

Risks

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HAZARDS
MAGAZINE



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

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The GMB, one of Britain's largest trade unions, wishes to appoint a Health and Environment Research and Policy Officer, based in Wimbledon, to provide specialist advice and guidance on health and safety at work. For details of how to apply (the deadline is 4 July) click [here](#).

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Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 7,000 subscribers and 1,500 on the TUC website. To receive this bulletin every week, click [here](#). [Past issues](#) [Useful links](#) [Disclaimer and Privacy statement](#).

ACTION

Safety in danger! Act now!

Health and safety enforcement could be scaled back dramatically if planned funding cuts go ahead ([Risks 104](#)). Prospect, the union representing HSE inspectors and specialists, says planned cuts in HSE's budget "cannot fail to have a detrimental impact on workplace safety." It says HSE is facing a 10 per cent cut in real terms over the next three years, with heavy losses of experienced staff. Prospect is urging MPs to intervene, and is asking them to write to minister for work Nick Brown to declare their "concern about the lack of investment in HSE which allows bad employers to get away with health and safety crimes." The union also wants MPs to "find out from your constituents when their employer was last visited by an HSE or a local authority inspector" as well as the numbers of workplace deaths and health and safety prosecutions in their constituency.

- [Prospects for safety](#) campaign page. **Cut risks, not safety workers – Prospect safety briefing [pdf format]**
- **Find out who's been prosecuted locally by using the HSE [prosecutions database](#)**
- **Make sure your MP is backing in the Prospect campaign. [Find your MP](#) - you only need to know your postcode**

FEATURE ON CONSTRUCTION SAFETY

Building sites are still danger zones for workers

The TUC has warned that Britain's building sites are still "danger zones" and has called on construction companies to reverse the dangerous subcontracting trend. Commenting on the publication of the latest construction industry "Key Performance Indicators," TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "UK building sites are still danger zones for workers. Eighty-five people were killed last year in construction and over 4,860 people were seriously injured. This does not include the thousands more who end their working lives in pain caused by chronic

back-injuries, respiratory or dermatological problems and other work related ill-health problems." He said the latest KPI report was "encouraging" but "clearly shows that the companies which employ their operatives directly out-perform companies which continue to use so called self-employed, agency and other forms of contracted labour. Unfortunately the companies employing directly are in the minority." Barber added: "Only by construction companies taking full responsibility for the people they employ, providing proper welfare facilities and ensuring their safety on site will the UK construction industry become the world class industry it purports to be."

- [TUC news release. Constructing Excellence news release. DTI Key Performance Indicators webpages](#)

Which white van will you be leaving in today?



The HSE has launched a "Don't fall for it" campaign to highlight the danger from falls, the top cause of death, disability and injury on construction sites. The initiative was launched on the first day of a two-week national blitz by HSE construction inspectors visiting on sites across the country and backed up by a national advertising campaign. The advertisements ask "Which white van will you be leaving in today?"

and show an injured worker who has fallen from height leaving the site in an ambulance. They will appear on billboards and in national newspapers and trade publications throughout the month of June. Since the beginning of April this year, six construction workers have died after falling from height, HSE says. Falls from height remain the single biggest cause of death, disability and injury in construction in Great Britain, accounting for almost half of all deaths and nearly a third of major injuries in 2001/2. In the last five years, 211 workers have died and 8,418 workers have sustained major injuries from falls from height, HSE says. George Brumwell, general secretary of construction union Ucat said: "This is a welcome initiative to address the continuing needless loss of life on our construction sites because of falls from height. Time and time again the evidence shows that the majority of these deaths could have been avoided if only the work had been properly planned and organised and the relevant equipment had been on site and had been correctly used. There can be no excuse for failing to assess this obvious risk and for not using the well-known solutions that would ensure the work can be carried out safely."

- [HSE news release and campaign webpage. People](#)

working in the construction industry interested in finding out more can call 08457 181819 for a "Falls from height action pack" that includes the free "Height safe" video and a poster. Also see: [Europe: SLIC construction safety campaign](#)

FEATURE ON WORKING TIME

Union plans £15m fund to cut working hours

A £15 million union fighting fund should be spent on a campaign to cut the working week of manufacturing workers to 35 hours, Amicus-AEEU general secretary Derek Simpson has said. The union leader argues that UK employees are working themselves into the ground while European workers enjoy a shorter working week. He said that despite evidence that better employment protection led to improved productivity and more jobs, the government's "inadequate response is to reiterate their commitment to a permanent opt-out of the Working Time Directive," adding under the UK's lax redundancy rules "workers have the opportunity to work themselves into the ground while they are waiting to lose their jobs." The union's fighting fund was set up in 1989 when engineering union members gave a voluntary levy of £1 each to support a campaign which led to working hours being cut from 39 to 37 a week.

- [Ananova](#)

Pilots call for minister to keep his word on hours

Britain's airline pilots are calling on transport minister John Spellar to keep his word and oppose new proposals on airliner flying hours coming from the European Parliament ([Risks 92](#)). The minister has previously accepted some of the proposals are unsafe and need to be changed, says pilots' union BALPA. The union's general secretary Jim McAuslan said: "When the proposals came out we were shocked that all the scientific and medical evidence was being ignored and that some of the flying schedules agreed at the behest of the airlines were positively dangerous." He added the union fears the European Commission may "nod through" the proposals, without considering evidence from UK government experts. "John Spellar has said he will not let the proposals go through unchanged. Now he must be as good as his word and do battle with the Commission," said McAuslan. Pilot organisations throughout the European Union "are unanimous in their condemnation of these proposals from the European Parliament and of this neglect of duty by the European Commission," he said.

- [BALPA news release](#)

Train drivers threaten strike over dangerous hours

Train drivers may have to resort to industrial action in an attempt to cut a 'dangerously long' working week of up to 70 hours, their union has warned. Members of the train drivers' union Aslef are under increasing pressure to work overtime, amid evidence that sleep deprivation is making the network unsafe, Aslef general secretary Mick Rix told the union's annual conference. "If there is no regulation on hours and if companies still carry on trying to exploit working arrangements, the only option will be industrial action," he said. "It is the last thing drivers want to do, but you hear so many horror stories about unsafe acts at work committed because of sleep deprivation. Hours are getting longer and increasing the chances of a major accident." The union's *Drive down the hours* campaign is seeking a maximum 48-hour working week with an average of 35 hours. Mr Rix said it was "not uncommon" for Aslef members working on goods trains to be on duty for 60 to 70 hours, with employees of passenger operators doing the same.

- [Aslef Drive down the hours campaign. The Independent. The Scotsman](#)

UNION NEWS

Call to strengthen violence laws

Public service union UNISON Scotland is urging ministers to strengthen proposed anti-social behaviour legislation after its *Trauma 2003* survey suggested that 99 per cent of Scots think all attacks on public service workers should all be treated as serious assaults. The union criticised Scottish Executive proposals because they apply only to emergency workers. Scottish health organiser Jim Devine said: "This survey involving over 1,200 members highlights lack of training, lack of support and an attitude that seems to suggest that physical and verbal abuse 'is part of the job'." He added: "We are calling on the Scottish Executive to abandon their complacency on violence against staff and to strengthen their anti-social behaviour legislation. The Scottish public are clearly saying that attacks on any staff delivering public services must be treated as serious assaults." Social workers, nursery nurses, planners, environmental health officers, health visitors and workers in many other jobs have been victims, he said.

- [UNISON Scotland. BBC News Online](#)

Photographer injured by Geneva stun grenade

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has protested to the Swiss government after a member was injured by a stun grenade in Geneva. Freelance photographer Guy Smallman was shot at by riot police in Geneva on 1 June. He was covering the G8 summit and the protests against it for the agency Images San Frontieres. According to witnesses, he was injured when police fired stun grenades into a demonstration and one of them exploded nearby. Smallman suffered serious muscle damage to his leg and underwent two hours of surgery and will need skin grafts. The NUJ is in contact with him and is helping arrange his treatment and return to London. NUJ's John Toner said the union is making a "strong protest" to the Swiss government, adding: "Once again police have seized the opportunity of public disorder to target a working journalist." Aidan White, general secretary of the Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), said: "There should be a full inquiry into this incident. By all accounts the police action was heavy-handed, reckless and put media people covering the event at risk."

- [NUJ news release](#). [IFJ news release](#). [International News Safety Institute website](#)

Usdaw gets £16m compensation for members

Shopworkers' union Usdaw secured more than £16 million compensation last year for members and their families. Personal injury cases made up more than £14 million of the total "proving, once again, Usdaw members have no need for the so-called 'no win no fee' deals available on the high street," said Usdaw. In total there were 11,670 separate applications for legal assistance from members last year. Over half - more than 6,500 cases - were for accident and employment-related claims. "We take great pride in the quality service we provide for our members," said Usdaw legal officer Kate O'Neill. "The figures for 2002 clearly show that the Legal Plus service is a major benefit to our members and their families. Last year the service reached more members than ever before."

- [Usdaw news release](#)

Union tackles summer SARS

Private sector union Amicus is giving holiday season advice to thousands of members working in airports and hospitals who could be

at risk from the SARS virus. A briefing distributed to Amicus health and safety officials throughout the UK gives advice on good workplace practices and on how to spot SARS symptoms. Amicus represents more than 70,000 NHS laboratory staff and thousands of cabin crew, baggage handlers, airport fire crews and technical staff in every UK airport. Roger Lyons, joint general secretary of Amicus, said: "As millions fly in and out of the UK over the summer it is essential we protect our workers most at risk, whether they are air stewards, baggage handlers or laboratory scientists." Chris Ball, head of the Amicus working environment unit, said: "We are providing facts and advice in an accurate unsensational way. We believe the risks of infection at present are very small, but circumstances can change and perceptions can change, and the epidemiology of SARS is so little understood that it would be foolish to ignore the threat."

- [Amicus news release](#)
- **Find out more from [Labourstart's unions and SARS news page](#) and the [Hazards SARS guide](#)**

OTHER NEWS

Employers must meet the full cost of safety failures

The government plans to reform employers' liability insurance so safer employers pay less. Minister for work Nick Brown, presenting the findings of a cross-departmental review, said: "We will move swiftly with business, the insurance industry and employee representatives to develop a programme to address the issues raised in this report. Matters of legal costs, rehabilitation, the issue of long-term occupational disease risks and enforcement action lie at the heart of this agenda." Among the government's short-term aims is to see "fairer 'risk related' premiums" to reward companies with a strong health and safety record. Welcoming the move, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "Employer liability insurance needs to reward safe working practices and protect the rights of victims. That means lower premiums for good employers but, in turn, employers must meet the full cost of health and safety failures." He added that unions wanted the government to be "more proactive about the long-term reform of rehabilitation and compensation." The DWP announcement was also welcomed by the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL). Colin Ettinger, vice-president of APIL, said: "It is quite right that firms which don't care about the safety of their employees should be made to pay. Employees have the right to go to work and come home again unharmed."

- [TUC news release](#) and original [submission to the review](#). [APIL news release](#) [[pdf format](#)]
- [DWP news release](#). Full report: *Review of Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance* [[pdf format](#)]. Related [OFT report](#) on the liability industry
- [ABI news release](#). [CBI news release](#). [EEF news release](#). [Ananova](#).

Coroners' system faces shake-up

Workplace deaths should continue to be investigated at coroner's inquests, a new report has recommended. The Coroners Review Team, an independent committee of experts convened by the government, has spent nearly two years looking at the coroner's court system. A draft report from the team last year attracted criticism from HSE ([Risks 82](#)), unions, victims' organisations and the Centre for Corporate Accountability for proposing the removal of the legal requirement to hold an inquest into a work-related death ([Risks 75](#)). However, the final report recommends inquests into "any traumatic workplace death in which industrial process or activity is implicated" and specialist coroners to deal with workplace deaths. It also calls for the HSE and other regulatory bodies to be required to give reasons to families if they decide not to prosecute following a death. TUC's Owen Tudor said: "The review team has recognised that deaths at work are major events which need to be properly investigated." The TUC is considering whether to lobby Home Office Ministers over the implementation of the review.

- [Centre for Corporate Accountability](#) briefing on the recommendations. [BBC News Online](#)
- Home Office [announcement](#) by Paul Goggins MP

Transco gas deaths charge dropped

Appeal court judges in Scotland have thrown out a culpable homicide charge brought against gas pipeline firm Transco following the deaths of a family of four. If the company had been convicted, it would have been the first time in Scottish legal history that a charge of corporate killing had been successful ([Risks 75](#)). However, in a ruling at the appeal court in Edinburgh, judges said the charge was "irrelevant". Transco was charged following the deaths of four members of the Findlay family in Larkhall, in Lanarkshire, in December 1999. It still faces charges under the Health and Safety at Work Act which carry an unlimited fine. The Centre for Corporate Accountability says the appeal

court decision overturns the judgment of Lord Carloway in a lower court, which had ruled under Scotland's culpable homicide law there was no barrier to a company facing charges. In its original indictment, the Crown Office has claimed that Transco had shown "a complete and utter disregard for the safety of the public" and particularly that of the couple and their children.

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

Safety probe at National Semiconductor plant

Fears of a chemical leak at the National Semiconductor Greenock plant in Greenock, Scotland, sparked a full-scale alert last week. Production halted after 550 workers were evacuated from one part of the plant and an ambulance was called to take three workers to hospital. The scare led to a chemical response team being sent in. Members of the Phase II campaign, a grassroots group that has been campaigning about health risks at the plant, have demanded an inquiry. But National Semiconductor's managing director Gerry Edwards has demanded a meeting with health chiefs, claiming the ambulance service over-reacted to their request for help after a woman fainted and another woman and man felt ill. An ambulance service spokesperson said: "We deployed the appropriate resources in response to the symptoms being described over the phone and the possibility of a chemical spillage." National Semiconductor has been embroiled in controversy for years, after revelations it employed a PR firm in a dirty tricks campaign to harass and discredit critics of the plant ([Risks 15](#)). An HSE study last year found unexpectedly high levels of certain cancers at the plant.

- **GreenockTelegraph stories:** [Safety probe at Nat-Semi](#), [Drama unfolds at plant](#) and [Full-scale alert hits Nat-Semi](#). **Background on the [National Semiconductor dirty tricks campaign](#)**

Better behaviour on HSE research

Britain's top safety body has revised its research strategy after criticism from TUC. The Health and Safety Commission and Executive (HSC/E) Strategic Research Outlook (SRO) for 2003 offers a guide to HSC/E's research priorities and activities. HSE chief scientist Dr Paul Davies commented: "We aim to make more direct and transparent the link between our research priorities and activities and our business aims and objectives." He added: "HSE is currently undergoing significant internal change, which includes the way in which research

needs are identified across the organisation." TUC criticised the earlier draft for paying too much attention to "behavioural safety" approaches, and called for more attention to the positive role which workers' own initiatives can make, including the union safety effect, worker safety advisers, inspection notices and women's health and safety ([Risks 87](#)). HSE says comments on the earlier draft ([Risks 76](#)) "have been fully taken into account." HSE is no longer funding any studies into behavioural safety and will be developing a programme of research into worker involvement in consultation with the TUC.

- [HSE news release](#). **Strategic Research Outlook (SRO) for 2003** [[pdf format](#)] and [HSE research webpage](#). **Hard copies from: Simon Armitage, Chief Scientist Unit, HSE, PO Box 1064, Sheffield S3 7YB**

Unhealthy attitude to sick leave

Employers are continuing to use sick leave records to decide who to give the chop, a new survey reveals. One in seven (15 per cent) UK employers are using absence records when making redundancy selections, according to *Employee Benefits* magazine. Other findings included 24 per cent of employers do not know how much sickness absence is costing them and 79 per cent monitor the causes of sickness absence. TUC's Owen Tudor said: "This is a real case of shooting the messenger rather than listening to the message. How can anyone run a business effectively by ignoring the facts and sacking the sick?"

- [Personnel Today](#)

INTERNATIONAL

Canada: Jury calls for better workplace violence rules

The government of British Columbia, Canada, should review how it dismisses employees and should ensure that workers get an annual job evaluation, a coroner's jury has determined. The call came after an inquest into a double-murder suicide last year at a government office. Shortly after he was dismissed, stressed out regional manager Dick Anderson killed his supervisor, Jim McCracken, and union steward Dave Mardon before turning the gun on himself. The jury called for an expanded definition of workplace violence rules to cover implied threats by one worker to another. It also wants the government to review those rules each year and to make workplace violence training programmes mandatory. The jury says any complaints of violence in

the workplace should be documented. The recommendations were welcomed by government employees' union BCGEU. "The jury's recommendations for improved training, a better reporting structure and tightened safety regulations should result in better awareness and a greater capacity to address potential risks in the workplace," said union president George Heyman. "It came out repeatedly in the testimony that Anderson was not dealing well with stress. An expert psychiatrist testified that constant re-organisation and 40 per cent staff cuts in the ministry contributed to significantly increased stress for Anderson."

- [BCGEU news release. Global and Mail](#)

Europe: SLIC construction safety campaign

A Europe-wide health and safety inspectors' campaign on construction safety kicked off at the start of June 2003. Europe's Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC) says the campaign, which will run through 2003 and 2004, will focus on falls from heights. SLIC campaign materials say more than 1,300 people die in construction accidents each year in the European Union. Worldwide, construction workers are three times more likely to be killed and twice as likely to be injured as workers in other occupations. SLIC guidance says: "Consulting the workforce is a requirement," adding, "using their knowledge helps to ensure hazards are correctly spotted and workable solutions implemented." In Britain, the HSE this week launched its contribution to the initiative, the *Don't fall for it* campaign.

- [European Agency SLIC webpage. International union site safety information: IFBWW latest safety report and Global Programme on Health and Safety. HSE's "Don't fall for it" campaign](#)

Thailand: Workplace safety campaign grows stronger

Labour groups in Thailand have completed a packed programme of events to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Kader factory fire ([Risks 103](#)). A report from the Asian Network for the Rights Of Occupational Accident Victims (ANROAV) includes details of events related to the toy factory tragedy that killed 188 in 1993, as well as information on the growing health and safety campaign in the region. A number of organisations active in the region participated in two weeks of activities, including alliances of workers' and women's organisations. The ANROAV report, however, suggests there is still a great deal of work to do. "Workers still do not think that occupational safety and



problem," it says. The groups did get a government and labour minister to contribute to other top priorities are to encourage the the Occupational Safety draft bill, currently tion, and to create a Kader fund to provide compensation and financial support to families of the victims ([Risk 105](#)).

- [ANROAV website](#), [Kader resources](#) and [photographs of the Kader fire commemoration](#). Also see: [Australia Asia Worker Links \(AAWL\)](#) and the [AAWL Regional Health and Safety Project](#), [Asia Monitor Resource Center \(AMRC\)](#) and the [Asian Occupational Health, Safety and Environment Institute \(OHSEI\)](#)

RESOURCES

How to use the internet for health and safety

A free 'teach yourself' guide to using the internet to solve your occupational health and safety headaches is available online. The "Internet for health and safety" tutorial is aimed primarily at students of health and safety, particularly on vocational courses. The initiative, part of the RDN Virtual Training Suite - a national internet service backed by further education funding bodies - "enables students to find key health and safety organisations on the web, trades union sites on health and safety, eLearning materials about first aid, environmental health and much more!"

- [Internet for health and safety at work](#)

The price of fish

In the US, workers in commercial fishing face a fatality risk 28 times greater than the average for all occupations. In *The price of fish*, top workplace photojournalist Earl Dotter illustrates the awful dangers facing men and women in the industry. The exhibit, based on Dotter's work in the fisheries off of Maine and Massachusetts - setting for the real life drama that became the George Clooney movie *The Perfect Storm* - also shows how commercial pressures can increase the risks. Work in the industry has all hazards of a dangerous factory job on land, from manual handling, to heavy equipment, to sharp knives, combined with frequent battles with nature. According to Dotter: "I want, first and foremost, to command the attention of commercial

combined with frequent battles with nature. According to want, first and foremost, to command the attention of co fishermen who have survived serious accidents and brush at work. I believe that these photographs, combined with fishermen's words, are an important medium that allows communicate with each other. It is a means for them to e specific practical steps toward a safer commercial fishing



- **[The price of fish: Our nation's most perilous job takes life and limb in New England. Exhibit review in the Portland Press Herald](#)**

EVENTS AND COURSES

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR APRIL TO JULY 2003:

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

Law enforcement and corporate accountability, 7 July

Government ministers, MPs from all main political parties, trade unions, employer organisations, bereaved families and the Health and Safety Executive are all speaking at the TUC-Centre for Corporate Accountability 3rd joint conference on "Law enforcement and corporate accountability." Speakers include: Rt. Hon. Nick Brown MP, minister for work; Brendan Barber, TUC; Janet Asherson, CBI; Anne Jones, Simon Jones Memorial Campaign; Neal Stone, HSE; Lord Falconer; Home Office minister; Patricia Peters, Institute of Directors; Tony Lloyd MP, chair, TU group of Labour MPs; Ross Cranston QC MP, former Solicitor General; and many more...

- **[Registration/further details](#) for the Law enforcement and corporate accountability conference, Monday 7 July, TUC, Congress Centre, Great Russell St, London WC1. Standard fee £25 (£40 for lawyers and businesses). Contact [Sugar Munthali](#) at CCA on 0207 490 4494**

Hazards Conference, 5-7 September

The Hazards Conference will be in London. Margaret Sharkey at the London Hazards Centre is the co-ordinator of the London end of the organisation. You can contact her via e-mail at margaret@lhc.org.uk or

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European Week for Health and Safety at Work, 13-19 October

The theme for the Week in 2003 will be 'dangerous substances' (EU Agency [press release](#)). The TUC will be stressing the hierarchy of control, and especially the need for substitutes and general toxic use reduction strategies. Key hazards dealt with will include asbestos, asthmagens and solvents. [Future years' themes](#) have also now been decided.

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](#).

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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