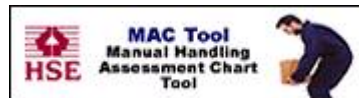


Risks

issue no 122 – 6 September 2003

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

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Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 8,000 subscribers. 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

TUC tells you how to telework

You wait years for a guide on the pitfalls of teleworking, and then two come along at once. Government figures show a 65 per cent rise over the last four years in the numbers working outside the traditional office, so it is no wonder the TUC was concerned. A new teleworkers' section of the TUC's workSMART website explains a new agreement published by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and produced jointly by the TUC and private and public sector employers' organisations CBI and CEEP to guide employers on their responsibilities for staff using computers and phones outside the office. The voluntary guidance covers issues for teleworkers including: Health and safety; working hours; claiming expenses; training; privacy; and the dangers of isolation from work colleagues. Brendan Barber, TUC general secretary, said: "Working outside the office should be an option that improves job quality for employees and brings people back into the workforce, not just a cheap option for employers." DTI estimates 2.2 million people in the UK now work away from the office because of the use of modern technology.

- [TUC news release](#) and [workSMART guide](#). [DTI news release](#) and [Telework Guidance \[pdf format\]](#). [The Guardian](#). [BBC News Online](#). [The Scotsman](#). [Employers' Organisation news release](#)

Long hours rife in UK workplaces

Over 3.4 million men work in excess of 49 hours a week, according to research for GMB London Region. A Durham university analysis of 2001 Census of Population provides "the first comprehensive statistics on those working more than 48 hours since the EU introduced a limit of 48 hours on the working week." The findings are to be launched at this weekend's National Hazards Conference. Conference spokesperson Mick Holder said: "These new figures for each area of Britain show that one in four men are working long hours that are putting their health at risk and endangering the community. The issue affects men across the board, from the high flyers to the low paid in rural areas." He added that the conference will discuss practical ways in which employers, trades unionists, policy makers and health professionals can revisit the opt outs to get working hours down." A TUC/*Hazards* report last month linked overwork to high rates of heart disease, stroke and suicide. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report this week said long hours were a problem for increasing numbers of working parents.

- [Hazards Campaign news release](#). [More on the Hazards Campaign](#). [TUC/Hazards "worked to death" webpage](#). [Joseph Rowntree Foundation report](#)

Compensation highlights performing risks

Substantial out-of-court compensation awards to two members of performers' union Equity show that every job can have its risks if employers don't take necessary safety measures. Joanne Ellery, a dancer described as "exceptionally talented," had to give up performing after she injured her spine, her knee and her back on a series of accidents while rehearsing for a West End production. First she was hit on the head by a weighted curtain which compressed her spine, then she wrenched her knee after her foot caught on an uneven section of the stage. Finally she had two further accidents while dancing, in both cases injuring her knee and back. Equity secured compensation because, it said, the employer's negligence caused the first two injuries. Actor Paul Chahidi, who slipped and broke his ankle on a wet floor while working at Shakespeare's Globe in London, had to undergo three operations to repair his damaged ankle and a medical report warned that he is likely to develop arthritis in later life as a result of the injury. The theatre accepted liability for the accident.

- [Equity news on the dancer and actor injuries](#)

Union seeks agreement on site safety

Construction union UCATT has warned that workers building a new superhospital in North Staffordshire could be exploited during its construction. It says it fears the hospital could be built by illegal immigrants or other workers operating under sweatshop conditions, although the trust running the University Hospital of North Staffordshire has rejected the claims. The union says NHS officials have stopped it securing legally-binding guarantees from two companies fighting for the £260 million contract that workers will receive proper employment protection. UCATT fears the lack of protection will leave the project's labour force vulnerable to working below the minimum wage, without holiday, sick pay or pension rights and with no health and safety back-up. Trevor Vernon, Midlands regional secretary for UCATT, said: "It is appalling that the North Staffordshire NHS Trust will not guarantee to select a company that will give reasonable terms and conditions. We and the public will not tolerate it."

- [Staffordshire Sentinel](#)

OTHER NEWS

Warning over heart risk from passive smoking

Being exposed to even a small amount of second-hand tobacco smoke may increase your chances of developing heart disease, according to a new study. It found people who are exposed to smoke just a few times a week at home or at work could see their risk rise by 15 per cent in five years. The study, conducted by heart doctors from the University of Athens, looked at more than 1,900 people and also found that over 30 years that risk could have more than doubled. Speaking at the European Society of Cardiology Congress in Vienna, the study authors called for a ban on smoking at work. Dr Demosthenes Panagiotakos' team found 86 per cent of heart disease patients said they were exposed to second-hand smoke for more than 30 minutes each day. This compares to 56 per cent of healthy volunteers. Among non-smokers, people with heart disease were almost 50 per cent more likely to be regularly exposed to second-hand smoke. Dr Panagiotakos commented: "The only safe way to protect non-smokers from exposure to cigarette smoke is to eliminate this health hazard from public places and workplaces, as well as from the home. A ban on smoking in workplaces might be an effective way to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke." An online survey this week by UK human resources website HR Gateway "found nearly three-quarters of the 203 professionals polled voted for smoke-free workplaces."

- [BBC News Online](#). **European Society of Cardiology news release** [[pdf format](#)]
- **Union smoking at work resources from [TUC](#) and [Hazards](#)**

Teachers use drink and drugs for stress

Teachers and other school staff are turning to anti-depressants and alcohol to cope with rising stress levels. The findings came in response to a Wrexham council survey, undertaken after concerns were raised by the HSE. The council received 600 replies to 2,000 questionnaires distributed to teaching and administrative staff. Of those surveyed, 10 per cent were taking some form of anti-depressant and 30 per cent said they were drinking more alcohol than they used to. "I think the problem of teaching stress has grown," said Paul Davies, Wrexham secretary of teaching union NASUWT. "In this survey 77 per cent said they were fatigued, 64 per cent said their workload was impossible and

30 per cent dreaded going to work." More than a quarter of respondents admitted suffering from raised blood pressure levels and high numbers reported muscular pains and headaches. The local authority is considering an action plan, including providing a helpline for teaching staff. TUC's December 2001 *Drunk or disordered* guide warned that the lifestyle imposed by a person's job could greatly increase the risk of alcohol and drug abuse, adding that stress can be a contributory factor.

- [BBC News Online](#). Union guidance on [sensible drugs and alcohol policies](#)
- **The TUC guide *Drunk or disordered* [ISBN 1 85006 616 7] costs £15 (£4.75 to union members) from [TUC Publications](#), tel: 020 7467 1294**

Give us back our evenings and weekends

Government action to reduce weekend working and excessive work hours is needed to help parents balance their work and family responsibilities, new research has concluded. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report warns that more than half of all fathers work more than a 40-hour week, including 30 per cent who routinely exceed the 48-hour ceiling set by the EU Working Time Directive. One in eight mothers also work more than a 40-hour week, including six per cent who regularly work more than a 48-hour week. The analysis, by Professor Shirley Dex of London's Institute of Education, found employed parents are more likely to work outside the normal "nine to five" than other workers. Professor Dex said: "Long working hours that routinely breach the EU Directive and pressure to work on Sundays and at weekends deserve particular consideration because they are areas where parents express the strongest levels of dissatisfaction." The report says unions have an "obvious" role in achieving best practice, because they can make sure policies are relevant and implemented and not "merely window-dressing."

- [JRF news release](#) and [summary and full report](#). **In print: *Work and family life in the 21st century* by Shirley Dex is published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and available from York Publishing Services, 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, York YO31 7ZQ, £16.95 plus £2 p&p**

Silicon Glen safety record "worst in UK"

Scotland's high-tech microelectronics companies have broken safety rules far more often than their counterparts in England and Wales, an investigation has revealed. Four Scottish semiconductor manufacturers were guilty of 28 breaches of the regulations meant to protect the health and safety of workers, reports the *Sunday Herald*. This compares to just two breaches by one manufacturer south of the border. The breaches were found by HSE inspectors. They include failing to control exposure to toxic fumes from acids and cancer-causing chemicals, and inadequate maintenance and training. The revelations have been greeted with anger by trade unionists, who accuse semiconductor companies of having a "grim" safety record. "Workers involuntarily breathe contaminated air, which, like asbestos, could give them diseases in later life," said Jim McCourt of safety campaign group Phase 2. "I find it deeply disturbing that every time regulators look for problems in this industry, they find them. It is an industry which risks workers' lives for profit in pursuit of production at all costs."

- [Sunday Herald](#)

Working together for offshore safety

The HSE has teamed up with offshore unions and employers to work together for safety. The head of the HSE Offshore Division Taf Powell opened a joint HSE and "Step Change in Safety" stand at the Offshore Europe conference and exhibition. Graham Tran of offshore union Amicus said: "It certainly makes sense to promote the partnership approach at Offshore Europe by having a joint stand. The progress made in the area of safety over the last 12 months has only been possible by all stakeholders working in partnership over this period." He added: "It is important however that we continue the partnership approach for years to come. If the workforce can see that there is not a 'them and us' approach to safety then it hopefully will encourage more people to come forward as safety reps."

- [HSE news release](#) and [Step Change website](#). [HSE news release on new offshore accident statistics](#)

Boy, 7, dies in forklift accident

A seven-year-old boy has died in an accident in a warehouse. A roll of paper is believed to have fallen on Harry Palmer while he was at the warehouse at Tilbury Docks. It is thought the seven-year-old's father may have been working at the premises. An Essex police spokesperson said: "The circumstances of the death are being investigated by the

Port of Tilbury Police, Essex Police and the HSE." An HSE spokesperson said: "It is believed that a roll of paper may have fallen on the boy from a forklift truck." The incident occurred on Friday, 29 August.

- [Ananova](#)

INTERNATIONAL

Australia: Tobacco giant pays asbestos price

Tobacco multinational Philip Morris has settled a lawsuit with a Melbourne employee battling lung cancer. The substantial out-of-court payout to Lionel Newman, 62, a heavy smoker who was also exposed to asbestos dust at the company's Moorabbin plant, was due to go to court last week. Lawyers said that in almost every asbestos exposure case where a plaintiff suffering lung cancer was also a smoker, defendants claimed "contributory negligence". Philip Morris's legal defence to Mr Newman's claim had no mention that he was a smoker, however. His lawyer, Peter Gordon, said that in every other asbestos case he had dealt with a person's history of being a smoker was considered relevant. "Of the very large number of asbestos and lung cancer cases I've been involved in over the last 20 years I have never known a defendant not to take the defence of contributory negligence by smoking where it's been available." Last year Philip Morris announced it had stopped giving workers free cigarettes and had introduced a no-smoking policy at Moorabbin ([Risks 82](#)).

- [The Herald Sun](#)

Australia: Workers to lower speed limits in road work zones

Australian road workers have voted unanimously to improve workplace safety by adopting 40 kilometre speed limits in road work zones where there are no traffic barriers. The 500 Australian Workers Union (AWU) members in Victoria also voted to lower speed limits to 25 kilometres an hour when the traffic is within one metre from the road work zone and no barriers are present. AWU national secretary Bill Shorten said the changes will take effect on 30 September, to give contractors time to "factor in the cost of any additional speed limit signage" when negotiating their contracts. The call for tougher measures follows the tragic death late last year of an AWU member struck by a runaway truck during his lunch break. The workers want the speed limits built into their workplace agreements, meaning they would only work at sites where they had this level of control over traffic speed. AWU's Bill Shorten said if the state government could legislate to lower speed

limits around schools, it could lower the speed limits to protect road workers' safety.

- [AWU news release. The Herald Sun](#)

Australia: Union takes on casual work hazards

An Australian union is taking on the hazards of casual labour. Manufacturing union AMWU says injury rates for "labour hire" workers are higher and injuries more severe than for directly employed workers in the same industry. "We're driving to ensure that the permanent workforce realise that contract and casual workers have a say in their occupational health and safety," says AMWU's David Henry. "Their lives are as important as any other worker." An AMWU brochure, *Health and safety: Not for hire*, sets out the union's position on health and safety for casual workers. The union is calling for agreements with labour hire companies including the election of regional health and safety representatives, the right for safety reps to be involved in safety negotiations and for reps to have access to accident reports and investigations.

- [AMWU news release. AMWU brochure, Health and safety not for hire](#)

Global: Work less, produce more

A new International Labour Office (ILO) report has found that US productivity had accelerated - but only because of longer working hours. ILO's *Key indicators of the labour market* report says that US workers put in an average of 1,825 hours in 2002 compared to major European economies, where hours worked ranged from around 1,300 to 1,800. In Japan, hours worked dropped to about the same level as in the US, ILO said. But working your employees into the ground, isn't the way to up their productivity, the report shows. Latest analysis from the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO) shows France has the shortest working week in Europe at 38.3 hours. The ILO report says the relatively rested French workers each generated \$35 worth of output per hour, compared to \$32 in the US. The US trailed in the output per hour ranking behind Norway, France and Belgium - all countries with more humane working hours. Norwegian workers are almost 20 per cent more productive than their US counterparts. The EIRO report puts the UK, which has relatively low productivity, at the top of Europe's working hours league table. UK workers put in half a day more per week than the EU average, with full-timers toiling 43.5 hours compared to an EU average of 39.9.

- [ILO news release](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#). [EIRO's March 2003 Working Time Developments 2002](#) report and [July 2003 report on Overtime in Europe](#)
- **The deadly consequences of overwork – see the [Hazards worked to death webpages](#)**

Malaysia: Minister calls for proactive workplace protection

A government minister has called on Malaysian employers to be proactive in addressing workplace safety risks. Human resources minister Datuk Fong Chan Onn said: "Employers should over protect, rather than under protect to avoid risking their workers' health and safety." He added: "I am concerned that there are cases where some workers are still exposed to dangerous chemicals in their workplaces." Fong was commenting after a recent case where two workers of the Employees Provident Fund's microfilm unit were diagnosed with cancer after long-term exposure to dangerous chemicals. The workers raised their concerns with the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) in March. The MTUC occupational safety and health department found that most of the chemicals used by the EPF workers were hazardous and notified the government's Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH). MTUC secretary general G. Rajasekaran said other workers in the unit were also having health complications ranging from severe headaches, to ear, nose and throat problems, which were similar to the symptoms of the two workers who also contracted cancer.

- [New Straits Times](#)

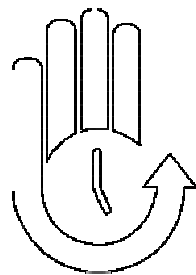
South Africa: Mines to be hit by new claims avalanche

Another legal onslaught against South African mining houses is looming following the announcement by a British legal firm that it is to take up the cases of former gold miners. The miners are claiming compensation from several mining companies for allegedly contracting chronic dust diseases including silicosis. Richard Meeran, lawyer with UK firm Leigh Day, said he is registering potential claimants countrywide as well as in Lesotho and Botswana, where former migrant workers live. He added the company planned to launch a class action style lawsuit, which could involve thousands of workers. A statement said: "Both the gold and asbestos mining industries appeared to have displayed a flagrant disregard and cavalier attitude to the health of their workers, placing profit as a clear priority. Both

industries accumulated massive wealth at the expense of workers' health, taking full advantage of the apartheid system." However, getting compensation may not be quick or easy. A report this week said UK-based asbestos multinational Cape plc had not fulfilled its promise to pay thousands of South African asbestos disease victims their compensation ([Risks 97](#)).

- [BBC News Online](#). [SABC News on the gold mining and asbestos cases](#)

USA: Give the workers a break



A US campaign is calling for the country's frazzled workforce to "take back their time." The organisers of "Take Back Your Time Day," scheduled for 24 October, say overwork leaves fewer and fewer Americans with enough time for their families and other responsibilities. "It's time for a new national dialogue about work and family balance," said Gretchen Burger, lead organiser of Take Back Your Time Day. A poll by the campaign found that 60 per cent of Americans "feel pressure to work too much" and 83 per cent wish they had more time to spend with their families. More than half say they would trade some pay for more free time. The group says Take Back Your Time Day is set for 24 October because the date falls nine weeks before the end of the year, symbolising the additional nine weeks - 350 hours - Americans work each year compared to western Europeans. The campaign is backing a Senate resolution calling upon President Bush to proclaim October as "National Work and Family Month" and to make "reducing the conflict between work and family a national priority."

- **Take Back Your Time Day** [website](#), news release [[pdf format](#)] and [September 2003 newsletter](#).
Order details for the new [Take Back Your Time Day official handbook](#)

USA: Unions keep the workplace safe

If you want to survive your job and enjoy decent conditions you should get in a union, latest research from the US says. The Economic Policy Institute's new report, *How unions help all workers*, concludes that unions are good all round, raising wages by roughly 20 per cent compared to non-union workers. Workers who get injured are more likely to get compensation and get significantly more compensation, too. The report cites two studies showing the union effect on

workplace safety. One found unions greatly improve official safety enforcement. In the manufacturing industry, for example, the probability that inspections by OSHA - the US HSE - would be triggered by worker complaints was as much as 45 per cent higher in unionised workplaces than in non-union. Union firms were also 15 per cent more likely to be the focus of programmed or targeted OSHA inspections in the manufacturing industry. And safety inspections lasted longer and penalties for non-compliance were greater. In the construction industry, a study estimated that unions raise the probability of OSHA inspections by 10 per cent.

- [Confined Space. How unions help all workers](#), EPI briefing paper, No.143, August 2003

RESOURCES

MAC covers your back

The HSE has produced a new Manual Handling Assessment Chart (MAC) "to help managers identify high risk manual handling jobs". The new tool, which is backed up by new HSE webpages, should also be useful to employers, safety reps, health professionals and members of the public, says HSE, as it provides up to date information on health and safety relating to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). HSE adds that the MAC is designed to help make easy and accurate assessments of three different types of operation; lifting, carrying and team handling. For each task it helps you go through the risk factors and record a risk rating – green, amber, red or purple – on a score sheet. The rating indicates which jobs are more likely to put workers' health at a greater risk. Malcolm Darvill, HSE head of ergonomics policy, said: "On the website you can test out your own practical risk assessment ability by scoring some real manual handling tasks and then comparing your scores with an ergonomics expert. The website also offers users practical tips to reduce risks of MSD injury."

- [HSE press release](#) and [MAC online resources](#). [Manual Handling Assessment Chart Tool leaflet](#) and other MSD leaflets. [HSE MSD page](#)

Remembering what happened on Workers' Memorial Day

TUC has published a detailed online report on UK activities on Workers' Memorial Day 2003. The 28 April 2003 event was marked by a record number of national and local events. The report was prepared by TUC WMD 2003 coordinator Hilda Palmer, of Greater Manchester Hazards

Centre.

- [International Workers' Memorial Day report](#)

Crash lessons

If you are used to whizzing down the highway at breakneck speed from one appointment to the next, be warned – you could be a prime candidate for a car wreck. New research commissioned by the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Road Safety Campaign on the attitudes and behaviours of speeding car drivers has found that male drivers who say they would drive faster if late for an appointment or running behind schedule are more likely to have been involved in a crash in the last three years. TUC's Owen Tudor said "This suggests more strongly than ever that managing work-related driving risks could make a major contribution to road safety."

- ***The speeding driver: Who, how and why?***
Development Department Research Findings No 170, Scottish Executive Social Research. [Summary](#) and [full report](#) (a daunting 200 pages)

EVENTS AND COURSES

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2003

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

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, Oriol 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.

Dangerous substances conference, 16 October

Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service (SOHAS) is organising a one-day conference for employers, trade unionists, health and safety managers and occupational health professionals. The event, to run on 16 October as a contribution to European safety week, will include a talk on the HSE's policy on risk assessment and dangerous substances at work and workshops on work related asthma, managing asbestos in premises, dermatitis and skin disease, work related cancer and substitution of dangerous substances. Cost £30, including refreshments and lunch. Venue to be announced.

- [Further details](#) and [online booking form](#)

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

IIAC public meeting, Glasgow, 18 March 2004

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC), the body that advises the government on which accidents and diseases should qualify for industrial injuries payouts, is giving members of the public a chance to find out about its work. A day of presentations and structured workshops at the 18 March 2004 meeting in Glasgow will: Describe the process of "prescribing" occupational diseases – picking the ones that get added to the list; seek opinions about new issues of concern in

occupational health; and will provide an opportunity to contribute ideas on IIAC's future work programme. IIAC says individual cases or claims cannot be discussed at the meeting, however.

- **Admission free, by ticket only. To apply for tickets or to get further information, contact [Neil Davidson](#), IIAC Secretariat, tel. 0207 962 8066. [IIAC website](#)**

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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