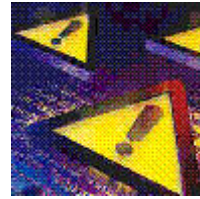


# Risks

issue no 73 – 28 September 2002

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Editor: [Rory O'Neill](#) of [Hazards](#) magazine. Comments to [Owen Tudor](#).  
EUROPEAN WEEK OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK: 14-21 OCTOBER  
[Details of what is happening](#). 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 5,000 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.

## FEATURE on stress at work

### **TUC urges workers to give their workplace a stress MOT**

Thousands of workers will be urged to check whether their work is causing them stress in a nationwide health and safety exercise next month co-ordinated by the TUC. This year's European health and safety week - 14-20 October - is focusing on stress at work which costs the British economy £7bn a year, and causes 270,000 workers to take time off with a mental or physical illness. As its contribution to the week, the TUC is asking union safety reps in offices and factories across the country to complete a TUC stress MOT of their workmates and their workplace. TUC general secretary John Monks said: "In today's hot-house workplace, stress is a big problem. But the causes can be controlled and the risks can be managed. We're asking union workplace safety reps to tackle the hassle that's hurting their workmates - and we hope their managers will work in partnership with them to identify the problem and then solve it." Safety reps will survey "stressors" in the workplace and draw a workplace stress map, noting the percentages of workers in each area of the workplace who feel that stress is causing them harm. Suggestion boxes for workers with ideas about reducing stress could also help safety reps persuade managers of the need for changes to bring about a healthier, less stressed workforce, says the TUC.

- [TUC news release](#). **TUC stress MoT: [General "how to" guide](#); the ["people survey"](#); and the ["organisation survey"](#)**

### **TUC backs working smart, not long**

The TUC has welcomed the government's drive to promote working time best practice, but says it must also act to outlaw overwork. Employment minister Alan Johnson has urged firms to do more to help employees balance home and work lives. The minister said: "We only have to look at the stress-related absence costs to industry, estimated at £370 million a year, as just one example of how workplace pressures can lead to burnt out employees and productivity nosedives." However, the TUC says the government's best practice initiative has not reduced the number of people working more than 48

hours per week, which still stands at just under four million. John Monks, TUC general secretary, said: "It is absolutely vital that we put an end to 'Burnout Britain' as soon as possible... government has the power to end the long hours culture at the stroke of a pen. The provision that allows individual workers to opt out of the 48 hour week average working time limit in the Working Time Directive is up for review in November next year. The government should say now that they will not seek an extension of the opt-out."

- [TUC news release](#)

### **Working class compelled to work long hours**

One in three fathers regularly breach the 48 hours a week limit set by the European Working Time Directive, a new survey has found. Nearly half of British fathers are barely seeing their children grow up because they work too hard, found the survey for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Mothers too are putting in long hours at the expense of family life. The *Happy families?* study, which looked at families where both the mother and father have jobs, found parents working atypical hours tended to operate a 'shift' system whereby at least one of them is looking after the children. While people in professional jobs put the long hours down to their career aspirations and family needs, working class parents were more likely to say their employers gave them no choice. The researchers say government policy-makers should take particular notice of differences revealed in the survey between parents who have some control over their working arrangements and those who have little choice about long or atypical hours. Ivana La Valle, a co-author of the study, said: "These findings raise important questions about the effectiveness of the EU Working Time Directive as it is currently applied in the United Kingdom."

- [JRF news release](#). *Happy families? Atypical work and its influence on family life* [[summary](#)]

### **Work-life balance all year round**

Companies nationwide have been involved in a week of activities aimed at improving work-life balance. Work-Life Balance Week, 22-27 September, is organised by the Work-Life Balance Trust and is designed to promote the benefits of flexible working practices for staff and employers. Jo Morris, TUC work-life balance officer, commented: "Long hours and stress must end. A better balance between work and the rest of our lives makes sense for employers who want a productive and happy workforce, as well as employees. Work-life balance must be

an all year round issue, which is why the TUC has developed the *Changing times* process to help unions and managers implement changes in working time to benefit workers and business."

- [BBC News Online](#) and [Work-Life Balance Trust](#).  
**More information:** [TUC Changing Times website](#) and the [Hazards Get a life! webpages](#)

### **Usdaw shops around for Euroweek stress action**

Shopworkers' union Usdaw is calling on all its health and safety reps to get involved in European Safety and Health Week next month. Usdaw general secretary Bill Connor, said: "The European Week is an important event in the health and safety calendar. We want to make sure that Usdaw health and safety reps are working with their employers to make it a success." He added that Usdaw reps should get hold of the HSE's action pack and should make sure the real causes of workplace stress are addressed, adding: "All too often, employers fail to recognise that there are work-related risk factors that can be controlled by the way they manage their organisation... Even where stress is recognised as a problem, employers often fail to tackle the root causes and focus instead on offering counselling or other treatments for individual workers." Usdaw is calling on its safety reps to: find out what their employers are planning for Euroweek; use the HSE pack and the TUC Stress MOT materials and publicise the week; log on to the European Week pages on the TUC web site; and tell the union HQ of successful activities.

- [Usdaw news release](#). [TUC](#), [HSE](#) and [European Agency](#) Euroweek webpages

## **UNION NEWS**

### **Thousand fight risks with *Risks***

The TUC's online health and safety bulletin *Risks* now has thousands of union safety reps getting e-active over workplace health and safety. *Risks*, launched in May 2001, has clocked up its 5,000th subscriber and now has a total readership in excess of 8,000, according to the first ever *Risks* readers survey. Readers of the bulletin are mostly safety reps (62 per cent) or union officials (12 per cent). More than one in eight readers (13 per cent) is a safety professional. *Risks* readers are also activists – 70 per cent replied that they had take action prompted by the bulletin. The readers' survey, conducted online earlier this year and analysed by Jawad Qasrawi of *Hazards* magazine, shows that 70

per cent of readers had influence over funds for health and safety in their workplace. TUC general secretary John Monks said: "The future of trade unions lies on the web because Britain is logging on - and unions must go where working people are. The web's potential for educating, informing and campaigning is enormous. *Risks* is beginning to make a real difference to trade union involvement in health and safety. Every union safety rep, every activist or official who needs to know what is happening, and everyone who wants to know what unions are up to on health and safety needs to get on the internet and sign up to get *Risks*." TUC says it intends to make increased use of e-activism through *Risks*.

- [TUC news release. The survey findings in full](#)

### **Half a million workers need new European ergo laws**

The TUC is calling for a new Europe-wide law to prevent RSI, a condition that now affects half a million people at work – one in every 50 workers - every year. TUC health and safety specialist Owen Tudor said: "RSI is a global disease and Europe needs to take action to prevent future generations from suffering more epidemics of RSI. Work needs to be adapted to workers, because fitting the workers round the jobs doesn't work." Among proposals presented by TUC to the 28 September AGM of the Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI) Association are: a new Directive on ergonomics - requiring employers to ensure that work, work stations and work equipment like computers and conveyor belts suit their workers' physical abilities; amendments to the existing Manual Handling Directive to cover the repetitive and monotonous handling of small loads; and updating the Display Screen Equipment Directive to cover the greater use of computer mice, laptops and palm pilots. The same proposals were made recently by the influential Employment and Social Affairs Committee of the European Parliament ([Risks 72](#)). The TUC also wants more rehabilitation for RSI sufferers to ensure they can return to fitness and to work as soon as possible.

- [TUC news release. RSI Association website](#)

### **Driving workers to an early grave**

The TUC has said employers should take the pressure off their workers so workers can take their foot off the pedal. TUC general secretary John Monks said: "As long as work means doing too much too quickly, impossible deadlines will mean that too many working people drive too fast." He added: "Employers need to control work-related road risks

and by doing so could save hundreds of lives every year. We want employees to be able to do their jobs right and safely, not immediately and dangerously." The TUC believes employers are requiring more workers to drive as part of their job and that this trend combined with long hours, "just-in-time" management or tough sales targets combine to put pressure on workers to drive faster for their work. It wants employers to develop road risk policies (RRPs), covering risk assessment, use of alternatives to driving - such as tele-conferencing and use of public transport - proper rest breaks, driver awareness raising and training. Speaking on 23 September, the start of Road Safety Week 2002, John Monks said: "There's no excuse for people who drive too fast, but all too often the real villain is the manager who has persuaded their staff to suspend their better judgment and go too fast."

- [TUC news release](#). [Road Safety Week](#) is run annually by [Brake](#), an independent road safety organisation. This year the week focused on the way speed on the roads kills children. [Detailed analysis of latest road casualty figures](#), DfT, 26 September 2002

### **Deadly dust that killed a teacher**

A retired teacher diagnosed with an an industrial asbestos disease told how 'puffs of dust' would billow from classroom walls if she tried pinning up a pupil's work, an inquest has heard. Told by doctors she had mesothelioma, Jean Whitwam made a statement saying she believed she contracted the disease from exposure to asbestos fibres during 24 years working at Outlane Infant School, Huddersfield. Coroner Roger Whittaker said he could only conclude that Mrs Whitwam, 66, had died after breathing in asbestos while she was working at the school. There was no evidence to suggest she had been exposed to it elsewhere. Mrs Whitwam's daughter, Linda Whitwam, said: "People working in the public services rely on the local government to protect them and I think that's not been the case here." She said she and her family were 'very pleased' at the verdict, but added she would now be very worried if she had worked or had been a pupil at the school. She said the National Union of Teachers had taken up the case on the family's behalf.

- [Yorkshire Post](#)

### **Government "contempt" for fire safety**

Troops trained to replace firefighters in the event of a strike next month have been redeployed, making a nonsense of the government's fire safety contingency plan, the firefighters' union has said. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) believes 3,000 troops trained to crew Green Goddess fire appliances are instead on alert for action should there be an attack on Iraq. The union says this leaves the army with only 9,000 soldiers to replace the 52,000 professional firefighters and emergency fire control staff. FBU general secretary Andy Gilchrist said the government was treating the public with "contempt" by "moving 3,000 troops from life saving duties in the UK to killing duties in Iraq. I understand their plans are to replace these 3,000 troops with new untrained troops for Green Goddess duties; this will not only put the lives of the public at risk, but also the lives of the untrained soldiers." He urged the fire service employers and the government to avert a dispute by recognising that firefighters should be paid properly for the life-saving and hazardous work they do.

- [Fire Brigades' Union. How a Green Goddess compares to a proper fire appliance – BBC News Online](#)

### **Railtrack changes track on safety**

Railtrack has bowed to pressure from ministers, unions and crash victims by announcing a crackdown on the casual army of subcontractors on Britain's railways - although unions have criticised the move for not going far enough. The company, to be succeeded next week by the not-for-profit Network Rail, said that by December 2003 it would require 85 per cent of workers to be directly employed by its contractors, cutting back on the use of casual labourers. Railtrack says that about 200 contracting and subcontracting firms regularly work on its tracks. But unions claim the figure is closer to 1,000 if sporadic participants are included, and want a total switch to in-house and integrated maintenance, inspection and renewal functions. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said: "We will still have maintenance work being carried out by contractors whose main concern is profit and not safety. It is no good Railtrack just deciding what should be done and when: What we need is recognition that the contracting system is fundamentally flawed and a commitment to bring all maintenance back in-house." TSSA general secretary Richard Rosser said Railtrack's statement was "contradictory", adding: "This announcement may represent progress, but progress to precisely what is not entirely

clear.” He added: “Railtrack are silent about reintegrating inspection, maintenance and renewal. Reversing the artificial split between these inter-related activities is essential.”

- [Railtrack announcement](#) and comments from [RMT](#) and [TSSA](#). [The Guardian](#)

## OTHER NEWS

### **Met police top brass appears in court**

Scotland Yard Commissioner Sir John Stevens and his predecessor Lord Condon have appeared at the Old Bailey on charges alleging safety breaches. Sir John, the highest ranking police officer to appear at the court, and Lord Condon, who retired in 2000, were not required to enter the dock for the preliminary hearing. The charges in the case, brought by the Health and Safety Executive, relate in part to the deaths of two police officers killed in roof falls while pursuing suspects ([Risks 51](#)). PC Kulwant Sidhu died on 24 October 1999 and PC Mark Berwick on 30 May 2000. Lord Condon has been charged in relation to both officers and Sir John in relation to PC Berwick. The case was adjourned to Friday 13 December 2002.

- [The Times](#)

### **Eight die on sites in seven days**

In one of the worst weeks for the construction industry in recent memory, eight people were killed in construction related accidents. Industry magazine *Construction News* reports that six men, one woman and a child were killed between 13 and 20 September on construction sites across the country. Five were construction workers and three were members of the public, including eight-year-old Alexander Garry, killed while playing on a Renfrew construction site. The Health and Safety Executive is investigating all of the deaths. George Brumwell, general secretary of Britain’s construction workers’ union UCATT, commented: “What is clear, as these deaths have shown, is that it is not just construction workers who are being killed. Members of the public are being killed in construction industry related deaths too and this gives the problem a wider focus. The numbers of people dying is now a national scandal that demands a national solution.”

- [Construction News](#) [registration required]

### **Crown immunity is “unjustified in law”**

Provisions that allow unsafe employers that happen to be “Crown bodies” to commit safety crimes and get away with it ([Risks 72](#)) must be removed, the Centre for Corporate Accountability has said. David Bergman, director of the corporate crime watchdog, said: “The current HSE policy gives immunity to managers of Crown Bodies which is unjustified in law. We have written to the director general of the Health and Safety Executive asking him to revise HSE’s policy towards Crown bodies and their servants”. CCA has publishing “for the first time” the procedures agreed between the Cabinet Office and the HSE on enforcing health and safety law in Crown Bodies – government departments and some government agencies. Under present law crown bodies cannot be prosecuted for health and safety offences. Instead there is a behind-closed-doors procedure of ‘Crown censure’ – set out in the Cabinet Office memo. CCA’s David Bergman said Crown immunity should be removed entirely and added: “Crown Censure proceedings should be held in public and decisions whether or not to prosecute crown servants – including senior managers - should be based on exactly the same factors as those involving senior managers of private companies.”

- [CCA news release](#). TUC/CCA [campaign](#) for stronger enforcement of health and safety laws (including removal of crown and Parliamentary immunity)

### **HSE noises about protecting hearing**

The HSE has published guidance on noise, making it easier to find information on protecting hearing from noise at work. Six ‘noise at work’ publications have been combined to produce a comprehensive leaflet for employers and a pocket card for employees. Mike Shepherd, head of HSE's physical agents policy unit, said: “Exposure to excessive noise at work is still damaging people's hearing. It is important that employers and workers have simple, comprehensive and helpful guidance to advise them on how to reduce exposure levels and guard against hearing loss.” Only the employers’ leaflet gives information on prevention. The employees’ guide glosses over the employers’ duties to control the risks, and instead concentrates on use of hearing protection. TUC’s Owen Tudor commented: “Hearing protection should be the last resort. Safety reps should get hold of the employers’ leaflet and should press for removal of the risks, not an ears cover-up.”

- [HSE news release](#) and [HSE free noise publications](#)

[online](#), including pdf versions of all the new resources. Single copies of the print versions of both the new leaflets, *Noise at Work - advice for employers*, INDG362, and *Protect your hearing - or lose it!*, INDG363 are available free from [HSE Books](#)

- [Listen here... Amicus MSF briefing on noise at work](#)

### **Bosses taught how to get tough on aggression**

A new HSE-backed resource for employers has been developed to help reduce violence and aggression in the workplace. HSC says the *National occupational standards in managing work-related violence* can be used by employers to draw up policies on managing work-related violence and to provide a framework for managers and staff to assess training needs. The HSE-funded standards have been developed by the Employment National Training Organisation (NTO) as part of a three-year drive to cut incidents of violence at work by 10 per cent by the end of 2003. Ann Harrington, of HSE's health directorate, said: "HSE is pleased to support these National Occupational Standards. They have been produced in consultation with a wide range of industry sectors and interest groups and will provide a comprehensive, practical resource for all those who have an interest in tackling work-related violence and aggression."

- [HSE news release](#). Copies of the *National occupational standards in managing work-related violence* CD Rom price £32.50, are available from the Employment NTO: order [online](#) or call the orderline 0116 251 9727
- HSE guidance leaflet, INDG69(rev), online [Violence at work, a guide for employers](#) [pdf format], or free single copies of the print version from [HSE Books](#)

## INTERNATIONAL

### **Australia: Poll reveals chemicals training is inadequate**

Almost 70 per cent of respondents to an online union poll say they are not receiving adequate information and training on hazardous chemicals in the workplace. The latest *OHS Reps* website poll asked: "Does your employer provide you with adequate information and training on any chemicals you may be exposed to either as part of your work or at your workplace?" Almost half (48 per cent) said their employer 'never' provided adequate information and training, with another 21 per cent saying information and training was adequate just

'sometimes'. Only 31 per cent of respondents answered 'always'. *OHS Rep*, the new safety website of the Victorian Trades Hall Council, receives thousands of responses to its online polls. The VTHC OHS Unit says the results show that the authorities must now make provision for accredited union training for workplace health and safety representatives.

- [OHS Rep poll](#)

### **Indonesia: Fireworks factory blast kills 10**

An explosion at a fireworks factory in Indonesia has killed 10 people and injured many others. A senior police official in the central Javanese town of Slawi said that nine of the dead were women and that 15 other women had been injured. The explosion is said to have occurred in a room where workers were mixing raw materials for the fireworks. Reports say fireworks are often produced in small, home-based factories that are unregulated and lack proper safety equipment.

- [BBC News Online](#)

### **International: Higher paid truck drivers have fewer accidents**

Well-paid truck drivers are less likely to suffer road accidents than those on low pay rates, according to a new study. "Clearly truck driver pay is an extremely strong predictor of driver safety," said the report *Paying for safety*, by Michael Belzer, associate professor at the College of Urban, Labor and Metropolitan Affairs at Wayne State University. "Higher pay produces superior safety performance for firms and for drivers," concluded the report, which examined pay and fatality rates in US truck operators. Mac Urata of the International Transport Workers' Federation's (ITF) said the findings "support our campaign against long driving hours for truck drivers. Better pay and shorter driving hours could make a real difference in reducing road accidents among road transport workers." On 15 October, under the slogan *Fatigue kills*, ITF affiliated unions in more than 60 countries will stage rallies, meetings, press conferences, demonstrations, road inspections and work stoppages to highlight the fatal dangers of long working hours.

- [ITF news release](#) and [Fatigue Kills Action Day](#)

### **Korea: Fewer laws mean more work deaths**

The number of deaths and injuries in Korean workplaces has risen

dramatically – and the official safety agency says a relaxation of safety laws is one reason why. Work fatalities rose to 42 in 2000 from 30 in 1998, according to the Ministry of Labor. The number of casualties, including deaths, from industrial accidents rose to 81,400 last year from 55,500 in 1998. A government regulatory reform drive started in 1997 had led to nearly 30 industrial safety regulations being scrapped and 41 relaxed. A Ministry of Labor official said the agency is planning to review a recent proposal by the Federation of Korean Trade Unions to pass and enforce tougher workplace safety standards.

- [JoongAng Ilbo](#)

### **USA: Workplace deaths figures “sad news” for workers**

Latest US workplace fatality figures revealing over 8,000 people died at work in 2001 have been met with dismay by American unions. The figure includes the 2,886 workers or rescuers who died on 11 September while working, and 5,900 workers killed in workplace accidents. John Sweeney, head of the 13-million strong union federation AFL-CIO, said: “The Bureau of Labor Statistics 2001 workplace fatality report contains sad news for American workers and little reassurance that the workplace is less dangerous now than in 2000, and for workers in some industries things are getting more dangerous. This report only confirms what too many grieving families already knew, that workplace hazards cost lives.” Fatalities rose sharply in construction, agriculture, mining and government, in some cases reversing years of improvement. The figures also showed rising numbers of deaths among Hispanic workers, up to 891 work fatalities in 2001, a 75 per cent increase in a decade. AFL-CIO’s Sweeney added that the report “demonstrates that workers need more protection, not less. The Bush administration and the Congress should be fighting for increased worker protections, not cutting federal funding for safeguards and job safety budgets.” In an average year a US worker is over four times as likely to die at work as their UK counterpart.

- [AFL-CIO news release](#). [OSHA statement](#). [The full BLS report \[pdf format\]](#)

### **USA: Settlements pre-empt massive asbestos case**

Several high-profile US firms have settled out of court ahead of a asbestos trial due to involve many top US companies and over 8,000 claimants. The scale of the settlements has not been disclosed, though some payments are rumoured to exceed \$250m (£160m). The settlements have pre-empted a trial that according to some estimates

could have resulted in payouts of more than \$200bn, resulting in the likely bankruptcy of some of the largest companies in the world. A smaller trial will go ahead, as ExxonMobil and Dow Chemical are still expected to be among the firms that will fight, said lawyer Paul Hulse, who will represent some of the victims. Initially, 259 companies had been sued however many, including Ford, General Motors, DaimlerChrysler, General Electric, 3M, DuPont, Bayer, Shell and Honeywell, have now settled all claims. In the UK, shares in the engineering group Wolseley fell 12 per cent over asbestos litigation worries, despite a sixth successive year of record profits.

- **US litigation stories in [FT.com](#), [BBC News Online](#), [ABC News](#) and [Forbes.com](#). Wolseley reports in [FT.com](#) and [BBC News Online](#)**

## RESOURCES

### **Free ILO work research guide on CD**

An ILO manual on grassroots workplace health research techniques is now available free on CD. ILO says its *Barefoot research: A worker's manual for organising on work security* "has been developed to help empower workers to increase their level of control over their own work situations, to protect their health and well-being, and to improve their level of basic security." It includes information on workplace body mapping, risk mapping and surveys.

- **Order free copies of the *Barefoot research: A worker's manual for organising on work security* CD by email from [Christian Colussi](#), ILO Programme on Socio-Economic Security (IFP/SES)**
- **More on [DIY workplace research](#)**

## 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!

### **Work-death Inquests: keep them public! 9 October**

A seminar organised by the TUC, Centre for Corporate Accountability and Inquest to discuss the government's consultation on inquests, and the proposal to end automatic public inquests into work-related

deaths.

- **Venue: TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1, 10:00am to 1:00pm, Wednesday, 9 October 2002. Free. [More information](#). Contact: [Sugar Munthali](#) at CCA on 020 7490 4494.**

#### **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. An [agenda](#) 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, and we have just launched the [TUC stress MOT](#) which can be used during the week or afterwards to identify the stress problems in your workplace! A [calendar](#) of union events and initiatives during the week is on the TUC website. 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](#)

**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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