

Risks

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HAZARDS
MAGAZINE



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Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others,

read each week by over 7,500 subscribers and 1,500 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.

UNION NEWS

Safety on the union agenda

Unions are to debate health and safety priorities at September's annual TUC Congress. In the health and safety section of the preliminary agenda, Protecting people at work, unions propose campaign priorities for TUC and measures they believe the government should take to improve the world of work. HSE union Prospect and bakers' union BFAWU both call for big increases in HSE resources. Construction union UCATT says the government's corporate manslaughter proposals are flawed and calls for an end to crown immunity, a corporate killing law "within the lifetime of the government," and for directors to be made accountable for safety crimes. Usdaw calls for action on violence and Accord and CSP for action on stress. The Musicians' Union says the government should be pressed to introduce an approved code of practice to protect workers from passive smoking. Elsewhere on the agenda, PCS criticises "work till you drop policies" and calls for government research and measures to address work-related stress and "a legal strategy to enforce the HSE Code" on stress management. Proposals on the rights of migrant workers and seafarers also include calls for safer work. If Congress delegates accept proposals they become a part of TUC's policy and work plans.

- **TUC Congress 2003 [webpage](#) and preliminary agenda [[pdf format](#)] – see section 8, Protecting people at work, for main health and safety motions.**

Amicus seeks the time of our lives

Amicus is pushing forward with its campaign for a better, less stressful, balance between life and work. A series of "the time of our lives" regional conferences for union reps in the autumn will explain the health and safety implications of excessive working hours and will address "issues around productivity and negotiating away excessive

working hours.” The union says “most victims of the long hours culture do not get any direct financial reward for staying late at work, so money is not the only answer.” Amicus says research has shown widespread hours abuse, with employers cajoling employees to sign agreements to work long hours, threatening that otherwise their jobs would become insecure. It adds that employers’ organisations are lining up to defend an extension of the opt-out that means workers can be asked to sign away their rights to a 48-hour working time ceiling. TUC has argued that “Burn-out Britain” will persist until the opt-out goes.

- [Amicus news release](#). **Sick of long hours? Do something about it – TUC’s [Worksmart working time guidance](#) and [Hazards Get-a-life! guide](#).**

TGWU’s holiday farm warning

The Transport and General Workers Union is stepping up its campaign to stop under 16s driving tractors and to ensure that all children are kept away from dangerous working areas on farms. “Sunny summer months, especially when the weather is so good, as it has been recently, mean children spend lots of time outside,” said Peter Allenson, the TGWU national secretary for agriculture. He added: “We don’t want to restrict their spirit of adventure. We want to make sure the adults in charge exercise their responsibilities and protect children by not allowing them anywhere near dangerous machinery let alone operating it.” Allenson added: “We are demanding that the government acts to change the 50-year old law and makes it illegal to put children at risk by allowing them to drive tractors and operate machinery.” TGWU says the campaign has public backing. The union’s survey this year showed that nearly 20 per cent of people thought there should be a total ban on children working on farms and 65 per cent said children should not be able to use farm equipment ([Risks 113](#)).

- [TGWU news release](#).

Union calls on shop workers to stand up and be counted

The UK’s retail union says the “biggest day in Usdaw’s history” is planned for Wednesday 17 September, when the nation will be told to show some respect for UK shopworkers. Usdaw says nationwide activities will mark the first National Respect Day for shopworkers.

Deputy general secretary John Hannett said: "On the day we're aiming to make everyone aware of our message that shopworkers deserve to go to work free from the fear of attack and abuse. We are calling on employers, the government, the police, and the local authorities to help us make the workplace safer for the 2.5 million people who work in retail and for the millions of consumers who make up the shopping public." He added: "I want to see as many Usdaw members as possible banging the drum for our Freedom From Fear campaign on September 17. We're also hoping to get senior government support on the day." Usdaw says it wants as many members as possible to get involved in the day.

- [Udaw news release](#) and [briefing on 17 September activities](#).

OTHER NEWS

Work deaths "a blemish on a civilised society"

Britain's top safety boss has given a cautious welcome to workplace fatalities statistics showing a 10 per cent reduction in the number of deaths at work last year. Bill Callaghan, chair of the Health and Safety Commission, said: "The accident statistics give us some grounds for optimism – but no room for complacency." The new HSE statistics show 226 people were killed at work in 2002/03, 25 fewer than in the previous year and the second year in which the rate of worker fatal injury has fallen. HSE says it is the lowest rate recorded – and part of an overall downward trend stretching back some 20 years, although this drop has coincided with a dramatic decline in manufacturing and mining in Britain. Bill Callaghan said the statistics are "encouraging" but added "226 deaths also represent continuing failure. Worker fatalities are a blemish on a civilised society. They mark a failure of a basic human right – to have our health and safety protected." He added that occupational diseases add to the toll, with 6,000 people dying each year from work-related cancers alone.

- [HSE news release](#) and [short statistics summary](#).
Statistics of Fatal Injuries 2002/03, free from the Safety and Enforcement Statistics Unit, HSE, Room 403, Daniel House, Bootle, Merseyside L20 7HE, tel: 0151 951 3864/4600 or online in [pdf format](#).

The fall and rise of construction death figures

Construction deaths dropped again last year, but have since taken a dramatic upturn, Health and Safety Executive figures show. HSE says 71 workers were killed in the construction industry last year (2002/03), the second lowest figure recorded. This is a fall from 80 fatalities in 2001/02 and 105 fatalities in 2000/01. The rate of fatal construction injuries to workers also fell, with a drop of 9 per cent to 4.0 per 100,000 workers in 2002/03, also the second lowest on record. HSE construction boss Kevin Myers said: "Every fatality is one too many, most are preventable, each a tragedy for those affected. However it is encouraging to see a further reduction in the number of people killed while at work in the construction industry during 2002/03, compared with previous years. This reduction demonstrates that, despite the hazardous nature of much construction work, it is possible to manage the risks and to reduce the number of fatal injuries to construction workers." He added: "Unfortunately, the reduction of fatalities in 2002/03 has so far, not been carried forward into the current year. There were 27 deaths associated with the construction industry reported to HSE in the first three months of this reporting year, which started in April." In 2002/03, 107 (47 per cent) of worker fatalities occurred in construction (71) or agriculture (36).

- [HSE news release.](#)

Unions are central to site deaths prevention drive

Unions are working with the Health and Safety Executive in a bid to reduce the top causes of construction site deaths. Health and Safety Commission chair Bill Callaghan said "we have developed a maintenance fitters project in response to detailed analysis of previous accident statistics showing that maintenance and electrical fitters are two groups of workers at significant risk of death or injury due to falls from height." He added: "A toolbox talk containing information about ladder safety was distributed via UCATT (Union of Construction Allied Trades Technicians), Amicus-AEEU and the Electrical Contractors Association. This pilot is now being assessed as a way of improving the health and safety of maintenance and electrical fitters. And such initiatives will be supported by the introduction, next year, of the Work at Height Regulations." He added that "irrespective of where fatalities occur, for the most part there's no great mystery to why they occur – it's just a failure to do the simple things well - to assess the risks, control those risks and make sure that workers are properly instructed

and protected. Even so, putting matters right is easier said than done – and unless we work together, with the support of employers, employees and their safety representatives, we won't secure the improvements we need."

- [HSE news release. Preventing falls from height in construction.](#)

Boss jailed for workers' deaths

The head of a Midlands paint stripping firm has been sentenced to nine months in jail for the manslaughter of two of his workers. Mumtaz Hussain, 43, and 22-year-old Ghulum Sarwar died four years ago after being overcome by toxic fumes at ENG engineering, in West Bromwich. The firm's boss, 49-year-old Ian Morris was found guilty of manslaughter at an earlier hearing ([Risks 113](#)). Sentencing Mr Morris at Birmingham Crown Court on 30 July, Justice Beatson reminded him that the jury had agreed he had been grossly negligent and had failed to ensure the factory had been properly ventilated. The judge added that nine months was the shortest sentence he could give him in the circumstances.

- [BBC News Online. Related information: TUC/Hazards deadly business campaign.](#)

Migrant labourers face deadly work threat

A spate of deaths involving foreign labourers on UK farms has highlighted the risks facing migrant labourers. A minibus carrying eight immigrant casual farm workers collided on 7 July with a high-speed commuter train on an unmanned level crossing in the Vale of Evesham, Worcestershire. Three died and six others, including the van driver, a 24-year-old Iraqi called Adnan Karim, were seriously injured. There has been speculation that the driver failed to understand a sign in English instructing him to contact the signal box to ensure that the line was clear. Mr Karim has been charged with three counts of manslaughter. The use of migrant labour on UK farms is not rare. A *Guardian* report in July revealed how 2,000 Chinese labourers have arrived in King's Lynn in a human trafficking industry described by the authorities as "illegal from top to bottom." On 30 July an inquest said the deaths of two Polish labourers on a Twyford fruit farm were "accidental deaths." The men were killed when they became entangled with a rope-reeling machine capable of spinning at up to 20mph, the

inquest was told. Farm manager Jeffery Dever admitted one of the dead men did not have a very good grasp of English and he had had to ask another of the Polish men who worked on the farm to translate his instructions.

- [The Guardian](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Breakdown worker killed on M-way

A vehicle recovery worker has been killed as she helped a motorist on the hard shoulder of a motorway. The woman, who has not been named, was attending a broken down vehicle when she was struck by a car. Breakdown recovery organisation AA, which said the victim was not one of its employees, has called for the government to improve safety on hard shoulders. Spokesperson Rebecca Rees, said: "This highlights the dangers faced by people who work or break down on motorway hard shoulders. Every year there are about 20 deaths and about 250 injuries on motorway hard shoulders, representing around 10 per cent of all motorway deaths and injuries in the UK."

Campaigners want the government to build lay-bys next to hard shoulders to provide a safe area for motorists and breakdown workers. The TUC is represented on the steering group of the key campaign organisation, the Occupational Road Safety Alliance.

- [BBC News Online](#). [Occupational Road Safety Alliance](#).

Doctors could sue over hours

Junior doctors may be able to start suing hospitals as three out of four fail to meet targets on long hours, the British Medical Association (BMA) has warned. On 1 August limits on the hours worked as well as guaranteed breaks became part of junior doctors' contractual rights. The move is a first step towards compliance with the Working Time Regulations, which will be phased in for doctors from August 2004. Hospital trusts that do not abide by the limits on hours could have training posts taken away in addition to the possibility of legal action from disgruntled doctors. Under the doctors' New Deal agreement of 1991, doctors should not be on their feet working for more than 56 hours a week, or do more than 72 hours of total work, including time spent on call. The July 2003 annual meeting of BMA's Junior Doctors Committee heard that thousands of junior doctors are still working outside these agreed safe limits on hours. BMA's cohort study of medical graduates showed that more than half of senior house officers

and registrars typically worked above the 56 hour weekly limit, and almost a quarter worked in excess of 70 hours a week. A May survey from BMA also confirmed excessive working hours are still widespread ([Risks 106](#)).

- [BBC News Online. BMA news release and report from BMA Junior Doctors Committee annual meeting.](#)

Toilet waste “hampers rail repairs”

Toilet waste from trains is building up on parts of the rail network, affecting track inspections and raising fears about health risks to staff. One track-worker told *BBC News Online* the problem meant some maintenance work was not being carried out. He said the problem demoralised staff, who feared for their health. Rail safety experts are studying the possible risk of workers contracting disease and the effect on staff morale. A Rail Safety & Standards Board spokesperson said the study's findings were three months away, but samples of discharge were being tested for disease bugs such as hepatitis A and gastroenteritis. A spokesperson for rail union RMT said “this is a biological source of danger which is too often not treated with the urgency it deserves.” All new trains are able to store their waste in retention tanks, but the old “slam-door” rolling stock and some high-speed diesel trains still dump it on the tracks.

- [BBC News Online news story and background.](#)

Working mothers are “too stressed”

Flexible hours and other “family friendly” employment policies are of limited help to working mothers if their work spills over too much into their home life and they feel overloaded and under stress while at work, according to a new study. The report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found the quality of working time may have as much impact on family relationships as the amount of time spent at work. The researchers suggest that “family-friendly” policies can be improved by putting more effort into reducing stress in the workplace. They add that more attention could be paid to controlling workloads, managing the intensity of work and insuring that goals and targets are achievable in the time available. Report co-author Tracey Reynolds said: “Family-friendly workplace policies and practices may have helped some of the mothers we interviewed to modify their time schedules, but they were

ineffective in helping them to deal with the stresses of paid work and the strains that they placed on family relationships.”

- [JRF news release](#) and [report summary](#). [Ananova](#). [BBC News Online](#).
- For union advice on family-friendly work, see the TUC's [Changing Times](#) website.

Holidays mean hard work

More than half the UK's workers will not take their full holiday entitlement this year and those that do will end up stressed to the eyeballs as they struggle to clear their desks. A poll of over 5,000 workers for recruitment website reed.co.uk showed that 60 per cent were too busy to take all their annual leave. And those who were going away were putting in extra hours to finish work commitments before they left the office for a summer break. One in five said they suffered from stress because of the extra work they were putting in. Reed reports that the “pre-holiday tension” was resulting from workers putting in an average extra nine hours in the days before taking a holiday.

- [Reed.co.uk](#) and [survey report](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Sky News](#).

INTERNATIONAL

Global: Concerns over trucker safety

Fatigue related road traffic accidents are causing concern worldwide, the global transport workers' union federation ITF has said. The union body, which is preparing for its fatigue-themed International Road Transport Workers' Day of Action on 13 October, said there is public concern in more and more countries about the dangers of drivers being put under pressure to work excessive hours or break speed limits. In Japan, a spate of fatal motorway accidents involving trucks led to 14 deaths and 29 serious injuries between 18 June to 2 July in eight collisions between trucks and other vehicles. Press reports have blamed increased competition between companies as a result of deregulation in the trucking sector. A survey by Unyu-Roren, the Japanese transport workers' union federation, found nearly one in five drivers report working more than 60 hours of overtime a month,

together with an increase in the number admitting to speeding. ITF says in the US – where there are plans to increase the legal driving stretch from 10 to 11 hours - the Department of Transportation estimates that 755 fatalities and 19,705 injuries result from fatigued drivers each year. The ITF campaign is calling for stricter regulations on drivers' hours and for their proper enforcement.

- [ITF News Online](#). [ITF fatigue kills webpages](#).

Global: Preventable, predictable and all too common

Knowledge of the risks doesn't mean employers will do anything about them, tragedies this week show – even when those risks have been known from antiquity. A blast this week ripped through a fireworks factory in northern China, killing 29 people and injuring at least 141 others. The explosion at the Guoxi fireworks factory in Wangkou, Hebei province, completely destroyed the main workroom at the factory and buildings up to 300 feet away were damaged. In India, three children were among six people killed when explosives for a Bollywood film stunt blew up in a Bombay slum. Twenty-five people were also injured by the blast which destroyed the home of a studio employee. The employee, Dilnawaz Khan, was killed along with his wife and at least three children. Police said he was storing the explosives at his home. Some neighbouring houses were damaged and at least four of the wounded are in a critical condition.

- **Ananova reports on the [China](#) and [India](#) tragedies.**

New Zealand: Unions needed for safe chemical handling

A New Zealand government inquiry has recognised the need for worker involvement in the prevention of exposures to hazardous substances at work. Greg Lloyd, health and safety adviser with national union federation CTU, said the findings of the Ministerial Inquiry into the Management of Certain Hazardous Substances "backs up the CTU experience that greater worker participation in hazard management will result in much less exposure to toxic chemicals." He added: "Workers have been aware of the problem for many years, and employers have been slow to acknowledge the connection between ill-health and disease and exposure to hazardous substances." The union body backed the inquiry's finding that the official compensation agency ACC was failing to recognise some chemical related health problems. "If a worker displays symptoms associated with chemicals used at the

workplace, there should be an automatic assumption that the condition has occurred as a result of the workplace environment, and appropriate support and compensation be provided," Greg Lloyd said.

- [NZCTU news release](#). [Ministry of Labour news release](#). [Ministerial Inquiry into the Management of Certain Hazardous Substances](#).

USA: Workers hit by depression era hours

US workers are facing work pressures not seen since the great depression. A 27 July 2003 article in the *Washington Post* notes: "Americans manage to live with the stingiest vacation allotment in the industrialised world - 8.1 days after a year on the job, 10.2 days after three years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics." And it's getting worse, the article says: "We're now logging more hours on the job than we have since the 1920s. Almost 40 per cent of us work more than 50 hours a week." Critics says the strategy is damaging for both productivity and health. The tab paid by business for job stress is \$150 billion (£93 bn) a year, according to one study. Researchers add that vacations can cure even the worst form of stress – burnout – by re-gathering crashed emotional resources. The Bush administration, meanwhile, is reforming overtime rules so the lowest paid workers could end up working long hours without overtime pay. "These proposals amount to a playbook telling employers how to cheat workers," said Mark Wilson, an attorney for the Communications Workers of America with vast experience in overtime law. "It's as illegal as it is immoral."

- [Confined Space](#). [Washington Post](#). [CWA news release](#). [Listen to the union arguments online](#).
- [Get-a-life! Unions fight for better work](#).

USA: Rising job stress could hit the bottom line

Mounting stress in the workplace is reaching burnout levels as more workers report feeling unable to keep up with the demands of their jobs. The rise in stress — driven by mounting unemployment, leaner workplaces and a jobless recovery — could pose a bottom-line threat to companies as workers suffer more mental and physical health problems related to job pressure, experts say. Chicago-based employee assistance provider ComPsych reports a 23 per cent increase in crisis- and stress-counselling requests from client companies in the

first quarter of 2003 compared with the first quarter of 2002. Nearly 30 per cent were because of worker anxiety and redundancies. A University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls survey of more than 2,000 workers found ongoing work stress and long hours had a negative effect on physical and mental health.

- [USA Today](#).

USA: Laundry company told to clean up its act

A union-busting company facing a raft of charges for breaches of US labour law has added serious safety breaches to its record. The US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has fined laundry giant Cintas over \$10,000 (£6,190) for violating federal safety and health laws. The serious violations, defined by OSHA as breaches of safety and health standards capable of causing "death or serious physical harm," included blocked fire exits, unmarked fire doors and a failure to provide required vaccinations for workers exposed to bloodborne pathogens. In February 2003, Cintas employees in the United States and Canada began organising with unions UNITE and the Teamsters. Cintas is currently under investigation in the US and Canada for over 100 violations of federal labour law, including non-payment of overtime. Several workers and union advocates say the Cincinnati-based company has thwarted employee attempts to unionise by intimidating employees, in some cases firing them for minor infractions.

- [UNITE news release](#). [New Haven Register](#).

USA: Korean-Americans warned of workplace dangers

A drive to make New York's Korean-American community more aware of the dangers lurking in the workplace has been launched by local advocacy groups. The Young Korean-American Service and Education Center and the union-backed New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) said more than 100,000 Korean-Americans live in the New York City area. The groups say a quarter of that population owns or works for small businesses, the bulk of which are nail salons, laundries and greengrocers. NYCOSH's Joel Shufro said: "Tens of thousands of women who work in nail salons and other cosmetic industries are exposed to a large number of chemicals from the nail polish. This results in cancer, asthma, birth defects and other

illnesses." The groups have developed a three-year occupational health and safety project. "We provide information by utilising conferences, workshops, training and Korean language publications to mobilise and educate the community on preventing accidents and illnesses," said Yu-Soung Mun, executive director of the education center. "We will also provide free legal service for anyone hurt on the job, and will offer assistance regarding workers' compensation and other workplace-related issues."

- [New York Daily News. NYCOSH news coverage on immigrant workers.](#)

RESOURCES

New HSE health services website

A new website covering the health services - both the NHS and the independent sector - has been launched by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). HSE says employers, safety representatives, health professionals and members of the public will find guidance on health and safety in the sector. Visitors can also view video clips, read case studies, download the 2003/4 HSE programme of work and gain access to guidance and links.

- [HSE news release. HSE website on the health services.](#) **HSE says it would like to involve all parts of the industry and the public in further developing the website. Email comments or suggestions to the [Health Services Priority Programme](#).**
- **Also new from HSE: Web pages on [dermatitis](#) and [motor vehicle repair](#).**

EVENTS AND COURSES

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!

Safety, Health and Environment Conference, Harrogate

Mid October sees the return of SHE Solutions, the HSE-backed event

lining up the industry's leading safety, health and environment specialists and incorporating the SHE Solutions Conference, which this year will cover a range of pertinent issues spanning behavioural safety occupational health, and insurance as well as a dedicated environment stream backed by IEMA (Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment) covering topics like "greening the supply chain" and "communicating environmental management".

Organised by CMP Information, SHE Solutions is actively supported by the HSE, which uses the event as a launch pad for its newly released literature on Dangerous Substances, the theme of this year's European Week for Health & Safety launched back in May at Safety & Health Expo. Organisations of all sizes and sectors get involved with the Week, and are encouraged to run their own awareness campaigns - more than 185,000 packs were requested for the 2002 campaign. SHE Solutions provides the year's first opportunity for visitors to access the newly released literature. More information on the event, including a full conference programme, will be available at www.she-solutions.co.uk where visitors will also be able to pre-register for free.

Asbestos and the law conference, Liverpool

Merseyside Asbestos of Victims Support Group is organising an "Asbestos and the law" conference, to take place in Liverpool on 16 September 2003. Speakers include UK and international medical and legal experts.

- **[Further details](#) and [application form](#). Other enquiries to Merseyside Asbestos of Victims Support Group, Unit 3, Oriol Close, Water Street, Liverpool, L2 8UQ (marked "asbestos conference").**

Corporate safety crimes conference, Glasgow

Ministers from the Scottish Executive and Westminster, Crown Office officials, trade unions, employer organisations, the Health and Safety Executive, lawyers, academics and bereaved families will be among the speakers at a Centre for Corporate Accountability "Safety and corporate criminal accountability" conference in Glasgow on Thursday, 23 October 2003. CCA says it is Scotland's first major conference on the issue.

- **[Further details and registration](#). Standard fee, £30. Lawyers, businesses and government bodies, £50. Unwaged, £10.**

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2003

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

Hazards Conference, 5-7 September

The Hazards Conference will be in London. Margaret Sharkey at the London Hazards Centre is the coordinator of the London end of the organisation. You can contact her via e-mail at margaret@lhc.org.uk or on 020 7794 5999.

Get in on the ACTS, 17 October

If you want to know more about the behind the scenes working of a top advisory panel on dangerous substances, you are being given your chance. The HSC's Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances (ACTS), an expert group that advises on "control of risks arising from the supply of or exposure to toxic substances at work," is to hold its first [open meeting](#) at HSE's London HQ. The 17 October open meeting will coincide with European Week for Safety and Health 2003, which this year takes the theme "prevention of risks caused by dangerous substances." Places must be booked in advance, no later than 15 August, by contacting the [ACTS Secretariat](#), HSE, Floor 7NW, Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge, London SE1 9HS. Tel: 020 7717 6780. Tell HSE your full contact details, your job title and organisation and details of any particular areas of interest you might have in ACTS work. [More information on ACTS](#).

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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