in India as "an absconder".

- [BBC News Online](#) and [FT.com](#). Latest from the [Bhopal victims' campaign](#)
- [Bring him to justice! Warren Anderson sightings hotline](#)

### **Southern Africa: Dangerous asbestos complacency sets in**

Recent cases suggest Southern Africa business may be suffering an outbreak of commercial and moral complacency about asbestos disease risks. South Africa's Pretoria-Everite Building Products, part of the manufacturing division of listed construction company Group Five, says it is vigorously defending itself against "isolated claims" for damages related to asbestos health issues and says its compensation liabilities are "insignificant" compared with the group's earnings. Company chief executive Mike Lomas says there is an outstanding claim from a man whose brother worked in Everite's factory for about six months and who alleges his brother must have brought asbestos dust home on his overalls. He said Everite's UK legal adviser had said the company had no case to answer – despite many "paraoccupational" claims of this type having been settled in the UK. In neighbouring Zimbabwe, a bullish asbestos industry lobby says it has

almost won its battle against a global asbestos ban. The principal medical officer at African Associated Mines, Greg Mataka, said Zimbabwe has no record of a patient that has suffered asbestosis.

- [Business Report](#) and the [Harare Herald](#)

### **USA: BP accused of taking staff safety risks**

BP has been accused by some of its workers of taking risks with their safety following an Alaskan well explosion that left one worker seriously injured. Representatives of PACE, the BP Prudhoe Bay local union, said chronic staff shortages had meant the oil group has been operating wells suffering from pressure problems without adequate safety tests. The 16 August explosion threw operator Don Shugak 50 feet from a well, causing burns and several broken bones. All that was left of his truck was its frame, ashes and a melted radiator. An operator who declined to be named said: "We are half the workforce we were 12 years ago, with more wells and more facilities." He said operators were often required to work 18-hour days when someone was off. Alaskan authorities are thought to be examining possible violations by BP of federal probation. BP Exploration Alaska pleaded guilty in 1999 to an environmental felony. The company agreed at the time to use 'best environmental practices' to protect workers, the public and the environment during the five year probation term.

- [FT.com on the BP explosion and possible probation breach](#). [Ananova](#)

### **USA: If you gotta go, you gotta go says boss**

Imagine having to bring a doctor's note to work in order to use the bathroom when you need to go. Even worse, imagine losing your job because you refused to wet yourself on the line at work. That's exactly how the workers at Jim Beam Brands Company bottling plant in Clermont, Kentucky live every day. Workers on the bottling line are fuming about being limited to four breaks per 8½ hour shift, only one of which can be unscheduled. The United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW) says that out of 100 workers on the bottling line — the only part of the plant subject to the bathroom break policy — 42 have received some kind of discipline for taking an unauthorised trip to the restroom. Workers with six violations can be fired; several are one unscheduled bathroom break away from losing their job. Some workers now wear protective undergarments and others have feigned illnesses to go home and avoid getting violations, said Jo Anne Kelley, president of the union local. The union has filed grievances each time a

worker is disciplined for taking a bathroom break. UFCW's legal advisers say the case could be a precedent affecting millions of workers across the US.

- [UFCW news](#) and [Chicago Sun-Times](#)
- [Tell Jim Beam why we're not wetting ourselves](#)
- [Unions and toilet breaks](#) – a *Hazards* guide

## RESOURCES

### **Tackling ergonomics on site**

An American union construction safety body has produced an online guide to tackling strains. The Laborers' Health and Safety Fund of North America's (LHSFNA) new ergonomics webpage says strains cause over one-third of all lost workday injuries and produce about half of all compensation claims. It adds that a recent survey found 40 per cent of construction workers believed "working while hurt" is a major problem. Many site labourers end up retiring by age 55 because they just can't do the work any more. LHSFNA says: "Ergonomics means finding ways to make the work easier so workers can work smarter, not harder. It means asking experienced workers for their ideas on how to do the work. Usually, it ends up making the job more productive since workers are less often fatigued or hurt." The site has extensive links and includes worker solutions to site problems.

- [LHSFNA ergonomics resource](#)

## 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!

### **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. The 2003 conference will be held in London.

### **RSI Association annual conference, 28 September**

Speakers at the conference which is on a Saturday at TUC headquarters include: Dr Michael Hutson, consultant physician and

president of the International Federation of Musculoskeletal Medicine; Trevor Shaw, head of the musculoskeletal, ergonomics and performance section in HSE's Human Factors Unit; Richard Southorn, Employers' Forum on Disability; and Owen Tudor, TUC health and safety specialist and Health and Safety Commissioner. For more details, see the [RSI Association](#) website.

### **Workplace bullying and harassment workshop, 28 September**

The Women's Committee of the South West TUC has organised a workplace bullying and harassment workshop in Plymouth on Saturday, 28 September. It wants to attract women from all walks of life who have concerns about these issues. The event is free, informal and friendly and is being held at The Guild Hall, Royal Parade, Plymouth from 10:00am to 3:30pm. Creche facilities will be provided if required. [More information](#). Contact: [Tanya Parker](#), telephone 0117 947 0521, fax 0117 947 0523.

### **TUC/UK Work Stress Network Conference, 14 October**

The TUC will be holding a joint conference called *Tackle the hassle: strategies for stopping stress and beating bullying* with the UK National Stress Network on Monday, 14 October at TUC headquarters in London, to launch European Week for Health and Safety. Further details and a [booking form](#) are now available.

### **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.

### **Conference on Violence at Work, 2 December**

Hosted by the TUC, this conference will be run by the Government Inter-Departmental Committee on Violence to Staff. For further information contact [Tom Mellish](#).

## 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](#)

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**What's new** in the [HSC/E](#) and the [European Agency](#).

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