

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 confirmed as a top union priority



The union world's top meeting has safety high on its agenda. The TUC's annual Congress, to take place in Brighton from 8-11 September, decides TUC policy and features top union speakers from the UK and worldwide, as well as cabinet ministers and business leaders. Safety is a top topic for unions this year, with corporate killing, stress, violence and other health and safety priorities making up 8 per cent of the 99 motions and 62 amendments to be considered by delegates. A TUC General Council report includes a 7,000 word section on TUC's health and safety work over the last year, which has included representing union views in national negotiations with government and other agencies, in Europe, on safety rights including worker safety advisers and employee consultation, and on union campaigns from making conditions better for workers to making them worse for dangerous employers. And TUC will present its first ever safety reps of the year awards at this Congress. Other top issues for unions will be work-life balance ([Risks 117](#)) and pensions.

- [TUC Congress website](#). [TUC news release](#). **[Protecting people at work, the safety section of the TUC General Council Report 2003](#)**

Passive smoking is a drag for musicians

The Musicians' Union (MU) says passive smoking is a drag for musicians and is backing the union campaign for protection of workers from other people's smoke. An MU motion to TUC's September Congress calls on TUC to urge the Health and Safety Executive to produce the long-awaited code of practice on passive smoking. The union says its members are concerned that the health of musicians working in smoke filled venues is suffering. It says some have had to stop working the pub and club circuit because of the smoky atmosphere has caused a deterioration in their health. It adds that "a no smoking culture" has been successfully introduced in concert venues, cinemas and theatres throughout the UK. New policies introduced to reduce the dangers of passive smoking should have immediate benefit to those currently at risk without threatening their work opportunities, says MU. The union should not face too much resistance from TUC, at least. In April TUC general secretary Brendan

Barber said ministers should “stop defending the fug-filled snugs of Britain’s pubs” and called on the government to end the uncertainty and introduce the passive smoking code of practice ([Risks 101](#)).

- [MU news release](#)
- **Union advice: TUC’s [SmokeatWork.org](#) website and [smoking news and resources from Hazards](#)**

GPMU opposes bogus safety incentive schemes

Print union GPMU says it is concerned about the growth of “safety incentive programmes” offering bonuses or prizes when accident figures fall, because they could encourage fewer reports rather than fewer accidents. A GPMU circular to union reps says they “should make clear to their employers the GPMU opposition to safety incentive schemes based on reporting fewer accidents.” The circular says: “GPMU policy is to oppose such schemes where they pay bonuses, or are included in payment systems, based on the recording of fewer accidents. The GPMU is sceptical about all safety related payment schemes, but where they do exist, they must only be based on measuring positive contributions to safety.” GPMU says it wants to hear about any workplaces covered by safety incentive schemes. In the USA, where these schemes have been heavily promoted, US national union federation AFL-CIO opposes their introduction. Several national white collar and blue collar unions in the USA and Canada have said union reps should avoid the safety incentive schemes.

- [GPMU circular](#)
- **Hazards union guide to [safety incentive schemes](#) and behavioural safety**

HSE treats workers worse than pigs

Unions are turning up the heat on the government’s safety watchdog for refusing to protect sweltering staff. On 20 August members of the Musicians’ Union, resplendent but sweaty in full tie and tails, joined other workers outside the HSE’s London HQ. They want the cold-hearted watchdog to introduce a workplace temperature ceiling – something HSE says it can’t do, despite cattle and pigs already having this legal protection. In a letter to the press, Roger Sutton of the General Federation of Trade Unions said: “Given the HSE refusal we will have to take a standard from elsewhere. Transported livestock have a maximum of 30C/86F. Workers surely should have at least the same protection as cattle?” Rail union TSSA has received calls from workers complaining of sickness, dehydration, dizzy spells, fainting and

heat rashes. TUC is pressing for a maximum working temperature of 30 degrees celcius, or 27 degrees celcius for those doing strenuous work, with employers required to take action when the temperature hits the celcius ceiling ([Risks 118](#)).

- [MU news release](#). [GFTU news release](#). [Sky News](#)
- **HSE guides: Heat stress in the workplace. What you need to know as an employer [[pdf format](#)] and other [leaflets on health, safety and welfare at work](#)**

Detention centre staff sue security firm

GMB members at a detention centre partially destroyed after riots are suing the private security firm that ran it. Nearly 30 workers at the Yarl's Wood centre in Bedfordshire say they are still suffering problems including post-traumatic stress disorder after been attacked or injured in the February 2002 riot and fire ([Risks 42](#)). The GMB union says it is suing the company in charge of the centre, Group 4, on behalf of its members who worked there as detention custody officers. GMB senior organiser Ed Blisset said many workers had "suffered great mental trauma and indeed, physical injury. They're still off sick and in no fit state to return to work at present."

- [BBC News Online](#)

Shop violence campaign set to be a hit

With less than one month to go until the first National Respect for Shopworkers Day – Wednesday 17 September – retail union Usdaw says the event is already set to be a major success. Usdaw deputy general secretary John Hannett believes the day will bring the issue to the nation's attention. "We expect to have more than 100 street stalls, promoting the campaign, throughout the UK," he said. "Retail staff are a massive part of the economy and the local community and deserve respect. Our members are telling us 'enough is enough' and giving this campaign their full support. Top employers are also backing us."

- [Usdaw news release](#) and [Freedom From Fear webpages](#)

OTHER NEWS

Report highlights BP management failings

A series of management failures were responsible for life-threatening accidents at BP's Grangemouth complex, an official report has found.

The report, the result of a joint HSE and Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Sepa) investigation, found standards had been allowed to slip and managers had not detected “deteriorating performance” and had failed to abide by the law. During the period 29 May to 10 June 2000 three incidents occurred at the complex. BP was prosecuted for the failures and fined more than £1m in January 2002 ([Risks 38](#)). A statement from BP Grangemouth said: “BP identified those areas where we had fallen short of our high expectations for our management of safety and environmental performance.” However, Falkirk East MP Michael Connarty, backed union claims that BP's current plans to cut up to 1,000 jobs at the plant will jeopardise safety ([Risks 107](#)). And BP's reputation isn't squeaky clean elsewhere, with its safety management also attracting criticism in Belgium ([Risks 25](#)) and the USA ([Risks 69](#)).

- [BBC News Online. HSE news release and executive summary of Major incident investigation report - BP Grangemouth, Scotland, May - June 2000. Full report. Hazards magazine BP webpage](#)

Pizza Hut bans smoking

Restaurant chain Pizza Hut has introduced a smoking ban in all its UK restaurants. The company said it hoped the move would protect customers and staff at its 500 branches from the dangers of passive smoking. Brian Rimmer, operations director for Pizza Hut, said the move was prompted for concerns for customer health and welfare, adding: “It is equally important that our staff can work in a smoke-free environment.” GMB London region's Simon Reed, whose union has members in Pizza Hut restaurants, told *Risks* the move “is excellent news for employees, who will no longer be exposed to second-hand smoking at the workplace, their customers and families, who for the first time now have a choice of a smoke free environment.” He added: “This is not a crusade against people who smoke, but about our members who have no choice on whether they are exposed to second-hand smoke in the workplace. The GMB takes the health, safety and welfare of our members very seriously indeed, and will continue to deal with this issue now, and in the future.” The union won a substantial out-of-court settlement last week for a London casino worker who said his health had been damaged by passive smoking at work ([Risks 119](#)).

- [Ananova. BBC News Online and video clip. Sky News](#)
- **Union advice:** TUC's [SmokeatWork.org](#) website and

[smoking news and resources from Hazards](#)

Six digit sick digits payout

A Scottish former railway worker who developed vibration white finger after years of using power drills and jackhammers has been awarded £212,829 damages. James McKenna, 42, was medically retired in 1999 after 14 years as a track worker and signals installation technician with British Rail and First Engineering. Court of Session judge Lady Smith said: "He would have to hold these tools throughout the working day for weeks on end." She added: "The condition is a permanent one and the attacks are clearly unpleasant. He is, to an extent, limited in his daily life, albeit that limitation is of the nature of inconvenience rather than significant disability." The bulk of the damages award was to cover loss of earnings and pension. Mr McKenna's earnings have dropped by almost £8,000 a year since he had to give up his job and take up taxi driving.

- [The Scotsman](#)
- [Advice on vibration and health from HSE](#)

Neglect contributed to death in washing machine

Neglect contributed to the death of a laundry worker who overheated after being trapped in a giant washing machine for almost three hours, an inquest jury has ruled. Paul Clegg, 23, died from heat exhaustion after getting inside the 13-metre long drum of the machine to clear a blockage. Attempts to get Mr Clegg out of the machine at the Sunlight Textile Services laundry in Bournemouth failed and firefighters had to cut a large hole in the side of the appliance. The Bournemouth inquest heard that no-one on duty at the time had been given training to deal with blockages. Fire station commander Tim Spring said his crew arrived at about 0938 BST and Mr Clegg was still conscious. Mr Spring said: "I asked on three or four occasions if there was an access panel on the machine. They said there was not." In fact there was but David Lewis, the company engineer on duty at the time, admitted under questioning he had not read the machine manual. It took nearly two hours to remove Mr Clegg, compared to an estimated 15 minutes had the firefighters been told about the access panel. In January 1997 the firm was fined £3,000 after a teenage employee removing a blockage was lucky to survive an electric shock.

- [BBC News Online](#)

HSE sets individual prosecution criteria too high

Official guidance for HSE inspectors could mean some guilty parties are not prosecuted. A briefing by the Centre for Corporate Accountability (CCA) says inspectors have been told that the prosecution of directors, managers and other individuals should only take place in certain, limited, circumstances. The "Prosecuting individuals" guide, which it is not yet available on HSE's website and which HSE has not so far made public, took effect on 1 July 2003. It says prosecutions will only be considered where there is "wilful or reckless disregard for health and safety requirements, or there has been a deliberate act or omission that seriously imperilled their health/safety or the health/safety of others." CCA says these criteria are far more stringent than the law which only requires evidence of "neglect" or "connivance." CCA director David Bergman said he would be raising with HSE his concerns about the guidance.

- [Centre for Corporate Accountability](#), including **exclusive CCA links to HSC policy on prosecuting individuals and [CCA summary of the policy](#)**
- [CCA job](#): **CCA is looking to recruit a lawyer or experienced caseworker to run its Work-Related Death Advice Service**

Employees stressed more, employers clueless

Half of all sickness absence is due to stress and one in five workers is taking time off because of the problem, according to a new report. The survey from insurance firm Unum Provident also found that the past decade has seen an explosion in employee claims for "mental and psychological problems," which were rare a generation ago. It found that whereas in 1995 only one in eight claims were for mental illnesses, by last year the figure had ballooned to almost a quarter. Over the same time, the proportion of claims for back and neck problems and other "traditional" industrial complaints such as breathing difficulties had fallen sharply. A second survey from HR Gateway found nearly six out of 10 (58 per cent) respondents said their own organisation was "poor" at dealing with staff stress, compared to only 11 per cent saying responding it was "excellent." A TUC spokesperson commented: "Bad organisation of work and the intensity of work appears to be teaching HR a sharp lesson in the limits of special management techniques. The basic cure is more autonomy and better workloads."

- [Evening Standard. Ananova. HR Gateway survey](#)

INTERNATIONAL

Australia: Spitting mad rail workers perpetrators tracked down

Rail workers sick of being spat on by passengers want authorities to consider using portable DNA kits to track down the culprits. Transport union RTBU says spitting and verbal abuse directed at guards and station staff is increasing as passengers vent their frustration at delays and breakdowns. The union says it is investigating the spit-and-police test kits that have been issued by UK train companies to help identify and convict people who spit at them ([Risks 119](#)). RTBU's Nick Lewocki said: "If other rail systems are successfully dealing with this problem we'd like to talk to them." He added: "It is disgusting, but it's also absolutely a very real health issue." Influenza, hepatitis A, herpes and many more diseases can be transmitted through saliva. Most spitters commit the act as they walk or run by, so remain unidentified and therefore unprosecuted. "This kind of kit would probably be very useful, particularly for repeat offenders," said RTBU's Lewocki. In the UK, transport union TGWU has said it is investigating the use of the DNA test system on buses.

- [Workers Online. Sydney Morning Herald. TGWU news release](#)

Australia: Call centre stink over time off in loo

Employees at a company owned by Australia's second biggest telecoms company say their bosses have ordered them to record as "personal time" the amount of time they spend in the toilet. More than 60 workers at an RSL COM call centre are being forced to time themselves going to the toilet and make up the time at the end of the day or risk losing pay. Members of the union CEPU have now started a "low key" campaign to end what they describe as harassment, excessive surveillance and monitoring over toilet breaks. "We are disgusted by this over-the-top behaviour by management," said Alice Salomon, CEPU branch organiser. "It is demeaning for grown adults to be treated like school kids and have to account for the time taken to go to the toilet...Managers are spending more time on monitoring toilet breaks than it actually takes to use the bathroom." She added the policy could force workers to forgo loo breaks, which could lead to serious health problems.

- [Workers Online. NSW Labor Council news release.](#)

[Sydney Morning Herald](#)

- **More [union news and resources on toilet breaks](#) from *Hazards***

Canada: Workers want survivable jobs

Canadian workers are stressed out, overworked and tired, a union has claimed. The Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) is calling for improved management of workload and time, which would ease tensions in the workplace and off the job. An April report from the union said: "A workplace where we feel in control of our workload and have the flexibility to organise our schedules, and a workplace that facilitates work-life balance will help to reduce the stress from work and work-life conflicts." The report called for a reduced work week, a reduction or end to overtime particularly where unpaid; and for agreements allowing a voluntary reduction in hours for workers experiencing conflict between work and family life. Official figures released in June by Statistics Canada said the highest proportion of working Canadians - more than one-third (34 per cent) - cited too many demands or hours as the most common source of stress in the workplace ([Risks 113](#)).

- **[Workplace.ca](#). Issues: Hot topics for collective bargaining, Karoshi, No.5, PSAC, April 2003 [[pdf format](#)]**
- **Related information: [TUC Changing Times website](#) and "[worked to death](#)" and "[get-a-life](#)" guides from *Hazards***

Global: Drug testing plans backfire on bosses

Attempts by Australian and New Zealand airlines to force through mandatory drug tests are facing stiff resistance. A top industrial relations official in Australia has suggested tests planned by Australian carrier Qantas should be restricted to 700 senior executive staff based in Sydney while talks continues. The proposal came from the senior deputy president of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission, the organisation arbitrating on the dispute. Qantas union AMWU has said the tests are an unacceptable breach of privacy, don't work and are a diversion from real health and safety concerns like fatigue ([Risks 118](#)). In New Zealand, mediation this week failed to settle a challenge by six unions to plans by Air New Zealand to extend random drug and alcohol testing to more than 9,000 employees ([Risks 115](#)). The parties met in closed session before a Labour Department mediator, but they without

a settlement, so will argue the case in the Employment Court in October. The company wants to screen staff for alcohol, cannabis, stimulants, depressants and hallucinogens, but unions fear workers will also have to explain their use of prescription or over-the-counter medicines. They also say if New Zealand Air is really concerned about "impairment," that is what it should test for – and should clampdown on the fatigue and other work factors that are a far more likely cause.

- [AMWU Online. New Zealand Herald](#)
- **More information from Hazards: [Union news and resources on workplace drug tests](#)**

Global: Workplace health research isn't the fairest of them all

A gender blind approach to occupational health research is can undermine efforts to properly assess the impact of work on health. A group of Canadian, American and Swedish researchers, writing in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, conclude women's and men's occupational health problems merit scientific attention. The authors say occupational health researchers need to consider the effect of gender on how occupational health issues are experienced, expressed, defined and addressed, adding that more serious consideration of gender-related factors will help identify risk factors for both women and men. The paper was prepared by researchers from disciplines including ergonomics, epidemiology, public health, social medicine, community psychology, economics and sociology, who pooled their collective knowledge to establish an outline of effective gender-sensitive research methods. They say although gender-sensitive practices enrich the scientific quality of research and should lead to better data and ultimately to well-targeted prevention programmes.

- **Karen Messing and others. *Be the fairest of them all: Challenges and recommendations for the treatment of gender in occupational health research*, American Journal of Industrial Medicine, vol.43 (6), pages 618-29, 2003 [[abstract](#)]**

India: Asbestos cases are covered up, say experts

Doctors in India are under pressure from the asbestos industry to label patients with asbestos disease as having tuberculosis or bronchitis and to underplay the health impact of asbestos, a public health team has said. The team added that thousands of people in India suffer from lung diseases caused by exposure to asbestos, and called for a ban on

asbestos. The call comes eight years after the Supreme Court ordered the asbestos industry to maintain health records of workers and to compensate people affected by asbestos poisoning. "But medical screening of workers is inadequate," said Dr Tushar Kant Joshi, head of occupational medicine at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital, New Delhi. The team said 6,000 people work in asbestos mines and industries and another 100,000 are at risk of exposure. Random screening indicates that lung disease attributable to exposure to asbestos shows up in the x-rays of 20 per cent of these workers, they said. They added that doctors' diagnoses of asbestos disease are challenged by the asbestos industry, which puts pressure on the medics to interpret x-rays as TB or bronchitis or other chronic conditions. India uses around 125,000 tonnes of asbestos each year, which it imports mostly from Canada and Russia.

- **News round-up. [Asbestos poisoning was covered up by doctors, claims health team](#). *BMJ*, vol.327, page 248, 2003**
- **More on international asbestos campaigns from the [International Ban Asbestos Secretariat \(IBAS\)](#)**

Iraq: Unions call for probe after US kills another media worker

The death of a cameraman in Iraq, fired on by a US tank, has led for renewed calls for an investigation of the US military top brass. The latest International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) call for "an independent and open inquiry" came after the shooting this week of Mazen Dana, an award-winning journalist working for the Reuters news agency. Aidan White, IFJ general secretary, said the incident is "more tragic evidence of what appears to be casual disregard of journalists' safety by military commanders." He added: "Despite the best efforts of journalists to identify themselves and to seek permission from military units to do their work they are still being fired upon." The US military said soldiers had mistaken Mazen Dana's camera for a rocket propelled grenade launcher. IFJ however said it was an "avoidable tragedy" that happened in broad daylight soon after the camera team had received military permission to be filming in the area. Aidan White said: "We need to know what went wrong and why. We cannot accept that this is brushed aside as just another regrettable incident in the chaos of war." The total death toll of media in Iraq since the beginning of the war on 20 March, now stands at 20 dead with two journalists still missing. The latest incident came only days after IFJ accused the Pentagon of a "cynical whitewash" over a previous attack on media in which two journalists were killed.

- [IFJ news release](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Ananova](#)
- **Related information:** [International News Safety Institute](#)

New Zealand: Tinnitus causes depression

Many tinnitus sufferers are afflicted by depression because of the condition, new research has shown. The disease – a ringing, crackling or buzzing sound in the ear – afflicts one in 50 New Zealanders to the point where it affects their daily lives, reports trade union website Worksafe Reps. The condition can be work-related and, like occupational deafness, is frequently caused by exposure to noise at work. Noise-exposed workers can develop one or both conditions. A University of Otago study of 338 sufferers found that at least half had tinnitus-related depression, reported the National Foundation for the Deaf.

- [Worksafe Reps](#)

South Africa: Dying are too poor for asbestos care

Workers in South Africa are dying of agonising asbestos diseases, but without the medical care they need to ease their pain. Without private medical care, the plight of the men and their families is desperate, according to *Business Report*. Typical medical costs for mesothelioma treatment are between R100,000 (£8,535) and R200,000 (£17,070). Isaac Olebogeng Monchonyane, 39, worked for six months for 1981/82 at Wandrag Asbestos Mining Company. When he became ill he lost his job as a platinum miner. He has a wife and four young children. He is supported by his wife, who earns R500 (less than £43) a month. He has no private medical care and must take an eight-hour return trip in a hospital taxi to Klerksdorp to obtain his medication. Aubrey Lekhobe Tanke, 58, worked for Wandrag for four years in the 1960s. With his state disability pension of R600 (£51) a month he supports his wife and six children. He has no private medical care and is managing without morphine to dull the pain. The plight of Dirk Joseph Jacobus Matthysen, 55, who worked at Wandrag for about nine months in 1979, is similar. He has no private medical care and no morphine. The lower treatment figure far exceeds the maximum compensation paid out to 7,500 South African claimants under this year's settlement with UK asbestos multinational Cape. South Africa's asbestos industry describes the risk of exposure at "miniscule" ([Risks 113](#)).

- [Business Report](#)
- **More from [Action on Southern Africa \(ACTSA\)](#) on**

the deadly mining legacy

RESOURCES

CSP Safety News

The August issue of the *Safety News*, the safety newsletter of physios' union CSP, is now available online. The issues covers issues including: Safety rep training; latest statistics on work-related ill-health; the CSP musculoskeletal disorders survey; Agenda for Change; flexible working; violence and bullying at work; and roving safety reps.

- [CSP Safety News](#)

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!

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.

Asbestos and the law conference, Liverpool, 16 September

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, Oriel Close, Water Street, Liverpool, L2 8UQ (marked "asbestos conference")**

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. The HSE's Euroweek action pack can be ordered [online](#) at HSE's Euroweek website or by calling 0800 085 0050, and the European Agency [website](#) has resources and background information too. [Future years' themes](#) have also now been decided.

Corporate safety crimes conference, Glasgow, 23 October

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

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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