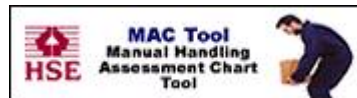


Risks

issue no 124 – 20 September 2003



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 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.

ACTION

Asbestos victim needs help

A 35-year-old former railway labourer with a terminal asbestos related cancer is attempting to track down former colleagues to help him with his compensation claim. Colin Ridley of Acomb, York is one of the youngest people to contract the asbestos cancer mesothelioma says his lawyer, Ian Bailey of Irwin Mitchell Solicitors. Colin is claiming that his employer, an employment agency whose details he cannot recall, was negligent in letting him work in asbestos dust without protective clothing when he was a labourer in a re-fitting yard at the ABB Carriageworks at York between October 1990 and February 1991. "If people who worked with me can help me with statements to describe the working conditions then I can make my compensation claim and help my girlfriend and parents financially," Colin said. His lawyer, Ian Bailey, added: "This is a particularly tragic case because Colin is so young and so very ill. He has already had one lung removed and the prognosis is poor...To make a successful compensation claim, which is the least Colin deserves, we need witnesses who can describe the working conditions there when Colin was working on the re-fit."

- [Irwin Mitchell information appeal](#). **If you worked at ABB in 1990/1, contact Ian Bailey, 0870 1500 100**

Eh, EU! Keep paraquat safely controlled!

International food and farming union IUF is appealing for worldwide action to prevent the European Union from relaxing current restrictions on the highly toxic herbicide paraquat. It says paraquat accounts for a substantial number of the 40,000 global pesticide-related deaths each year, adding there is no known antidote to paraquat poisoning. Despite widespread recognition of the dangers to human health and the environment, the European Union is proposing to encourage paraquat's use by relaxing current restrictions, says IUF. The issue will be voted at a meeting of the EU's Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health to take place on 1-2 October 2003. IUF says: "Relaxing restrictions on paraquat would encourage greater use of this toxic substance and force it onto the market in EU and other countries where it is currently banned. It would undermine efforts to establish higher standards of health and safety in agriculture and encourage agricultural production methods which are socially and environmentally non-sustainable." IUF wants national safety ministers and the EU inundated with letters opposing any relaxation of paraquat controls.

- **You can help! [IUF briefing and sample letter](#) to the EU and national safety and environment ministers – get writing now**

FEATURE



TUC awards "Workers' VC" to safety reps

Britain's top workplace safety reps were honoured at last week's TUC Congress. The 2003 national Safety Rep of the Year is TGWU safety rep Anthony Hitchins, who works at Peugeot in Coventry. Congratulating Anthony and the regional 2003 Safety Representative of the Year winners, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said they were the heirs of the 440 recipients of the Order of Industrial Heroism or "Workers' VC" (pictured). The original awards were given by the *Daily Herald* – which later became *The Sun* – between 1923 and 1964 to recognise the "deeds of valour" of those who saved fellow workers from danger or death. Brendan Barber said: "Safety reps are the best and sometimes the only defence that working people have. We know that union safety reps cut the rate of serious injury at work by more than 50 per cent, and over the years they have saved thousands of lives by diligence, hard work and commitment." He added: "Safety reps work their magic by making sure that workers' health and safety risks are managed properly by employers. These 'Workers' VCs' honour the hard work and ingenuity of 200,000 safety reps around Great Britain by picking out just a few of the stories those safety reps have to tell." And safety had another winner – the Congress Award for Youth went to Ross Marshall, a 24-year-old RMT safety rep on London Underground.

- [TUC news release and background on the 2003 winners](#)
- **Regional Safety Rep of the Year awards went to: George Kane, TGWU, Scotland; John Evans, GPMU, Wales; Kevin Armstrong, Unifi, North; Robert Wilson, GPMU, North West; Philip Clarkson, Amicus, Yorkshire and Humberside; Ron White, PCS, West Midlands; Jackie Harrison, PCS, East Midlands; Gwen Cherry, Usdaw, South East; Malcolm Mellow, TGWU, South West.**
- [TUC history online](#) on the Order of Industrial Heroism
- [More on the live-saving role of union safety reps](#)

UNION NEWS

Worker safety advisers are a hit!

A worker safety adviser scheme created in response to union calls for "roving" safety reps has been a stunning success, a study has concluded. The report issued by the HSC assessed the worker safety advisers (WSA) pilot, one of a number of measures HSC agreed with ministers in 2000 to promote greater employee involvement and consultation. HSC says the WSA pilot, which involved 88 employers and nine WSAs, was an innovative way to get safety representatives into small firms. The independent evaluation found: Nearly 73 per cent of employers said awareness had increased on health and safety matters and a third said communications had improved; over 75 per cent of employers said the pilot had led to them changing their approach, including revising or introducing new policies and procedures (61 per cent), having regular health and safety discussions with staff (21 per cent), and carrying out risk assessments (11 per cent). Nearly 70 per cent of workers said there was more discussion on health and safety. HSC chair Bill Callaghan commented: "What has impressed me was that where employees were involved they really did help solve health and safety problems. We now want to take forward the approach but more work needs to be done to find practical and cost effect ways of doing this."

- [HSE news release](#). **The Worker Safety Advisers (WSA) pilot, HSC research report RR144, [pdf format]**. [More on Worker Safety Advisers](#)

UNISON help for voluntary organisations

Public sector union UNISON has launched a new website to provide free health and safety information to small and medium sized community and voluntary organisations. It says it created the www.healthandsafetyinfo.org.uk resource after a year-long pilot of workplace safety advisers (WSAs) in the community and voluntary sector in the Newcastle area. The initiative, funded by the Health and Safety Executive and supported by UNISON, revealed that community and voluntary sector employers wanted simple, straightforward information on health and safety. UNISON national officer for the voluntary sector Rosalie Ward commented: "Community and voluntary sector employers often hide their heads in the sand when it comes to health and safety, yet this is just storing up trouble for the future." She added: "Both management committees and managers have to

start taking their responsibilities as employers seriously and make the health, safety and welfare of their staff a priority." Hugh Robertson, UNISON's head of health and safety, said: "This website shows that health and safety is not rocket science, often it is just common sense, and the three keys to it are risk assessment, training, and consultation with staff."

- [UNISON news release](#) and [community and voluntary sector safety website](#)



Brit journalists are being written off by overwork

British journalists work the longest hours for the lowest pay with the fewest rights and the shortest holidays in Europe and are paying a deadly price as a result, says journalists' union NUJ. The union's general secretary Jeremy Dear said: "Working life has been characterised for too long by low pay, long hours, increased stress and illness." He added: "Many of our members end up working 45, 50 and 60 hours a week. Some sign individual opt-outs from the Working Time Regulations because they have to or fear losing their job. We've seen record numbers of cases of bullying, of stress at work. Three of our members have committed suicide, at least one directly blamed by their families on stress at work." Last week, TUC launched an "It's about time!" campaign to end the UK's opt-out from the Working Time Regulations ([Risks 123](#)).

- [NUJ news release](#). Also see: **Double trouble from soaring stress**
- TUC's [It's about time website](#) and the [Hazards worked to death web resources](#)

Union backs ban bullying day

Nationwide activities to mark ban bullying day are being scheduled for 16 October. The event, the brainchild of the union Amicus, employment rights groups and anti-bullying organisation The Andrea Adams Trust, is intended to "raise awareness of bullying and its terrible consequences throughout workplaces up and down the country, where it might have occurred or where it might occur in the future." Amicus says current safety laws are "completely inappropriate" to deal with this problem. It says employment tribunals are hearing cases of bullying every day "but they are doing so in a

framework of law that compels them to ask the wrong questions and produces unsatisfactory answers." The union adds: "For people on the receiving end of bullying, the experience is devastating, and it is a big cause of mental ill-health. Bullying at the very least, is a big cause of stress. It is a sad fact that it leads some to suicide. What a terrible indictment of our world of work that we allow this kind of behaviour to go unchecked!" The day's organisers are calling for national activities and for workers to wear silver ribbons.

- [Amicus news release](#)



Cut risks not safety workers, says HSE union

Safety inspectors' union Prospect is campaigning for more money for the HSE to prevent reductions in the number of investigations into major injuries at work. The cuts come in the wake of a funding crisis at HSE after the government this year froze the executive's resources, prompting a rash of cost-cutting measures across departments. The HSE budget allocation for the next three years equates to a 10 per cent reduction in real terms. Stephen Kay, Prospect's HSE branch chair said: "Rather than axing HSE inspectors we would like to see the numbers doubled so each workplace is inspected at least once every five years. At present employers can expect a visit every 10 to 15 years if at all." The union is calling on employees and employers to join its campaign and write to their MPs to oppose these senseless cuts. TUC's Owen Tudor said: "The HSE needs more resources to meet the Government's Revitalising health and safety targets. We want to see more investigations, but we also want to see more proactive, preventive inspections, which will require a rebalancing of inspectors' work from investigations towards prevention."

- [Prospect news release](#) and [Cut risks not safety workers](#) web resources
- **Write to your MP – if you don't know who your MP is or how to contact them, it's dead easy to find out - [just click here](#)**

Safety cuts cost lives, says Amicus

Government plans to cut the budget of the HSE will have dire consequences for workers, says Amicus. The union claims the move will result in fewer health and safety inspectors and less frequent workplace inspections. "Employers whose negligent health and safety

practices lead to the death and injury of their workers are criminals in the same way that muggers and murderers are," said Derek Simpson, general secretary of Amicus. "If the government tried to reduce police numbers there would be justifiable public outrage and the reaction should be the same when it comes to compromising workplace safety by reducing the number of health and safety inspectors." The union says leaked HSE documents show the safety watchdog has had to suspended recruitment and is leaving vacancies unfilled.

- [Yorkshire Post. Occupational Hazards](#)

OTHER NEWS

Double trouble from soaring stress

The prevalence of work stress related health problems including heart conditions has doubled since 1990 and is now the top cause of lost work days, according to new official figures. The latest HSE statistics on work-related ill health in Great Britain show the self-reported prevalence stood at 2.3 million people in 2001/02, accounting for 33 million working days lost. The report says: "In 2001/02, stress, depression or anxiety and musculoskeletal disorders accounted for the majority of days lost: an estimated 13.4 million and 12.3 million days off work respectively." It adds: "The estimated prevalence rate of stress and related (mainly heart) conditions has increased over time and is now around double the level it was in 1990." TUC and *Hazards* warned last month that stress and overwork were making heart disease and depression top occupational diseases of the 21st century ([Risks 118](#)). "These latest figures show our concern is well-founded, and that overwork is creating modern and deadly occupational disease epidemics," said TUC's Owen Tudor.

- [HSE news release. Occupational Health Statistics Bulletin 2002/03 \[pdf format\]. More official HSE stats](#)
- [Daily Mail. Personnel Today](#)
- [TUC's It's about time website](#) and the [Hazards worked to death web resources](#)

Bosses call for government rehab help

Rehabilitation must play a greater role in halting the rising tide of long-term illness and incapacity in the workforce, a report from a top bosses' organisation has concluded. The Institute of Directors (IoD) report says government and employers must work together to help

long-term absentees back into work. It says official figures show there are some 700,000 new incapacity benefit claimants each year, with over 2.7 million people of working age now claiming some form of the benefit. IoD's health policy analyst Geraint Day said: "The chances of returning to regular employment tend to diminish with the length of absence from work." Half of the respondents to a survey of IoD members said their company provided an occupational health service for employees, the report says. However, employers felt more could be done by other bodies to assist in rehabilitating staff on long-term sick leave. Geraint Day said: "All the stakeholders – workforce, employers, insurers, and central and local government (especially the NHS) - have a role to play in ensuring that everyone who has the inclination and capacity to do so is actively encouraged to remain in or return to working life."

- [IoD news release](#). [Union advice on rehab](#)

Jail term for rigged safety valves

A Derbyshire company director has been jailed for selling unsafe equipment to North Sea oil rigs. The faulty ball valves sold by 47-year-old Paul Timson with forged safety certificates could have caused an explosion and destroyed an entire North Sea oil rig. Timson, who was jailed for 15 months at Derby Crown Court, had admitted 19 charges of forging safety certificates for ball valves, one charge of using forged business documents for financial gain, and three charges of supplying unsafe valves. The court heard the deals made him £250,000 in 18 months. The case followed a joint investigation by police and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). HSE issued an official safety alert in May 1999 after one of Timson's customers noticed inconsistencies in safety certificates supplied with the valves. After the case, HSE inspector Nick Marshall said: "Safety tests and certification aren't just extra paperwork – these valves were for use in key safety systems in platforms across the world and if they'd failed, Timson's actions could have cost many lives. Thankfully no one offshore was injured as users removed the valves at considerable expense after HSE's safety alert. It was a serious offence and that's reflected in the sentence."

- [HSE news release](#). [icScotland](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Ananova](#)

Fury at rig safety cuts after worker deaths

Moves to scrap a levy that funds safety training for oil industry managers and designers have been exposed just days after an

accident on the Brent Bravo platform claimed two lives. The *Press and Journal* says it has uncovered evidence that industry insiders believe safety could be compromised by the plan. The Engineering Construction Industry Training Board has denied the change would affect safety. Union leaders and MPs, however, have expressed "great concern" about the effect on safety of any reduction in training, despite an assurance from ECITB chief executive David Edwards that only the training of managerial and design staff working "off-site" would be affected, and not supervisors and trade staff offshore, for whom the board planned to increase training. Amicus regional officer Graham Tran said: "If they are talking about cutting back on training to save money, that will be wholly unacceptable and downright dangerous." Mr Tran said managers and designers were still "in the chain" and any decrease in the levy for their training would be wrong. Sean McCue, 22, and Keith Moncrieff, 45, died on Shell's Brent Bravo platform on 12 September, when they were engulfed in a massive gas escape.

- [Press and Journal](#) and [earlier article about union concerns](#). [The Scotsman](#). [BBC News Online](#)

Dangerous rumours lead to walk out

More than 600 contract workers at one of the biggest oil refineries in Europe walked out after rumours of safety problems spread across the site. Oil giant Texaco and union leaders at the Pembroke refinery, in west Wales, joined forces to appeal to them to return to work. Both sides claim that safety issues at the site have been fully dealt with and are calling for the workers to return to work. Danny Fellows, regional officer with the TGWU union, said part of the problem stemmed from unfounded rumours about safety at the sprawling site during a £60 million refit. "We had one report that someone had broadcast an alert saying workers are 'dropping like flies' because of a gas leak," he said. "Another said that a contractor had broken his back in an accident. Neither report was true." A spokesperson for Texaco said: "Having met with the site union representatives, we are satisfied that we have been able to alleviate those concerns and the union full time officers are requesting a return to work."

- [icScotland](#). [Ananova](#)

Radiation claims "too difficult"

Former dockyard workers are asking the government to look again at criteria set for proving radiation exposure in cancer compensation

claims. The group, who were employed by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in Chatham, Kent, have been pressing their case since 1989. They believe they were exposed to radiation when they worked on nuclear submarines in the 1980s, but say getting the compensation they are due is proving too difficult. Out of more than 50 dockyard workers who have made claims so far, only two have been successful in meeting the MoD's criteria, with another two still in progress. The campaigners says workers' claims have been "seriously compromised" by below standard health and safety practices and record keeping at the dockyard. The campaign, which is supported by Labour MP for Chatham and Aylesford Jonathon Shaw, was started by Tim Robson, a former worker who died of Hodgkinson's disease. Mr Shaw said: "Thousands of people worked in that nuclear facility ensuring submarines went out on time during the Cold War."

- [BBC News Online](#)

Police escort for paramedics

Paramedics in Merseyside are refusing to travel to some households without a police escort because of increasing attacks. Mersey Regional Ambulance Service said its staff had been assaulted and abused at nine addresses in Wirral. One woman paramedic asked to be moved to a different department after being attacked three times. The Ambulance Service said it had a responsibility to protect its staff from potentially dangerous situations. Paramedics are being instructed to stand off until police arrive and withhold treatment if necessary.

- [BBC News Online](#)

Building industry must improve, says minister

The government's health and safety minister has challenged the construction industry to do more to improve site safety. Speaking at the Federation of Master Builders annual conference, minister for work Des Browne stressed the importance of cooperation and involving workers in efforts to improve standards: "Together, we are making progress in tackling the industry's poor health and safety performance. The fact that, for the first time, health and safety is the theme of your annual conference demonstrates your determination to work for a better future," he said, adding that there is still a lot to do because "workers in the construction industry are five times more likely to be killed at work and are almost twice as likely to suffer ill-health than the average of all other industries in Great Britain." The minister added: "I believe that involving workers in planning out the job safely and taking

more steps to protect the health of workers is the way forward." The FMB co-operated with the TGWU and UCATT in last year's Worker Safety Adviser pilot. George Brumwell, general secretary of construction union UCATT, warned last week that employment agencies are openly advertising "cheap labour" migrant workers, adding that some were having wages docked illegally for accommodation and even safety equipment.

- [DWP news release](#). [Yorkshire Post](#)

INTERNATIONAL

Canada: Deadly asbestos industry fights for survival

Asbestos industry lobbyists in Canada are continuing to defend their deadly product at home and abroad. The latest twist in the multimillion dollar campaign by the Canadian government and the asbestos industry to rehabilitate asbestos ([Risks 93](#)) came as workers from the Asbestos and Thetford mines areas in Quebec lobbied a two-day international conference in Ottawa calling for a global asbestos ban. The result was duelling press conferences and demonstrations by defenders and opponents of the controversial product. Those opposed argue there is no safe way to use asbestos and accuse Canada of condoning the global trafficking of a lethal commodity. Those in favour of the industry argue asbestos may have been dangerous in the past, but now, when handled properly, chrysotile (white asbestos) fibres can be used safely. However, these safe use claims were examined and dismissed by the European Commission in the run-up to the EU-wide asbestos ban, which found a ban was justified on health grounds. Critics of the asbestos industry say the Canadian government would have better served the interests of the dying asbestos mining communities by investing its millions in economic regeneration in affected communities and in support and retraining for displaced workers. A Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) policy document supports a "just transition" strategy of this type for unsustainable industries.

- [Montreal Gazette](#). **International Ban Asbestos Secretariat [website](#) and [conference background document](#)**. [CLC policy on Just Transition](#)
- [ICFTU feature on Just Transition](#). [Just Transition Alliance](#)

China: Deadly disasters in firework factories

In the space of only one week - from 28 July to 4 August 2003 - there

were four reported explosions in fireworks factories in China, leading to the death of at least 31 people, reports China Labour Bulletin. It says the explosions came just days after the official safety agency, the State Administration of Work Safety (SAWS), held a press conference highlighting “good news” – but still admitted the number of serious fatal accidents in some industries had increased despite claims of “vigorous measures to advance the building of the safety supervision and administration system.” In the first quarter of 2003, the number of “serious fatal accidents” was up compared to 2002, says CLB. The independent organisation has produced its own detailed proposals to improve occupational health and safety in China.

- **China Labour Bulletin [fireworks story](#) and [China safety proposals](#)**

USA: WWII nukes still killing today

Employees at secret US World War II nuclear weapons facilities are still paying a deadly price for the work and are missing out on compensation. Workers at the plants were exposed to radiation laced dust that persisted long after weapons manufacture ceased. But a compensation scheme that pays \$150,000 (£93,200) and help with medical bills to workers falling ill as a result of exposure to the toxic dust does not cover workers who were hired after the weapons work ended. Many of the private facilities that handled uranium, thorium and other hazardous materials for the nuclear weapons programme in the 1940s and '50s remained dangerously contaminated for years, even decades, according to a review of declassified federal records. Discoveries of lingering hazards forced a few sites to be restricted, closed or abandoned as late as the 1990s. People with ailments that can be tied to contamination at the sites “deserve compensation, whether their exposure occurred during the weapons contract or after,” says Democrat senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, who is pushing to expand eligibility.

- **[USA Today](#)**

RESOURCES

More stuff for web US-ers

Workers taking work hazards home or workers handling the baggage when we depart on holidays can find new helpful advice online. A webpage from the official US safety research body NIOSH on “take home toxins” includes a research agenda on protecting workers’

families, guidance on reducing the risks, and detailed assessments of the problem. And US safety watchdog OSHA has produced a new "etool" on injury reduction measures for baggage handling staff.

- [Take home toxins](#) webpage and [etool on airline baggage handling](#) and related [news release](#)

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](#)



World Maritime Day, 25 September

As the global transport unions' federation ITF and its affiliated unions prepare to mark World Maritime Day on 25 September, ITF has released a new publication, *Seafarers, the vital link in safe, sustainable shipping*. ITF says member unions plan to honour the day and explore the best ways to achieve shipping that is safe for seafarers, passengers and the environment by - among other planned activities - addressing their governments and by holding rallies and education events.

- [ITF news release](#). *Seafarers, the vital link in safe, sustainable shipping* [[in pdf format](#)]

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

Construction Safety Campaign AGM, 8 November

The Construction Safety Campaign's 2003 AGM and national meeting is to be held in Liverpool on 8 November. Key issues are corporate killing, asbestos risks, employee consultation and roving reps. Further details from CSC, PO Box 23844, London, SE15 3WR, [email](#) or phone 07747 795954.

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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