

Risks

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HAZARDS
MAGAZINE

Construction Safety
HSE - Have your say?

Editor: [Rory O'Neill](#) of [Hazards](#) magazine. Comments to [Owen Tudor](#).
**EUROPEAN WEEK OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK STARTS
ON MONDAY:** [Details](#) of trade union activities are on the TUC website.

CONTENTS

- Action: [what to do in European week](#)
- European week feature: [tackle the hassle of stress at work](#)
- Union news: [NHS code is good for workers and patients](#) * [danger at the chalkface](#) * [teachers in strike vote over death-threat pupils](#)
- Other news: [workaholics kiss goodnight to vital sleep](#) * [asbestos victims urge Cape to pay up](#) * [Scots pledge to "fast track" asbestos claims](#) * [work dust and fume takes your breath away](#) * [farms fail health and safety visits](#) * [split decision on anti-RSI keyboards](#) * [don't stop inquests into work-related deaths](#)
- International news: Australia: [safety survey shows union PINs work](#) * Canada: [asbestos mine to bite the dust](#) and [dying waitress wins second-hand smoke payout](#) * Global: [cancer in the system infects agency](#) * Japan: [naval base workers win asbestos payouts](#) * Nigeria: [union wants safety standards in workplaces](#) * USA: [slow progress on deadly docks speed-up](#)
- Resources: [CSP safety news](#) * [latest from GMB](#)
- Events: [Turner and Newall asbestos victims speak out, Manchester](#) * [sickness absence management conference, Cumbria](#) * [National Asbestos Conference, Scotland](#)

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.

ACTION

What to do in European week

Safety reps have described European week as providing them with a half open door to joint action on health and safety with their employers. This week the TUC expects more action by trade unionists than ever before, and a higher national profile. Here are some actions you can take to make this year's week a success.

- **give your workplace the [TUC stress MOT](#);**
- **beat bullying with [Amicus](#) on Tuesday;**
- **inspect against stress with [UNISON](#) on Wednesday;**
- **check out what's going on by checking out the [TUC](#) and [HSE](#) websites; and**
- **tell the [TUC](#) what you are doing in European week**

EUROPEAN WEEK FEATURE

Tackle the hassle of stress at work

The TUC has launched its first safety rep leaflet on the web to mark this year's European week of health and safety at work which concentrates on stress. It provides basic facts on stress, a summary of the law, and suggests simple steps that safety reps can take.

Meanwhile Amicus MSF has released the results of a survey of 2,000 safety reps which shows that while employers know stress is a problem, they don't think they're the cause of it, and don't know what to do about it. And the CWU has launched a special page on their website about the week, referring to an earlier survey of their safety reps.

- **[Tackle the hassle – TUC leaflet for safety reps](#)**
- **[AMICUS-MSF stress survey](#) and [CWU Euroweek page](#)**
- **[TUC calendar of trade union events for European health and safety week](#)**

UNION NEWS

NHS code is good for workers and patients

UNISON, the largest union representing health service managers, has

welcomed a new Code of Conduct for NHS managers. UNISON made forceful representations to alter the original draft, to give managers protection if they spoke out about their concerns and staffing issues. Karen Jennings, UNISON national secretary for health said: "UNISON is pleased to see that key proposals suggested by UNISON have been taken on board, tightening up the original draft." She added: "The code recognises that the prime commitment to patient services must be tempered by managers duty of care to the health and safety of themselves and their own staff."

- [UNISON news release](#) and [background documents](#).
[Department of Health news release](#)

Danger at the chalkface

Around £300,000 compensation has been won by the Scottish teaching union EIS in the past year. Settlements range from £11,805 to a member who slipped on ice to over a quarter of a million pounds awarded to a teacher in a criminal injury compensation scheme settlement. Classroom perils ranged from a teacher with a head injury caused by a falling blackboard (£2,500), head and knee injuries suffered by a teacher who tripped on raised tiles (£23,035), and a teacher who sustained £500 worth of head injuries when a classroom ceiling collapsed.

- [EIS news release](#)

Teachers in strike vote over death-threat pupils

Staff at a school where two pupils made death threats to a teacher may go on strike over their return to classes. Physical education teacher Steve Taverner was bombarded with hate-filled phone calls by two 15-year-old boys at Glyn School in Epsom. The teenagers were expelled from the technology school last term after police intercepted one of the calls. But the decision of headmaster Stuart Turner, backed by his governors, was overturned by an independent appeals tribunal. Sixteen of the school's teachers, members of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, have been balloted over taking strike action or boycotting the pupils' classes, said a union spokesperson. Mr Taverner received 44 calls to his office phone at the school, said the ATL. The pupils were said to have begun the six-week campaign of hate after the father-of-four, who is now off sick with stress, reprimanded them for throwing stones at windows.

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

OTHER NEWS

Workaholics kiss goodnight to vital sleep

The growing trend of UK employees working from their beds is playing havoc with their sleeping patterns, research suggests. The pressures of 24/7 society are forcing many individuals to squeeze more working time out of their day from the comfort of their bedrooms. Hard-pressed staff are often surviving on less than the recommended eight hours sleep a night, as a result. One in six people taking part in the DuPont survey admitted they catch up on work in bed and a third said they make work-related phone calls from under the duvet. Others use their laptops and send emails from the bedroom. More than a third of British residents are sleeping six hours or less each night - losing a month's sleep every year.

- [BBC News Online](#). More: [Union get a life advice](#)

Asbestos victims urge Cape to pay up

Protesters dressed in black and carrying banners with messages from South African asbestosis victims have demonstrated outside the headquarters of Cape, urging the company to honour a £21 million compensation settlement ([Risks 72](#)). Adita Sharma of the lobby group Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA) played to the annual general meeting emotive recordings of some of the 7,500 claimants from impoverished mining communities. Next week the claimants' lawyers plan to ask the high court to set a date for trial. Richard Meeran of Leigh Day, solicitors for many of the claimants, said: "As things stand, the settlement is off." Cape maintains it is still "fully committed to the settlement." More than 300 claimants have died since the litigation started. Asbestos levels at the South African subsidiary were 30 times higher than permitted in Britain.

- [The Guardian](#) and [Business Report](#). [ACTSA Cape campaign website](#)
- **Join the ACTSA protest! Royal Courts of Justice, the Strand, Tuesday 15 October, 9.30am-10am**

Scots pledge to 'fast track' asbestos claims

Claims made by asbestos victims will be speeded up through a new fast track system, a Scottish parliament committee has pledged. The Justice 2 committee chaired by Pauline McNeill MSP has agreed to create a fast track system and is seeking more money and specialists,

including an extra judge to help achieve this. It will also consider adopting an Australian system where the most urgent asbestos illness cases are heard within 14 days. Under the existing system, many sufferers die before their cases are settled. Ms McNeill said: "Because of the sense of urgency surrounding the asbestos cases and the mesothelioma sufferers in particular, we need a speedier system." Labour MSP for Greenock and Inverclyde, Duncan McNeil, said it was vital that the committee finished their report as soon as possible. He said: "There is a clear need to get this moving and ask the Executive to provide resources to ensure that asbestosis victims get justice." More than 1,800 people have died from asbestos-related illnesses in Scotland. Clydebank, where thousands once worked in shipyards, has the highest death rate from asbestos disease in the UK.

- [The Daily Record](#) and [BBC News Online](#)

Work dust and fume takes your breath away

Exposure to dust and fumes at work causes breathing problems, new research confirms. The study of 2,819 Norwegian workers over an 11-year period found that there was an increased risk of developing respiratory symptoms and asthma if participants were exposed to dust and fumes in the workplace, according to an article published in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*. The researchers said the findings held true even after they had taken account of sex, age, educational level, and smoking habits. They also discovered that quartz exposure caused cough symptoms and asbestos exposure led to a higher risk of severe shortness of breath (dyspnea) and asthma.

- [Intelihealth.com](#) Tomas ML Eagan and others. **Occupational airborne exposure and the incidence of respiratory symptoms and asthma, *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*, vol. 166, pages 933-938, 2002** [[abstract](#)]

Farms fail health and safety visits

Twenty per cent of farms in east Herts and Uttlesford failed key health and safety requirements following an inspection blitz by the HSE. Nearly half of the 45 enforcement notices issued required the immediate cessation of work, mainly due to dangerous machinery. Simon Longbottom, the HSE principal inspector, said: "Some activities were so dangerous that we took immediate action to stop them for the safety of the farmers and employees concerned. In most of these

cases it was simple and inexpensive for farmers to deal with the risk." An early blitz in East Sussex saw work stopped at 13 farms ([Risks 72](#)).

- [Citizen](#)

Split decision on anti-RSI keyboards

Split keyboards for computers are intended to reduce injuries stemming from strain on the hands and wrists. But according to a report from the department of mechanical and industrial engineering at Marquette University in Milwaukee, the split keyboard isn't the final answer to injury prevention. The report in the journal *Human Factors* says that while the traditional computer keyboard twists the wrists by 12 degrees from the safest position, the split keyboard twists the wrists 5 degrees. That means the split keyboard isn't the complete solution to wrist problems - you still need frequent breaks to rest your wrists.

- [Yahoo news](#)

Don't stop inquests into work-related deaths

Over a dozen families bereaved by a work-related death met the Home Office's Coroners Review Team on Wednesday to voice their concerns about its proposal to stop automatic inquests into work-related deaths. The current law requires a coroner to hold a jury inquest into all officially reported work-related deaths. In 2000/01 there were 438 officially reported work-related deaths. The Coroner's Review team is proposing a removal of both the right to a jury and the right to an inquest itself. "It is crucial that families do not lose their right to have an automatic inquest," said Ann Jones, whose son Simon Jones died on his first day at work and who will be present at the meeting. "It is the only opportunity for families to hear in detail how the death took place, hear live evidence from witnesses and ask questions themselves. It also allows some form of independent scrutiny of the criminal investigation process."

- [CCA news release](#). **Coroners Review Team's [consultation document](#) [pdf format] and [comments on work-related deaths](#)**

INTERNATIONAL

Australia: Safety survey shows union PINs work

A survey of safety reps by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (the

Australian TUC) has found the union legal right to enforce safety standards is used responsibly - and very, very effectively indeed. The survey found just 10 per cent say they have issued a Provisional Improvement Notice (PIN) – a beefed up, legally backed version of our Union Inspection Notices ([Risks 28](#)) - but 95 per cent say it was effective in resolving the health and safety issue. Only 16 per cent of reps say they have either issued a cease work order – the equivalent of the stop work prohibition notices used by HSE inspectors in Britain - or stopped work for health and safety reasons. But when they did, 98 per cent say it was effective in resolving the issue. The reps' survey found the main health and safety issues in Australian workplaces are "manual handling; lack of resources and maintenance; poor ergonomics; difficult working hours, shift work and rosters; physical security issues; violence from clients, customers, patients etc; stress; inadequate staffing; and noise." Almost one in five safety reps (19 per cent) say they have been bullied or intimidated by the employer/management as a result of raising health and safety issues.

- [Australian Council of Trade Unions safety rep survey](#). More on [PINs and Union Inspection Notices](#)

Canada: Asbestos mine to bite the dust

The falling world price of asbestos has stopped production at one of Canada's last asbestos mines and forced the company into bankruptcy protection. The directors of Jeffrey Mine – once the largest white asbestos mine in western world, based in Asbestos, Quebec - blame production from Russia and Zimbabwe for the falling price for the fibre. Press reports say the once-thriving asbestos mining industry in south eastern Quebec has been decimated, mainly for health and environmental reasons. Jeffrey Mine president Bernard Coulombe said the production at the mine has stopped, but he did not say it has closed. He said the company has put itself under bankruptcy protection to remain viable in the event the market comes back. Denis Hamel, director of the Montreal-based industry body the Asbestos Institute, said the two remaining mines in Canada produce about 180,000 tonnes, sold mainly in Asia. He said in the last 20 years the market for asbestos has moved to developing countries, adding: "The demand is still there, despite what people think about asbestos and its bad reputation." The Asbestos Institute and the Canadian government have spent millions in a worldwide promotion of their asbestos exports.

- [Canada.com](#)

Canada: Dying waitress wins second-hand smoke payout

A Canadian waitress who spent 40 years inhaling second-hand smoke at work will receive official government compensation for her terminal lung cancer. The ruling could prompt an Ontario-wide ban on smoking in bars and restaurants. The *Ottawa Citizen* reports that Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board had ruled in favour of non-smoker Heather Crowe, who said second-hand smoke was to blame for her illness. Crowe, 57, had worked for four decades in smoky bars, restaurants and hotels. Doctors say she has less than a year to live. Dr Robert Cushman, Ottawa's medical officer of health, told the paper that more and more workers may sue local authorities unless workplace safety rules are tightened to ban smoking. "I think, eventually, the government won't be able to afford not to," he said. Commenting on the award, Marsha Williams of the UK anti-tobacco campaigning group ASH said: "It would be no surprise at all if thousands of bar workers in this country are left concerned, or downright scared by this news. Employers in this country have been allowed to shirk their responsibilities to protect staff from passive smoke for far too long." An ASH survey last week found workers were overwhelmingly in support of workplace passive smoking controls, and criticised the UK safety watchdog for stalling on a new law ([Risks 74](#)).

- [Ottawa Citizen](#), [BBC News Online](#) and [Reuters Health](#)
- [ASH news release](#)

Global: Cancer in the system infects research agency

Unions worldwide are calling for urgent reform at the international agency evaluating workplace and environmental cancer risks, after new evidence revealed it has developed a dangerous industry bias ([Risks 70](#)). The call comes in a letter from the TUC and co-signed by international union bodies ICEM, IFBWW, ITGLWF, IFJ, IUF and TUTB and national union centres in Australia (ACTU) and the USA (AFL-CIO). The letter to Jerry M Rice, chief of the identification and evaluation unit at the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), says the union bodies are alarmed at "reports of conflicts of interest, bias toward industry and of questionable evaluation practices at IARC." The union letter concludes: "We feel at this time it is particularly important IARC distances itself - and is seen to distance itself - from any suggestion of improper corporate influence." Under Dr Rice, eight IARC cancer ratings were upgraded and 12 were downgraded. Under his predecessor, the cancer ratings for 38 chemicals were upgraded, and

none were downgraded. The US Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) has found evidence that almost all the recently convened chemical evaluation panels have been stacked in favour of industry-side representatives.

- [Union letter to IARC](#). For background information see [NRDC IARC page](#)

Japan: Naval base workers win asbestos payouts

Japanese workers afflicted by lung problems after asbestos exposure at a US naval base have been awarded 231 million yen (£1.2 million) in a court decision. "The central government failed to fulfill its responsibility to maintain safety," Presiding Judge Yukio Suyama said. The plaintiffs, who all worked at Yokosuka Naval Base, were seeking 313.5 million yen (£1.62 million) in compensation from the Japanese government under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the United States. They claimed Tokyo failed to seriously lobby the US government to deal with asbestos dust at the base. The lawsuit was filed in 1999 by nine former workers and eight relatives of three workers who died from asbestos-related diseases. The ruling was the first in a lung disease case at a US military base. The court ruled that the Japanese government had failed to enforce adequate safety standards at the base. Campaigners hope Japan, one of the developed world's few big asbestos importers, may now take a tougher stance on asbestos hazards.

- [The Asahi Shimbun](#)

Nigeria: Union wants safety standards in workplaces

Nigeria's Trade Union Congress (TUC) has called on the federal government to introduce strict workplace safety measures. The move follows allegations that lax safety standards and poor enforcement led to a deadly fire last month that razed a Nigerian factory killing dozens of workers ([Risks 72](#)). Calling for reform and an investigation into the tragedy, the TUC said the victims had "worked under semi-slavery conditions, like being stripped to their pants and locked up in the factory to prevent stealing," adding that the ministry of labour had never undertaken a safety inspection at the factory.

- [Times of Nigeria](#)

USA: Slow progress on deadly docks speed-up

Union leaders call it 'working safe', making sure every safety rule at the ports is followed to the letter. Members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union are angry they have been forced back to work after an unprecedented, pro-employer court intervention by President George W Bush in a dispute over escalating workloads. The Pacific Maritime Assn., which represents shipping lines and terminal operators, has vowed to seek sanctions against the union in the event of slowdowns. But the ILWU has claimed there's good reason for 'working safe': five deaths among its members so far this year, compared with one or two deaths a year normally. Union members contend that as cargo shipments have grown, so has the danger. Union president James Spinosa said: "Five people being killed on the waterfront in that short a time has to be reckoned with. And if that's a slowdown, then that's a slowdown, but that's the way we're going to work. We're going to work safe." ILWU has condemned the intervention of President Bush as 'anti-union collusion.'

- [ILWU news release and background documents.](#)
[News reports from the LA Times and the Wall Street Journal](#)

RESOURCES

CSP safety news

The new issue of *CSP safety news* is now online. It gives order details for the union's new *Safety Representatives Information Manual* (free to CSP reps, £15 other union members), information on training, a reps' questionnaire, and a news round-up.

- [CSP safety news](#)

Latest from GMB

General union GMB has added updated resources on [contractor health and safety](#) and on [safety reps' rights](#) to its health and safety webpages.

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!

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, we have 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, as is a TUC [leaflet](#) for safety reps. 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.

Turner and Newall asbestos victims speak out, 25 October

Turner and Newall asbestos victims are invited to a public meeting on Friday 25 October 2002 called by asbestos victims support groups throughout the UK. Government, employers and insurance companies ALL have responsibilities to asbestos victims, say the organisers. They say they are asking all those who support our call for justice for asbestos victims to support this important meeting. Speakers include: Tony Lloyd MP; Nigel Bryson, GMB; Anthony Coombs, solicitor; Jamie Gleave, administrator.

- [More information, Tony Whitston](#), telephone **0161 953 4037**

Sickness absence management conference, 1 November

The conference will demonstrate with the help of speakers from industry, healthcare, the trade union movement and the CBI, how the use of quality real time sickness absence data and a pro-active management approach can both achieve and maintain tangible reductions in employee absence levels, the organiser says.

- **Contact: [Cath Giel](#), Westlakes Scientific Consulting (WSC), The Princess Royal Building, Westlakes Science & Technology Park, Moor Row, Cumbria,**

CA24 3LN. Tel: 01946 514101

“No Sweat” conference, London, 23 November

Union organisers from the MexMode (formerly KukDong) factory in Mexico are to speak at the No Sweat conference at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London on 23 November. The KukDong factory produces for multinationals including Nike and Reebok. Nike tried to pull out of the factory after workers campaigning against poor workplace safety and employment conditions won union recognition. Registration £5 (discounts by negotiation), cheques payable to No Sweat. [More information](#). Email [No Sweat](#) or phone 07904 431 959.

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](#).

National Asbestos Conference, Scotland, 12 December

The conference is recommended for all those concerned about the impacts of asbestos exposure. It provides an ideal forum to examine practical measures for effectively implementing the new asbestos regulations. Speakers include union, enforcement and medical authorities and campaigners. Workshops on asbestos assessment, removal, use of contractors and information.

- **Conference venue: Management Centre, University of Stirling. Fee: trade unions/local government/voluntary sector; £75. Commercial organisations: £105. Enquiries and bookings: [Joan Pollock](#), Welfare Rights Representation Unit, West Dunbartonshire Council, 6-14 Bridge St, Dunbarton G82 1NT. Tel: 01389 738369 Fax: 01389 737051**

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 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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