

# Risks

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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 10,000 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](#).

## SPECIAL FEATURE: Play fair at the Olympics

### **Olympic logo should not be stitched by sweatshop workers**

The biggest anti-sweatshop initiative of all time, bringing together human rights groups and unions worldwide ([Risks 146](#)), is calling on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to ensure that sportswear carrying the world-famous five ring logo is not made in sweatshops. Worldwide events organised by "Play fair at the Olympics" in the week prior to the 13 August Olympics opening ceremony in Athens form part of a campaign to end the abuse and exploitation of sportswear workers by the Beijing 2008 Olympics. The initiative has so far won a range of commitments from sports brands and national Olympic bodies to improve employment standards. But the IOC has refused to accept that they have a responsibility to reassure consumers that products bearing the Olympic logo, worth \$1.5 billion (£0.82bn) in sponsorship and licensing, are made by workers treated with the dignity and respect. Brendan Barber, TUC general secretary, said: "The Olympics is a showcase of endeavour and achievement. But the hidden heroes of this festival of human spirit are the millions of workers in sportswear sweatshops." He added: "We urge the IOC to reconsider their position and support our campaign and the values it champions."

- [TUC news release. Play fair at the Olympics campaign and report \[pdf\] and positive responses from sportswear companies.](#)
- **Find out latest news on the Olympics labour rights campaigns at the [special Labourstart webpage](#).**
- **Global action: [ICFTU news release](#). [BBC News Online](#). [The Scotsman](#). [IPS News](#). [The Guardian](#). [Thai Labour Campaign](#). [Clean Clothes Campaign updates](#).**

### **Athens protest honours dead Olympic site workers**

Protesters gathered in central Athens on Tuesday 10 August to hold an open air memorial service for construction workers killed during the breakneck rush to complete venues for the Athens Olympic games. About 500 demonstrators stood in silence as the names of the workers were read out and olive wreaths placed on 13 crosses erected outside Greece's parliament three days ahead of the official opening ceremony. "We have paid for the Olympic games in blood," said Andreas Zazopoulos, head of the Greek Construction Workers Union.

Construction crews raced round the clock this year to finish off seriously delayed Olympic venues and infrastructure projects, pushing up the Olympic budget to more than US\$7 billion (£3.83m) and compromising worker safety, according to protest and human rights groups. Some reports put the reported death toll at 14, with the full toll in all related infrastructure projects as high as 40 ([Risks 167](#)). The late construction rush has also raised questions about the future of more than 10,000 immigrant workers - mostly from neighbouring Albania - whose contracts are now up.

- [Yahoo News](#).

## UNION NEWS

### **Tourism work ain't no holiday**

The TUC is calling on the UK tourism industry to audit the working conditions of tourism staff to ensure the workers delivering your holiday dream aren't enduring a working nightmare. The call comes following a Tourism Concern investigation found many of the 200 million workers employed through the global tourism industry, worth nearly \$500 billion (£273bn) a year, suffer low and unpredictable pay, treacherous safety conditions, serious health risks, sexual harassment, long hours, and casual employment. Its report, *Labour standards, social responsibility and tourism*, says many workers in the sector have no contract, no training and are prevented from joining trade unions. Four companies – First Choice, Thomas Cook, My Travel and TUI - account for 50 per cent of the tourism business leaving the UK. According to the report "only one of these, First Choice, has an employee working specifically on social responsibility." The TUC is calling for the big four tour firms to set an employment standards auditing benchmark for smaller operations to follow. Assistant TUC general secretary Kay Carberry said UK holidaymakers "would be reassured to know that their holiday company has made sure that there is no mistreatment of the waiters, cleaners, guides, reps, cooks, drivers and other workers who cater for them."

- [TUC news release](#). **Tourism Concern [website](#) and full report [[pdf](#)]**.

### **Expectant and new mums feeling the heat**

Shopworkers' union Usdaw is warning that pregnant workers could be

wilting in the face of Britain's steamy summer weather. Sweltering workers downloaded its *Keep your cool* leaflet 750 times in the first two weeks of August alone ([Risks 168](#)). But Usdaw says workplace heat problems are 10 times worse for pregnant women, saying they tolerate heat less well and may more readily faint or be more liable to heat stress. The risk is likely to be reduced after birth but it is not certain how quickly an improvement comes about. And breastfeeding can be impaired by heat dehydration, says Usdaw. Employers have a duty to assess risks to all employees but they have to take particular account of risks to new and expectant mothers. However, Usdaw research this year found that fewer than three in 10 pregnant women are given the legally-required risk assessments at work ([Risks 156](#)). The union says employers have a duty, under the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, to maintain a "reasonable temperature" in the workplace. Last August, TUC has called for a maximum workplace temperature of 30°C or 27°C for strenuous work ([Risks 118](#)).

- [Usdaw news release](#) and [Keep your cool leaflet](#).
- [TUC Worksmart summer heat guidance](#). [Send a sweltering worker a cool reminder](#).

### **Cooking up trouble in the kitchen**

A radical overhaul of kitchen layout, design and working practices is needed if the back pain associated with catering work is to be prevented, UNISON has warned. The union's latest survey shows that repetitive movements, including bending, twisting, working in awkward positions and lifting heavy objects are leading to musculoskeletal complaints including pains in the shoulders, lower back, knees, wrists and ankles. It found almost half of those surveyed (49 per cent) said they had experienced pain in the past week and over threequarters (77 per cent) significant pain in the past 12 months, with over half seeking medical help. UNISON national safety officer Hope Daley said poor job and workstation design, combined with pressure to work fast and intensively, was at the root of the problems. She said: "Living with pain should not be an option, especially when employers could take action to prevent it. We need proper risk assessments to monitor where the real danger areas are and immediate action where solutions have already been identified... It's not rocket science and it would help to turn kitchens into pain-free zones."

- [UNISON news release](#) and [Catering with care](#) guide.

## **CWU dressing down for Royal Mail**

Royal Mail is taking "irresponsible safety risks" by axing uniforms for backroom staff, says postal union CWU. National officer Martin Collins says the decision is "quite unbelievable" given current government warnings about terrorist threats.

And CWU safety officer Dave Joyce has written to Royal Mail's corporate social responsibility director Dr Steve Boorman and head of safety Alan St John Holt arguing that the measure announced last month "cuts right across the initiatives we are taking jointly with management in Royal Mail to protect staff." The letter calls for "this ill-conceived idea to be dropped." Dave Joyce says that at a recent meeting union-management meeting on terrorist attacks on the postal service, no manager was prepared to defend changing current uniform policies. He adds that Royal Mail-issue clothing is designed to avoid entanglement in machines in the heavily mechanised offices. The union says the company's response to CWU's call for the plan to be dropped "will define Royal Mail's attitude towards corporate social responsibility and illustrate its attitude towards staff safety at a time of constant security alerts."

- [CWU news release.](#)

## **Construction union challenges "macho" employers**

Construction union UCATT has called for urgent action to stem an alarming rise in fatalities in the industry. UCATT general secretary George Brumwell was speaking on hearing of the death this week of a 24-year-old steelfixer at a Laing O'Rourke site in London. "Our thoughts are with the family of this young man who fell over 10 metres down a lift shaft to his death," he said. "Yet again we see that a fundamental failure to protect workers against the most common risk in our industry, which is falls from height, has robbed a worker of his life." The union says there have been 20 fatalities on construction sites since 1 April and four of those have occurred in the last two weeks. George Brumwell added: "It is time that construction companies recognised that the way forward lies with a partnership approach between workers, their trade unions and employers. The employers should shed their macho image and adopt a policy of working together at site level and actively promoting a caring, sharing approach. Only then do I believe we will start to see a real reduction in the numbers of

workers killed, injured or made ill as a result of simply earning a living.”

- [UCATT news releases](#). Related information: [HSE falls from heights webpages](#).

### **Priests on the run warn of unholy workloads**

Some village priests are coming under increasing stress as they have to take on more and more churches, their union has warned. The Reverend Dr Graham Blyth, an East Anglian representative for the Clergy and Church Workers Union, believes some priests even suffer breakdowns from stress. He said: “There is a danger of whizzing from one church to another, throwing things down the throats of the faithful without taking the time to talk to people, having coffee with them, getting to know them better. You are almost priests on the run.” He added: “Stipendiary clergy are facing an increasing amount of stress related illnesses from the mental burdens they are under. It's a major issue for the Church. There are even some clergy who simply break down, although often it is covered up in some way and other reasons are given, as if the Church is ashamed of it. The union is concerned about stress.” The clergy union is a section of Amicus, one of Britain’s biggest unions.

- [East Anglian Daily Times](#).

### **HSE and TGWU team up for child safety on farms**

Farmworkers’ union TGWU has signed up an HSE inspector on loan to assist the campaign for child safety on farms. HSE inspector Mike Walters, currently seconded to TGWU, is appealing for people in farming to help improve child safety by taking part in two surveys. He said: “The first is designed to help try and solve the difficulties faced by farming families in relation to childcare. The second is an investigation into the awareness of the farming community of the risks faced by children on farms and to see what current action has been taken to control some of the identified key risks.” Chris Kaufman, TGWU national secretary for the sector, said: “Mike's surveys are vital to the TGWU's campaign to keep death and injury off the farm. I hope there is a big take up of the surveys by the farming community.” Results of this research will be published towards the end of Mike Walters' secondment to the TGWU - probably early in 2005. In the ten years from 1993 to 2003, 35 children have been killed on farms and

the HSE has received reports of nearly 400 serious injuries to children, with many more incidents going unreported.

- [HSE news release. TGWU child farm safety campaign. HSE inspector Mike Walters' secondment to TGWU.](#)
- **HSE resources: Stay safe on the farm [pdf]; Preventing accidents to children on farms, leaflet AS10 (rev2) [pdf]; Keep children safe on the farm - fatal accidents to children, leaflet INDG340 [pdf]; or free from HSE Books.**
- **Help out! Members of the farming community can complete the [HSE child safety surveys](#) online or download them and return them by post, fax or email to [Mike Walters](#), HSE, International House, Dover Place, Ashford, Kent TN23 1HU. Fax: 01233 634827.**

## OTHER NEWS

### **Mind-numbing jobs may up Alzheimer's risk**

People who spent most of their lives in jobs that involve little brain work appear more likely to eventually develop Alzheimer's disease, according to new study. To investigate whether job history played a role in the development of Alzheimer's disease, Kathleen Smyth and colleagues from Case Western Reserve University in Ohio reviewed the work history of 122 people with the disorder and 235 people who were free of the disease. Jobs were classified as having high mental demands if they were complex, involved a variety of activities, required creative rather than routine tasks, and workers had some ability to control, direct or plan activities. Reporting in the journal *Neurology*, the researchers found that people without Alzheimer's disease were more likely to have held jobs that required significant brain work, while people with the disease were more likely to have held physically demanding jobs. Smyth said that while the findings could mean the effects of Alzheimer's start early in life, and may influence people's ability to get or keep mentally demanding jobs, "it also could be that being in mentally demanding jobs for many years helps people to do better mentally when they are older." She added: "On average, people with Alzheimer's disease in our study had jobs with lower mental demands than people without Alzheimer's disease in their 30s, 40s, and 50s - that is, across most of their working lives."

- [Reuters Health. BBC News Online.](#)
- **KA Smyth and others. Worker functions and traits associated with occupations and the development of AD, Neurology, volume 63, pages 498-503, 2004** [[abstract](#)].

### **“Frantic life syndrome” hits women workers**

Working women in the UK think new technology makes their lives even more hectic, according to a new report. It says the advent of mobile phones and email have left women feeling under greater pressure to juggle work and home commitments, leaving less time for themselves. As a result, a growing number of career women are suffering from what has been dubbed “frantic life syndrome.” A survey of over 1,000 women conducted for *Good Housekeeping* magazine found 30 per cent of working females had regularly been driven to exhaustion by work and home commitments. It found 12 per cent complain mobile phones meant “my life is no longer my own,” while 10 per cent said having a mobile meant their employer regularly called them with out-of-hours work queries. One in 10 of those surveyed felt their boss put more demands on them by email than they would face-to-face. Pressure to succeed at work means many women are working through their lunch hour, but the survey found 17 per cent had felt dizzy and sick as a result.

- [Sydney Morning Herald. Channel 7. Evening Gazette.](#)
- **Related information:** [Hazards women and hazards webpage](#) and [get-a-life news and resources](#).

### **Female nurses and teachers top stress league**

Women are more likely than men to suffer strain at work because they occupy the most stressful public sector jobs and are more often the victims of discrimination than men, reports *The Independent*. It cites a study by Britain's health and safety watchdog HSE which found that teaching and nursing, dominated by women, were the most stressful professions. HSE found more than three in 10 nurses and four in 10 teachers suffered stress at work. “The reasons for high stress will vary from workplace to workplace but it is likely that demands and workload will contribute substantially to stress among teachers and nurses,” an HSE spokesperson said. “Feeling supported is often an important factor in reducing stress.” A spokesperson for UNISON, which represents

many NHS staff, said rising NHS violence and aggression was part of the problem. "There is an awful lot of verbal abuse that can be very scary," she said. "We can be worn down by a constant barrage of abuse and verbal aggression. We need to ensure people's problems are dealt with quickly. This slow drip, drip effect undermines people's confidence and leads to ill-health."

- [The Independent](#). **Related information:** [HSE stress webpage](#).

### **NHS staff under threat and under pressure**

Violence, harassment and long hours are placing an increasing burden on health service staff. Results of an official survey published on 29 July and which included responses from over 200,000 NHS staff show fifteen per cent faced violence in 2002 and nearly 40 per cent were harassed, bullied or abused at work. The biggest threat to staff was perceived to be from patients and their relatives. The survey, which was conducted by the Healthcare Commission in October 2003, is intended to provide information to help the NHS, the department of health and the commission itself improve patient care. Threequarters of all staff said they routinely worked more than their contracted hours. Almost half said that they had suffered some injury or illness as a result of problems at work in the previous year. Nearly 40 per cent of staff reported that they had felt unwell in the previous year as a result of work-related stress. UNISON head of health Karen Jennings commented: "Every NHS employer involved in the survey has also been given a detailed analysis of their individual results, which should be shared with UNISON branches." She added: "Many of the findings support evidence that UNISON has gathered over the years to support our evidence in pay claims to the Pay Review Body and in raising health and safety concerns about the rise in violence towards health workers."

- [Healthcare Commission news release and full report, 2003 NHS staff survey](#). [UNISON news release](#). [BBC News Online](#).

### **Equality body finds pregnant workers aren't protected**

Most employers do not know about their legal duty to undertake risk assessments to protect pregnant staff. Preliminary findings of Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) research suggests a lack of awareness and understanding of legal obligations could be preventing many businesses from managing pregnancy effectively. The research into the knowledge and attitudes of 450 employers was carried out as

part of "Pregnant and productive," the first ever investigation into pregnancy discrimination in the workplace. When asked what they believed to be the legal rights of pregnant women and those on or returning from maternity leave, around threequarters (73 per cent) were able to cite at least one statutory entitlement. Those most frequently mentioned were maternity leave (46 per cent) and maternity pay (45 per cent). However, only 7 per cent said risk assessments and 1 per cent said sick pay/benefit. In May 2004, retail union Usdaw said its own survey had found over two-thirds of pregnant women were not properly protected at work because their employers were ignoring a legal duty to carry out risk assessments ([Risks 156](#)).

- [EOC news release](#) and [Pregnant and productive webpage](#) including the consultation document. The consultation will close on 30 September 2004. [EOC checklist on pregnancy rights at work](#).

### **Offshore injuries still at "unacceptable" levels**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says there has been an unacceptably slow decline in offshore fatal and major injury rates. Announcing the latest offshore safety statistics, Taf Powell, head of HSE's offshore division said: "Last year was a bad one for fatal accidents: three men were killed bringing the total number of work related deaths offshore to 10 since 6 January 2000. Furthermore the combined rate of fatal and major incident accidents has declined by less than 10 per cent in the past five years... This is unacceptable and I know the industry agrees." Graham Tran, regional officer with the union Amicus, said he welcomed an HSE commitment to a more rigorous effort to tackle the problem, but added: "I would question if they have the resources to carry this out effectively. I along with my fellow trade union colleagues call upon the government to release more funding to enable more HSE inspectors to be deployed in the offshore sector. This I believe is crucial if we are to have an effective and efficient policing of the industry as a whole." HSE's Taf Powell concluded further improvements could be achieved if senior industry managers continued "to work in partnership with government and worker representatives to make Britain the world's safest offshore sector by 2010."

- [HSE news release. Offshore Safety Statistics Bulletin 2003/2004. Step Change in Safety website](#).

## **Roadworkers face deadly risks and abuse**

Roadworkers are facing deadly dangers and abuse at the hands of irresponsible car drivers. A Highways Agency staff survey found almost one in five of the 400 workers who responded said they had suffered some injury caused by passing vehicles in the course of their careers. More than threequarters said they had suffered verbal abuse from drivers, and 40 per cent reported having objects thrown at them by motorists. The findings come as the Highways Agency re-launches its safe driving campaign to reduce death and injury accidents at roadworks. Minister for roads, David Jamieson, said: "Everyone is entitled to a safe workplace, yet roadworkers risk death and injury at work every day. Every injury suffered on the roads is one too many. Accidents affect the lives of those people involved, and their families. Now a moment's loss of concentration by a driver or driving too fast through roadworks can have devastating results." David York, Highways Agency national traffic director, said: "Today's roadworks are tomorrow's better roads, but this survey highlights the risks to the workforce and the completely unacceptable behaviour that staff have to put up with simply because they are doing their job."

- [Highways Agency news release](#) and [Driving through roadworks leaflet](#). [Manchester Online](#).
- [Occupational Road Safety Alliance](#).

## **UK offices becoming "hotter than Cairo"**

Global warming will make peak temperatures in the average naturally ventilated British office hotter than they are at present in Cairo, according to research for the Department of Trade and Industry. Findings reported in the trade magazine *Building* say internal summer temperatures could hit 36°C by 2020. More air conditioning is unlikely to provide an answer as it generates greenhouse gases, was limited by building regulations in 2002, and is likely to be further restricted in future. The magazine quotes Gavin Davies, associate director of Arup Research and Development, as saying: "When the temperature inside a building hits 28°C, you cannot just open a window because it is hotter outside than inside. We need Mediterranean shutters, heavy walls, smaller windows and verandas to keep cool." The research also proposes relaxing dress codes, sending staff home during hot spells, introducing flexible working or longer summer holidays, siestas and relocating offices to the north. Mr Davies said they chose 28°C – "the

point at which people start to feel hot and look for some level of cooling relief" - as the maximum acceptable internal temperature.

- [The Guardian. Building magazine.](#)

## INTERNATIONAL

### **Australia: ACTU condemns asbestos firm's cut price compo plan**

Australia's top union body has condemned a proposal by multinational firm James Hardie as an attempt to evade its liabilities to asbestos disease victims and their families. The firm was denounced last week at a NSW Special Commission of Inquiry for lies and fraud ([Risks 168](#)). Greg Combet, secretary of Australian union federation ACTU, said: "James Hardie has already attempted to implement one elaborate scheme to short change Australian asbestos victims, why on earth would anyone agree to let them now do it a second time. This is just another attempt by the company to limit its liabilities to Australian asbestos victims and deny them the full and proper compensation they are owed." The union leader added: "On Tuesday this week James Hardie announced a 25 per cent increase in first quarter profits and told investors the company expects to make Aus\$240 million (£94m) this year. Then today they are stand up in the Special Commission of Inquiry and tell the Australian government and the Australian people that they should let them off the hook over their responsibilities to Australian asbestos victims. They have got to be kidding." A special counsel to the official inquiry this week said Hardie Industries chief executive Peter Macdonald should face a jail sentence for his role in a scheme that disadvantaged asbestos victims.

- [ACTU news release. The Australian.](#)

### **USA: How to get fewer accidents? Don't count them**

A subsidiary of Weyerhaeuser, a company that is one of the US government's flagships for the "voluntary protection programmes (VPP)" introduced as a business-friendly alternative to official safety enforcement, has been found to have fiddled its accident reports. The Buckhannon plant of Weyerhaeuser owned Trus Joist has now been forced to withdraw its VPP application to safety watchdog OSHA as it has been hit with enforcement action for recordkeeping violations. After receiving a complaint, OSHA discover that over a two year period 38 cases of injuries and ill-health required to be logged by law had

gone unrecorded. According to OSHA's website, Weyerhaeuser has nine sites with safety and health programmes already operating VPP systems – where a low accident rate is a condition of entry. Once accepted for VPP, companies are exempt from programmed inspections. In a bid to increase the number of companies eligible for this inspection opt-out, OSHA recently relaxed the recorded injury and illness rate requirements for VPP applicants. In the UK, the Health and Safety Executive is investigating the introduction of a scheme based on the US VPP system. HSE's 2010 safety strategy already includes a commitment to action "free from the fear of enforcement". In May, TUC criticised HSE's drift towards "self-regulation" ([Risks 156](#)).

- [Occupational Hazards.](#)
- [Why self-regulation initiatives are a bad idea for Britain's workers.](#)

#### **USA: Starbucks serves up coffee and pain-oh-work-a-lot**



Workers at Starbucks in New York are attempting - so far without success - to organise a union. A top grievance, alongside pay and benefits, is the strain injuries caused by the awkward, repetitive movements required when making coffee. Anthony Polenco, a barista at the Starbucks store at Madison Avenue, said he hurts constantly from working the espresso machine. "I suffer from pains in my wrist all the time," said Polenco, one of the leaders of the union drive. "Sometimes hot milk will splash on me. Some days I can't move my wrists." Starbucks has a progressive image as a customer and worker-friendly company – but its reputation isn't spotless. Three years ago, Starbucks had to pay \$18 million (£9.8m) to settle a class action lawsuit from managers charging that the company wrongfully denied them overtime pay. Similar claims have followed. And a tarnished image is something the company will want to avoid. "Scandal can do real damage to companies with powerful brands," said Nancy Koehn, a professor of business administration at Harvard Business School. "Today's consumer not only wants to know about the company's product, but how it is run." There have been successful union drives in Starbucks' Canadian outlets.

- [Newsday. Confined Space.](#)
- [IWW Starbucks unionisation campaign webpage.](#)

## EVENTS AND COURSES

### **TUC courses for safety reps**

#### **COURSES FOR SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2004**

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

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