

Risks

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HAZARDS
MAGAZINE



back pain

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

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Risks is the TUC's weekly online bulletin for safety reps and others, read each week by over 9,500 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](#).

UNION NEWS

Alarm at “disastrous” Euro safety enforcement move

TUC, unions and campaigners across Europe have responded with alarm to a Euro plan that could stop national enforcement agencies enforcing safety laws for some foreign companies based on their turf. The Health and Safety Executive and local authorities will not be able to inspect, investigate, impose enforcement notices or lay criminal charges against any non-permanent, non-UK European company or individual for any breaches of health and safety law, under proposals in the “Directive on Services in the Internal market.” European companies in Britain will instead have to comply with their own country's laws and only HSE equivalent bodies from their home nation will be able enforce the law in Britain. TUC head of safety Hugh Robertson said: “This proposal will effectively make any enforcement impossible in many cases. If implemented in its present form it could have disastrous consequences.” Robertson explained: “The proposal means that many services will be free from inspection for a six month period, there will be no-one to deal with potentially fatal situations and safety reps will have no-one they can call in when the employer ignores either UK, or the home state, laws. The very idea of ‘home member state’ jurisdiction and enforcement is an absolute nonsense in health and safety terms and must be scrapped.” Unions across Europe are also campaigning actively on the issue, which would cover safety and other areas of enforcement.

- [TUTB news release](#). [CCA news release](#). [ETUC news release](#).

TSSA calls for zero tolerance as assaults on rail staff increase

TSSA, Britain's biggest rail union, is calling on train operating companies to introduce a zero tolerance policy on customer violence after a safety report revealed that assaults on staff have risen for the third successive year. The Rail Safety and Standards Board's *Annual Safety Performance Report* for 2003 shows that reported assaults on rail staff have increased for the third successive year, up by 18 per cent. Shock or “no injury” cases rose by 33 per cent and 40 per cent of the total increase was in verbal abuse to staff. TSSA is concerned that

the fragmented rail industry has not yet settled on a common method of reporting workforce assaults, resulting in discrepancies between reporting rates in train operating companies. It fears that this leads to the under-reporting of assaults on rail staff, which was identified as a major health and safety risk in an independent survey of TSSA members. TSSA general secretary Gerry Doherty said: "It is unacceptable that rail staff are bearing the brunt of the public's frustration with a failing rail service through verbal abuse and threats of violence. This is putting staff under intolerable stress and we call on the industry to take the issue seriously by introducing a zero tolerance approach to customers who behave in this way."

- [TSSA news release](#). [RSSB news release](#) and [Annual Safety Performance Report](#).

Amicus survey shows lab workers are at risk

Lab workers are facing serious health risks, according to a survey by science union Amicus. The union "found evidence of some worrying ways in which their health is not being protected." The survey found "7.7 per cent of our private sector labs sample reported technicians' health had suffered through coming into contact with dangerous chemicals or biological agents," says Amicus. It adds: "Sixty-five per cent of respondents said their employers failed to make provision for annual surveillance of workers at risk from chemical or biological hazards. Ten per cent said their employers failed to provide the necessary training to workers handling potentially dangerous chemicals and biological agents." The survey found more than one in eight safety reps (13 per cent) said their employer did not provide annual health surveillance or adequate safety provisions for workers handling radioactive substances. Amicus national safety officer Chris Ball said the shortcomings in health surveillance, training and prevention measures were more worrying still as the Health and Safety Executive has insufficient resources to enforce properly. In addition to demanding more resources for HSE, he said: "If safety reps were automatically contacted whenever the HSE inspector calls, if they had the right to issue Union Improvement Notices and be involved in all risk assessments, these would be big steps forward."

- [Amicus news release](#). **Guide to [union issued health and safety notices](#)**.

Union warning after fatal attack on BBC news team

The killing of a BBC cameraman and the wounding of a reporter in Saudi Arabia has highlighted the increasingly frightening choices facing journalists who report from the world's most dangerous regions, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has said. Freelance BBC cameraman Simon Cumbers was killed and BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner critically injured when gunmen opened fire near the Saudi capital, Riyadh. "The targeting of journalists by ruthless terrorists presents media with its greatest challenge," said Aidan White, IFJ general secretary. "We cannot bow to the intimidation of cold-blooded and ruthless killers, so we must face up to the reality that in this new climate of terrorism more actions must be taken to protect our people, because we can be sure more attacks will take place." White added: "We must improve safety training, provide protection for people when they are reporting from dangerous areas, and ensure that governments and security forces are doing everything they can to improve levels of protection for media people. Journalists must be equipped to take hard decisions about the risks they face, but they can only do that with confidence if they are certain that everything is being done to minimise the dangers."

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

Union signs accord to beat harassment

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has struck a formal accord with the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) to help ensure dignity and respect for all workers represented by the union. Julie Mellor, chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission, welcomed the measure to tackle bullying and sexual harassment: "Unions have a key role to play in establishing a zero tolerance policy towards harassment of any kind," she said. "This agreement marks an important recognition of that role." CWU general secretary Billy Hayes commented: "We are acutely aware that problems of bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment have existed within our industries. With the aid of the EOC we have mapped out a strategy for ensuring our workplaces and our union are prejudice-free zones." He added: "We have introduced training sessions for all our active members, and drawn up a charter for our membership. They know what they can expect from their union." The union and the EOC began working together after the

EOC was contacted by a number of women claiming that sexual harassment had been carried out or supported by postal workers who were members of the union. CWU has run a harassment hotline for its members for over three years.

- [CWU news release](#). [EOC news release](#).

Pilots working hours campaign takes off

The British public support overwhelmingly airline pilots who say flying hours should be determined not by politicians but by experts or by pilots. Of 1,000 people surveyed by MORI, 83 per cent believe that pilot flying hours should be determined by experts specialising in this field (56 per cent) or by the pilots themselves (27 per cent). The poll findings were published this week as British pilots joined 100 other European pilots in an unprecedented lobby of Euro ministers in Luxembourg. British pilots' union BALPA and the other 14 pilot organisations in the EU believe that the European Parliament's proposals for significantly longer flight time hours are a "political compromise," are dangerous and will put passenger lives at risk. BALPA says the proposed new flying hours should have been decided by scientists and safety experts and not by politicians. "We shall be demanding that we be allowed to meet with the Council and set before them research which will prove that if they adopt the proposals, the probability of accidents will increase six fold and passenger lives will be put at risk," said Jim McAuslan, general secretary of BALPA. "The British public clearly agree with us that it is the scientists and safety experts who should determine what the European flight time hours should be, not the politicians in Brussels or in Westminster."

- [BALPA news release](#).

Unions provide legal support for blast tragedy families

The Maryhill victims' families and survivors of the factory blast which killed nine workers ([Risks 158](#)) are to be given free legal advice and support by trade union chiefs. The Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) is offering its expertise to help workers from the Stockline Plastics plant - even though they are not union members. STUC assistant secretary Ian Tasker said the trade union movement had already expressed condolences to the families of those killed and said that members' thoughts were with those injured and affected. He added: "Although we recognise this was a non-unionised workplace our

general council has decided that every possible assistance should be given to the workers and their families, both during the investigation and any subsequent legal process." He said the STUC would host a meeting of workers and families with a view to forming a support group to provide free legal advice and practical help.

- [The Evening Times](#).

Deadly legacy of London's asbestos industry

A London community has been blighted for decades by asbestos disease, according to a union-backed report. *Rising from the dust*, produced by the London Hazards Centre with support from Barking and Dagenham UNISON, tracks the deadly passage of asbestos imported through London's docks into the Cape asbestos factory in Barking and then out into our vehicles, schools, hospitals and homes. The report says Barking and Dagenham is the sickest London borough and asbestos is an important reason why. The 2001 census showed nearly one-fifth of households in Barking and Dagenham had someone suffering a long-term illness, significantly above the English average. For cancers of all kinds the death rate is significantly above average for men, and is higher than other London boroughs. Barking and Dagenham is the tenth worst place in the UK for asbestos disease, topped only by shipbuilding locations. Among women, Barking and Dagenham has the top national incidence for the deadly asbestos cancer mesothelioma.

- [LHC news release](#). Full report: *Rising from the dust* [[pdf](#)].

Bar staff union votes for smoking ban

Bar, pub, club and catering staff members of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) have voted in favour of an outright ban on smoking in bars, pubs, clubs and restaurants. The decision comes amid mounting concerns about the failure of existing legislation to protect workers and the public from the potentially fatal impact of passive smoking. Brian Revell, TGWU national organiser for food and agriculture, said: "It is unacceptable that our members working in the leisure industry continue to be confronted by smoky environments, which can damage their health and even be fatal. One delegate suggested that passive smoking can be as bad as working in an asbestos contaminated area." He added: "The feedback from our

members working in bars, pubs, clubs and restaurants is that smoking in their workplaces is as prevalent as ever and a ban is now necessary. The government are right to consider a ban and the TGWU expects them to take a firm position in the interests of public health.”

- [TGWU news release](#). **Related information:** [TUC SmokeatWork.org](#) and [Hazards smoking news and resources](#).

OTHER NEWS

Prime minister considers public smoking ban

Tony Blair has said the government is considering introducing a ban on smoking in public places and will come to a view in the “next few months.” But the prime minister stressed it was “a difficult balance” protecting the public's health on the one hand and not being overly interfering on the other. He told BBC Breakfast: “There's no doubt about the damage that smoking does and also I think for a lot of people who aren't smokers they would actually prefer to be in an environment where there's not smoking taking place.” Welcoming the PM's comments, TUC general secretary, Brendan Barber, said: “Ending the exposure of workers to secondhand tobacco smoke would not only save hundreds of lives every year, it would also help reduce the levels of asthma and other smoke-related diseases in the hospitality and other related industries.” He added: “Asking employers to prevent exposure to tobacco smoke voluntarily clearly has not worked, and there is growing evidence that other proposed solutions, such as introducing increased ventilation and no-smoking areas, have only had minimal effect.” He said piecemeal local authority bans were not good enough, because workers everywhere deserved the protection of a national ban.

- [BBC News Online](#). [TUC news release](#). [ASH news release](#). [Sky News](#).

Scottish Executive seek smoking ban views

The Scottish Executive has launched a consultation on whether to introduce a smoking ban in public places. Scotland's deputy health minister Tom McCabe said: “Legislation is obviously an option, but all options will be considered. We are seeking to promote good citizenship and ensure smokers are aware of how their secondhand smoke affects

others. A voluntary charter being operated by the licensed trade has yielded some results, but seven out of 10 pubs still allow smoking throughout their premises and smoke-free pubs and restaurants are still few and far between." The minister added: "In addition to the public consultation, we are also undertaking a number of pieces of research to help us reach the right decisions. This includes looking at international experience and evidence about the health and economic impact of action to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke." This includes the smoking bans in place in New York and Ireland, he said. Dr Bill O'Neill, Scottish secretary of the BMA, said he was pleased the executive had finally "succumbed" to public pressure and launched a consultation into the creation of more smoke free public areas. He said: "The voluntary approach has failed while international experience has produced evidence that comprehensive tobacco control programmes, supported by national legislation, work."

- [Scottish Executive news release](#). [Consultation webpage](#). [ASH Scotland news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).

Directors have best jobs and lowest stress

Bosses have the least work stress, most job satisfaction and the best health, according to a new study. A survey of 25,000 Britons in 26 jobs indicated that workers dealing directly with customers are much more likely to suffer stress than their bosses. Psychology firm Robertson Cooper said paramedics had the most stressful time, ahead of teachers and social workers. Senior business directors - facing performance pressures but often more removed from direct contact with customers - were the least likely to suffer from these problems. The least anxious workers are directors in the private sector, who came bottom of the stress table in all three areas measured by the study - physical health, psychological well-being and job satisfaction. Ambulance personnel suffer the most with their physical health while social services have the worst psychological well-being, and prison officers have the least job satisfaction.

- [Robertson Cooper news release \[pdf\]](#). [BBC News Online](#). [Personnel Today](#). [HR Gateway](#).

Father hits out at "joke" fine after deaths

A grieving dad has hit out after a firm was fined £15,000 over his son's

death. Richard Moncrieff witnessed the incident in which his son Gary and workmate Ross Cockburn were electrocuted. He claimed both Lightways Contractors and Inverclyde Council had got off lightly after pleading guilty to breaching health and safety regulations. He said: "I think the fines are a joke. The penalty is not nearly high enough for the deaths of two young men. I know the directors of Lightways are earning four times more in a year than what the company was fined." The men had been sent to replace old street lights in Kilmacolm in August 2002. But tragedy struck when a column they were removing toppled and touched a live 11,000-volt overhead cable. Sheriff Ian Inglis fined Lightways £15,000 and the council £5,000. An earlier enquiry criticised the company for not undertaking a risk assessment and found that the council should have issued a warning if not a prohibition notice to prevent Lightways doing the dangerous job without a prior risk assessment.

- [Daily Record](#) and [earlier report on the original accident](#).

Safety harness may be not as safe as you think

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is warning that certain safety harnesses might not be as safe as the user hopes. It says a number of recorded incidents in Europe coupled with interim findings of its own ongoing research "have raised concerns with certain fall arrest equipment usually found attached to or integrated in fixed ladders on permanent structures." HSE's Martin Holden said: "All those manufacturing, installing, using or having responsibility for any of these types of fixed rail or guided wire fall arrest equipment need to be aware of these important alerts. HSE advises that all relevant parties heed the warnings they contain and follow the recommendations in them. If end users are unable to follow the recommendations then we advise that alternative means of fall protection be used until such time that the equipment can be modified or replaced." He added: "HSE inspectors will further publicise these warnings to trade associations and other relevant industry bodies."

- [HSE news release including details of the warnings](#).

Helen Clark, global high tech campaigner

Helen Clark, a Scottish woman who fought high tech hazards on her doorstep and won acclaim worldwide, has died. Helen was chair of

Phase Two, the campaign group for those fighting hazards and ill-health caused by the microchip industry in Scotland's Silicon Glen. She suspected the cancer that was to kill was, like other cases known to the group, related to exposures at the Greenock National Semiconductor plant where she had worked ([Risks 128](#)). She was held in high regard by the International Campaign for Responsible Technology for her campaigning, including throwing down a face-to-face challenge to George Scalise of the US Semiconductor Industry Association to conduct a meaningful health study of electronics workers. Last year SIA caved in and said it would conduct a study ([Risks 149](#)). Investigations of high tech cancer, reproductive and other health risks in UK microelectronic plants similarly only took place after concerted Phase Two pressure. In 2002, Helen and fellow campaigner Jim McCourt accepted the Bob and Sydney Brown International Humanitarian Award in the US for their work with Phase Two.

- [Phase 2. Helen Clark receiving the Bob and Sydney Brown International Humanitarian Award 2002. International Campaign for Responsible Technology.](#)

INTERNATIONAL

Australia: Rail unions condemn "beer nannies"

Management at RailCorp in Australia has ordered supervisors to monitor the alcohol intake of workers out of hours in a move unions say shows drug and alcohol testing is off the rails. An internal RailCorp memo circulated by manager Nigel Howlett says that if employees are forced to stay overnight in licensed premises, a supervisor should ensure "excessive alcohol consumption does not take place." Labor Council secretary John Robertson said the measures, to be applied to rail maintenance workers staying away from home overnight, shows that RailCorp's approach to drug and alcohol usage is not working. "The idea of asking supervisors to be 'beer nannies' shows that RailCorp is not prepared to treat its workers as adults. First, RailCorp imposed a drug and alcohol policy that places conditions more onerous than those for police officers or people who are driving their cars on the road. Then, rather than increase accommodation allowances to allow them to stay in motels, they have instructed supervisors to monitor alcohol intake after hours." The union leader added: "It's about time RailCorp got serious and gave their workers the respect they deserve."

- [Workers Online](#). Related information: [Union guidance on drink and drugs tests](#).

Global: The unacceptable costs of child domestic labour

Child domestic labour is a widespread and growing global phenomenon that traps as many as ten million children or more - mostly girls - in hidden forms of exploitation, often involving abuse, health risks and violence, according to a new report from the International Labour Office (ILO). *Helping hands or shackled lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it* documents the exploitation of these children - some as young as 10 - for the first time on a global level. Prepared by the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), the report examines in detail the plight of children working in sometimes hazardous forms of domestic labour, and was issued on the eve of the third World Day Against Child Labour, 12 June. ILO director general Juan Somavia commented: "Millions of children work night and day outside of their family homes, toiling as domestic child labourers. Nearly all are exploited, exposed to hazardous work and subject to abuse - this must stop now." Report author Dr June Kane, said: "They are in a workplace - even if that workplace is someone else's home - hidden from public view and labour inspection. The children are consequently at risk not only of exploitation but also of abuse and violence."

- [ILO news release](#). *Helping hands or shackled lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it* [[pdf](#)], ILO, 2004, ISBN 92-2-115747-4. ILO brochure on child domestic labour, *The invisible children* [[pdf](#)]. [IPEC website](#). [World Day Against Child Labour](#), 12 June.

Global: Survey charts the spread of anti-union repression

With 129 trade unionists killed worldwide and an upward swing in death threats, imprisonment and physical harassment, trade union rights continue to be violated across the world. This year's survey of trade union rights, published annually by the global union federation ICFTU, details severe abuses of fundamental workers' rights in 2003. Painting a country by country account of trade union rights violations across the world, this year's survey covers 134 countries in total, highlighting assassinations, physical intimidation, arrests, death threats and dismissals for forming or joining trade unions, presenting

collective demands or taking strike action. The survey notes that growing global competition has been accompanied by deteriorating workers' rights. Colombia proved yet again to be the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist. Last year, a total of 90 people were killed in the country for their trade union activity.

- [ICFTU news release](#), plus news releases concerning violations in the [Middle East](#), [Asia and Pacific](#), [Americas](#), [Africa](#) and [Europe](#).

India: White asbestos must be banned say campaigners

Health campaigners in India are demanding a ban on white asbestos, saying the thousands die each year in the country from asbestos related diseases. "India faces a massive and completely preventable epidemic of early, painful death and suffering caused by white asbestos," says the Ban Asbestos Network of India (BANI). Spokesperson Gopal Krishna warned that because of the absence in India of any mechanism to identify asbestos victims, the problem is much more alarming than in United Kingdom, Australia and the US, all of which are experiencing an asbestos disease epidemic. Krishna added: "Despite the ban on asbestos by over 36 countries and an incessant global movement against this killer fibre, the government has responded merely by setting up one committee after another." He called for a judicial ruling or legislation to declare use of asbestos a violation of human rights. A proposal to list white asbestos as a "prior informed consent" substance under the global Rotterdam Convention will be considered in September, and if approved could severely curtail asbestos trade and use worldwide ([Risks 151](#)).

- [NDTV.com](#). More on [asbestos and Prior Informed Consent](#).
- **Related information:** [International Ban Asbestos Secretariat](#).

USA: Axing safety law left women at risk

President Bush's decision to axe an ergonomics safety law introduced in the last days of the Clinton presidency has left workers in the heavily female health care field particularly prone to injury. Ergonomic injuries, or musculoskeletal disorders, occur more often in the heavily female health care sector than any other industry, according to the most recent statistics from the US safety watchdog the Occupational

Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). "One of every nine ergonomic-related injuries occurs in the health care sector, and the health care sector is predominantly women," said Bill Borwegen, occupational health and safety director for health care union SEIU. He added that state-funded insurance payments often expire before an employee is able to resume work, compelling the injured to apply for government-funded disability payments. "You and I as taxpayers end up paying for their injuries," he said. Borwegen argues that many of the injuries would have been prevented by Clinton-era workplace ergonomics laws that the Bush administration, upon taking office in January 2001 and to the glee of business lobbyists, downgraded to voluntary guidelines for employers.

- [Women's E-news.](#)

RESOURCES

Multiple chemical sensitivity guide

Canadian auto union CAW has produced a short workers' guide to multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS). It says multiple chemical sensitivity can involve a combination of a wide range of symptoms, from burning eyes, nose, headache, cough, breathing problems and sore throat to fatigue, memory loss, nausea, aching joints and skin disorders. Unlike a cold or the flu, symptoms do not clear up within days. After weeks or months of exposure, symptoms may become chronic and only get better after a very long time away from the building. CAW says once you have been sensitised to chemicals at work, your sensitivities often broaden to a wide variety of chemicals that in the past did not bother you. These can range from perfumes to paints, from carpets to fuels. The guide lists a range of MCS causes and prevention measures.

- [CAW MCS guide.](#)

EVENTS AND COURSES

TUC courses for safety reps

COURSES FOR SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2004

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

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