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focus on health and safety

trade union trends survey
TUC biennial survey of safety reps 2008

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executive summary

This is the seventh biennial TUC safety representatives' survey. The survey is designed to provide the TUC and its affiliated trade unions with valuable information, which will shape safety campaigning and organisation in the period ahead.

Key findings

Hazards

Once again **overwork or stress** was by far the most frequently identified hazard, with no sign of improvement in most workplaces. Three in five (60%) of safety representatives identified overwork or stress as a concern, similar to the previous survey and higher than in earlier surveys.

- Stress is cited in more than half of all sizes of workplace, from 53% in workplaces with under 50 employees and rising to 66% of those in workplaces with over 1,000 employees;
- Stress is more prevalent in the public sector, where two thirds (66%) of safety representatives identified it as a major concern, compared to 47% of representatives in the private sector;
- In 10 out of the 14 economic sectors, stress was the top concern for safety representatives who work in them, and in the top five in 12 out of 14 sectors.

Display screen equipment was the second most-quoted concern and has risen from fourth in 2004 and third in 2006. This year over two in five (41%) safety representatives identified it as a hazard – significantly more than in the previous surveys. HSE has done little work on the issue in recent years.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are still a major hazard in workplaces and the situation appears to be getting worse again after some improvement in 2006. Two-fifths of representatives (40%) identified **repetitive strain injuries** (RSI) as a major concern, while over three in ten (31%) saw **back strain** as a problem. RSI was the third most identified hazard and back strain fifth – a continued cause for concern given the emphasis HSE has placed on reducing these injuries.

Slips, trips and falls on a level was the fourth most significant hazard identified – and again the picture is worse than in recent years. Around a third (33%) regarded it as a major cause for concern, up from 27% in 2006.

Working alone was the sixth main concern – with more representatives (30%) identifying it as a hazard compared to previous surveys.

Bullying was perceived as a growing hazard, recognised by 20% of representatives. It was identified by 40% more representatives compared with 2004 and by 25% compared with 2006 – indicating that employers' voluntary initiatives are not reducing the problem.

The survey suggests that bullying gets worse as the workplace gets bigger. Some 14% of representatives thought bullying was a problem in workplaces with under 50 employees, while almost double (27%) saw it as a concern in workplaces with over 1,000 employees.

Wales was the place with the most concerned regionally. It is the area most concerned with noise (23%), dusts (16%), infections (7%), asbestos (7%) and vibration (6%). In these cases, almost twice the proportion of Welsh safety representatives were concerned, compared with the national average. Wales is also second worst for slips, trips and falls from a level (38%), long hours of work (26%), handling heavy loads (16%), chemical and solvents (15%), slips, trips and falls from height (12%) and machinery hazards (11%).

Managing health and safety

Over half (55%) of the safety representatives in the 2008 survey said their employer had carried out adequate risk assessments, though this was down slightly from the highpoint in 2006, where (56%) said risk assessment were adequate.

An increased proportion of safety representatives in 2008 said that their employers' risk assessments were inadequate. Three in ten (30%) of representatives came to that conclusion, compared with 27% in the last survey.

In terms of consultation over risk assessments:

- Little over a quarter (27%) of safety representatives said they were satisfied with their involvement in risk assessments, slightly worse than in 2006;
- Over four out of ten (44%) said they were not involved in helping their employer draw up risk assessment at all;
- Another 29% said they were involved, but not enough.

The survey found a big increase in the proportion of occupational health services provided externally, and for the first time is greater than those provided in-house. Some 46% said their occupational health service came from an external provider, compared with 44% in-house. By comparison, in 2006 some 38% were externally provided, whilst 48% were provided in-house.

A number of sectors were significantly worse off than with regard to occupational health services. Less than three in five (59%) construction safety reps said their employer provided an occupational health service, down from around four-fifths (79%) in the last survey. Similarly, leisure services had less than three-quarters (73%) covered, and distribution, hotels and restaurants 78%.

More safety representatives are reporting sickness monitoring (68%) and disciplinary assessments (43%) than previously, indicating a more draconian approach by some employers. The provision of treatment has also fallen to around one in five workplaces (21%) and first aid now appears in only half (50%) the workplaces surveyed, despite the legal requirements to do so. And records are still provided to only one in eight (12%) safety representatives, indicating wide scope for improved information and consultation.

Safety representatives

The vast majority of safety representatives now have access to the internet at work or at home, and this was reflected in responses to the survey. The number of online responses jumped from a third in 2006 to half in 2008, with more representatives than ever before responding via the TUC website.

The survey shows that union training in health and safety continues to thrive. In all three general TUC courses, more safety representatives than in previous surveys have received training.

- Almost three-quarters (72%) had completed the stage 1 course, up from around two-thirds (64%) in 2006;
- The proportion of those completing stage 2 courses has also risen significantly compared with previous surveys, and now stands at 44%;
- At the higher end, one in six (17%) of safety representatives said they had completed the TUC diploma/certificate in occupational safety and health. This is almost three times the proportion in only six years.

Some safety representatives still have problems getting time off for training. Four in ten safety representatives (40%) said that management had refused permission to take time off. This was significantly higher than in the last survey (25%) and worse than the picture in 2004 (38%).

On consultation, the figures for 2008 were similar to previous surveys. Almost a quarter (24%) of safety representatives are never automatically consulted by their employer over health, safety and welfare matters. Even when representatives specifically requested to be consulted, barely a third (37%) were frequently consulted as a result.

Enforcement

Enforcement of health and safety continues to decline, the survey suggests:

- Almost half (49%) of safety representatives said that as far as they know, a health and safety inspector has never inspected their workplace;
- Another one in eleven (9%) said the last inspection was over three years ago, while a further 15% said it was between one and three years ago;
- Almost three in ten (28%) said their workplace had received a visit over the last 12 months.

The survey also found that almost two in five (38%) of the largest workplaces (with over 1,000 employees) had been inspected in the last 12 months, falling to less than half that figure (18%) for small employers with less than 50 employees.

With regard to employers who make improvements because of the fear of enforcement action, only just over one in five (21%) made improvements because of this possibility, fewer than in previous surveys. Over half the safety representatives did not know their employers' view on this vital matter.

However there were some indications that enforcement remains an effective stimulus to action. Over four out of ten employers (43%) reviewed other practices in the company in different departments and/or work activities after their most recent enforcement notice. This was the same as in 2006. Also, the proportion of employers who implement best practice with an effect that lasted at least several months in one work activity or area increased from 12% in 2006 to 15% in 2008.

Recommendations

Profile

The TUC recommends that:

- Trade unions renew their drive to recruit safety representatives, either as stand alone positions or as stewards, to reflect the full diversity of the workforce;
- Health and safety materials continue to be produced to contribute to the wider organising agenda.

Hazards

The TUC recommends that:

- Unions step up campaigning on stress with employers and HSE, including for specific regulations to make sure something is done. There should be more use of enforcement measures by inspectors and the stress management standards should be incorporated in an Approved Code of Practice (ACOP). The HSE should, in particular consider new ways of tackling stress in Wales in the light of its prevalence in this survey.
- Unions campaign on display screen equipment (DSE), alongside other initiatives, as part of a drive to make HSE campaigns more effective. This would include emphasis on work station assessments, paid time off for free eye tests and taking regular and frequent breaks away from the desk.
- The TUC should encourage more take up of specific courses and materials on slips and trips, bullying and lone working, in conjunction with other sympathetic organisations (such as the National Group on Homeworking and the Andrea Adams Trust) as well as within HSE to progress these issues

over the next two years.

Managing health and safety

The TUC recommends that:

- HSE investigate the reasons behind poor compliance with risk assessment legislation, and seek to back this up with changes in the law and stronger enforcement.
- The TUC and affiliated unions continue to campaign for a duty on employers to consult with safety representatives. This survey provides more evidence of the need for such a duty.
- The government and HSE should invest resources in developing an integrated occupational health strategy, covering all areas from prevention to rehabilitation. This should be about making all work decent, quality and safe work – alongside supporting those who suffer from work-related injury and ill-health.

Safety representatives

The TUC recommends that:

- Employers should implement existing law on safety representatives' rights and powers, and HSE and environmental health officers should enforce this law, issuing notices where compliance is found to be lacking;
- HSE should review and strengthen the regulations and guidance on time off for training;
- Unions should use the results of the survey and their own research to press the case with government for a duty on employers to consult with safety representatives over risk assessments and a duty to respond to concerns raised formally by union safety representatives;
- Unions should continue to campaign for extended rights and powers for safety representatives, particularly on roving representatives, provisional improvement notices and stopping the job.

Enforcement

The TUC recommends that:

- The government provide the funding necessary for HSE and local authorities to increase the number of inspectors, investigations and prosecutions for health and safety matters.
- Enforcement authorities should ensure that inspectors liaise fully with safety representatives in order to make their visits most effective.
- Employers should consult fully with safety representatives after receiving an enforcement notice and after a prosecution, so that the necessary changes can be implemented.

introduction

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977, which came into force in October 2008.

The labour and trade union movement fought for and won these important reforms. The resulting improvements in workplace safety have been well documented. The TUC's Union Safety Effect¹ research explains clearly how much of a difference safety representatives make in workplaces.

The survey

This is the seventh biennial TUC safety representatives' survey. The survey is designed to provide the TUC and its affiliated trade unions with a profile of safety representatives, the hazards they have to tackle and to identify some of the problems they face.

The report is analysed by senior TUC policy officials and union health and safety specialists in order to understand the changing experience of safety representatives at work and to help provide more support. They also use the survey to inform public policy debates and in work with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). The TUC wants union safety representatives and safety committees to discuss and use the report to help with their ongoing work.

Just over two thousand six hundred (2,611) safety representatives responded to the questionnaire either on paper or online in the period May-June 2008. Their answers provide a wealth of information about the profile of safety representatives and the work they do to improve safety.

Profile of safety representatives

The survey allows for a profile of the respondents, helping to identify the diversity of safety representatives.

Over a quarter (27%) of safety representatives who responded were women, slightly less than in 2006 (30%) but the same as in 2004.

Some 83% described themselves as white; while 4% described themselves as black and ethnic minority – around the same as in the last survey.

Some 10% of representatives were under the age of 35. Almost three in ten were aged between 36 and 45, while just over half (53%) were between 46 and

¹ The union effect: How unions make a difference to health and safety, TUC, 2004.
http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-8382-f0.com

60. The survey also found 7% of representatives were still active beyond 60 years of age.

Two thirds of representatives (66%) work for organisations in the public sector. Of those, over a quarter came from central government (27%), local government (19%), the health service (10%), transport and communications (9%), and education (8%). The biggest groups in the private sector came from transport and communications (29%) and manufacturing (25%).

Almost a third (32%) work in workplaces with less than a 100 workers, fewer than in the 2006 survey.

Over one in five (22%) work in workplaces with over one thousand workers and more than half (54%) in workplaces with over 200 workers.

One in five (20%) of safety representatives who responded said they had been doing the job for less than a year. Most (43%) had been a safety rep for between one and five years, while over a third (36%) had been a safety rep for over five years.

Half of those who responded were also union stewards, and half were just safety representatives alone.

Safety representatives are widely distributed across the UK. The largest groups of respondents came from London and the South East (22%), the North West (14%), the Midlands (14%) and Scotland (13%).

The survey again registered the growth of online access by safety representatives. More than four out of five (82%) have access to the internet at work. Nearly three quarters (74%) had access at home and 61% said they could go online both at home and at work.

This was reflected in the response to the survey. The number of online responses jumped from a third in 2006 to half in 2008, with more representatives than ever before responding via the TUC website.

A clear majority of safety representatives (60%) in the Northern region and in East Anglia preferred the web. Within particular sectors, workers in banking and finance (90%), agriculture (86%) and transport and communications (67%) overwhelmingly responded via the TUC website. Over half of male representatives (53%) but only 40% of the female representatives responded online.

Section two

hazards at work

main hazards

Safety representatives were asked to identify up to five of the major hazards their members face in the workplace. *Table 1* shows the responses and compares them with the last two surveys, in 2006 and 2004.

Table 1: The main hazards of concern to workers (%)

Hazard	% cited in 2008	2006	2004
Overwork or stress	60%	61%	58%
Display Screen Equipment	41%	36%	32%
Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI)	40%	38%	40%
Slips, trips, falls on a level	33%	27%	28%
Back strains	31%	28%	35%
Working alone	30%	27%	27%
Violence and threats	26%	25%	22%
Long hours of work	23%	24%	25%
High temperatures	20%	26%	19%
Bullying	20%	15%	12%
Noise	14%	16%	17%
Handling heavy loads	13%	13%	13%
Chemicals or solvents	11%	14%	21%
Dusts	9%	11%	15%
Slips, trips, falls from a height	9%	7%	7%
Machinery hazards	9%	9%	13%
Low temperatures	9%	8%	7%
Workplace transport accidents	7%	6%	6%
Road traffic accidents	7%	6%	6%
Infections	5%	6%	7%
Asbestos	4%	4%	5%
Dermatitis/skin rashes	3%	4%	6%
Vibration	3%	3%	3%
Passive smoking	1%	2%	3%
Asthma	1%	1%	2%

Note: percentages exclude respondents who ticked more than five main hazards

The top five hazards have been same in the last three TUC biennial surveys, although not always in the same order.

Once again **overwork or stress** was by far the most frequently identified hazard, with no sign of improvement in most workplaces. Three in five (60%)

of safety representatives identified overwork or stress, similar to the last year's survey and higher than in earlier surveys.

Display screen equipment was the second most-quoted concern, continuing its rise from fourth place in 2004 and third in 2006. This year over two in five (41%) safety representatives identified it as a hazard – significantly more than in the previous surveys. HSE has done little work on the issue in recent years.

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are still a major hazard in workplaces and the situation appears to be getting worse again after some improvement in 2006. Two-fifths of representatives (40%) identified **repetitive strain injuries** (RSI) as a major concern, while over three in ten (31%) saw **back strain** as a problem. RSI was the third most identified hazard and back strain fifth – an ongoing cause for concern given the emphasis HSE has placed on reducing these injuries. Over the last three surveys, 13% of representatives have consistently maintained that lifting heavy loads is a hazard, indicating that manual handling remains a crucial issue.

Slips, trips and falls on a level was the fourth most significant hazard identified – and again the picture is worse than in recent years. Around a third (33%) regarded it as a major cause for concern, up from 27% in 2006.

Other key features from the survey were:

Working alone was the sixth main concern – with more representatives (30%) identifying it as a hazard compared to previous surveys.

Violence was the seventh main concern, with over a quarter (26%) singling it out. Long hours too remain stubbornly high, with nearly a quarter (23%) regarding it as a major hazard.

High temperatures fell back as an issue this year, probably reflecting the miserable summers over the last two years. However one in five (20%) still regard it as a problem, and this may well increase with climate change.

Bullying was perceived as the next important hazard, recognised by 20% of representatives. It was identified by 40% more representatives compared with the 2004 survey and by 25% compared with the 2006 survey – indicating that employers' voluntary initiatives are not reducing the problem.

Chemicals and solvents, dusts and dermatitis all fell again significantly as hazards, which may suggest that HSE's COSHH materials are having an effect.

But slips, trips and falls from height went up from 7% last time to 9% in 2008, a worrying trend in light of the Work at Height Regulations 2005. Similarly, more representatives were concerned about low temperatures (9% this time), despite limits in the regulations for indoor workplaces.

hazards at work

Hazards by sector

It is possible to analyse these hazards by sector, in order to draw out which particular hazards are most prevalent in which sectors. The first division is between the public and private sectors, and is set out in *Table 2*.

Table 2: Hazards by public/private sectors (%)

Examples of hazards	Public	Private
Overwork or stress	66%	47%
Display screen equipment	45%	29%
Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI)	42%	36%
Slips, trips & falls on a level	28%	44%
Back strains	30%	34%
Working alone	31%	26%
Violence and threats	30%	15%
Long hours of work	22%	26%
High temperatures	22%	16%
Bullying	23%	12%
Noise	10%	25%
Handling heavy loads	11%	18%
Chemicals or solvents	8%	19%
Dusts	5%	17%
Slips, trips & falls from a height	5%	18%
Machinery hazards	5%	16%
Low temperatures	9%	10%
Workplace transport accidents	6%	10%
Infections	6%	1%
Asbestos	4%	6%
Dermatitis/skin rashes	3%	5%
Vibration	2%	5%

There are some marked differences between the public and private sectors. Psycho-social hazards such as stress, bullying and violence are far more significant in the public sector – as is display screen equipment. Similarly RSI and high temperatures are more likely to occur in the public sector.

For the private sector, all kinds of slips and trips are regarded as a more significant hazard. Other physical hazards such as noise, as well as hazardous substances and machinery hazards are more important for private sector representatives than for their public sector colleagues.

A further breakdown into more specific sectors also reveals different concerns between safety representatives. The breakdown in *Table 3* lists the top five hazards for 14 sectors. Overall stress appears in 12 out of the 14 sectors, and it is the top hazard in ten of them. RSI features in nine of the 14 sectors, back strain in half (7), DSE in eight of them and slips, trips and falls on a level (slips level) also appears in eight of the 14. Lone working is also cited in half (7) of the sectors.

Table 3: the 5 main hazards of concern to workers by sector (%)

Sector	1st concern	2nd concern	3rd concern	4th concern	5th concern
Agriculture & Fishing	Stress (21%)	RSI (19%)	Back strains (19%)	Chemicals (16%)	Slips level (16%)
Health Services	Stress (69%)	Lone working (48%)	Back strains (47%)	Violence (43%)	Infections (30%)
Distribution & Hotels	Back strains (67%)	Slips level (58%)	RSI (49%)	Stress (38%)	Heavy loads (33%)
Energy and water	Stress (63%)	DSE (57%)	RSI (50%)	Slips level (37%)	Long hours (33%)
Voluntary Sector	DSE (67%)	Stress (58%)	Lone working (42%)	Back strains (42%)	Bullying (42%)
Education	Stress (74%)	DSE (47%)	Lone working (35%)	Bullying (35%)	Slips level (33%)
Manufacturing	Noise (45%)	Chemicals (44%)	Slips level (42%)	RSI (37%)	Machinery (34%)
Banking, insurance and finance	Stress (57%)	Lone working (45%)	DSE (45%)	Slips level (42%)	RSI (32%)
Leisure Services	Stress (56%)	Long hours (50%)	DSE (38%)	Back strains (31%)	Slips level (31%)
Construction	Back strains (52%)	Slips height (48%)	Dusts (45%)	Lone working (36%)	RSI (36%)
Local Govt.	Stress (68%)	DSE (43%)	Lone working (41%)	Violence (39%)	RSI (36%)
Central Govt.	Stress (81%)	DSE (71%)	RSI (65%)	High temp (35%)	Bullying (32%)
Transport & Communications	Stress (54%)	Slips level (44%)	Lone working (37%)	Long hours (35%)	DSE (33%)
Other Services	Stress (61%)	Slips level (44%)	Back strains (42%)	RSI (40%)	DSE (35%)

Note: percentages exclude respondents who ticked more than five main hazards.

hazards at work

Agriculture & fishing

This year again, responses from safety representatives in agriculture and fishing were fairly evenly spread. Stress was first (21%) followed by RSI (19%) – the latter displacing long hours from the top five compared with 2006. Back strain (19%), chemicals and slips, trips and fall on a level (both 16%) also featured, as they have done in previous surveys.

Health services

Many of the same five hazards appeared in the 2008 as in previous surveys for the health service. However some changes are notable. While stress (69%) remains the top concern, lone working (48%, down from 55%) was regarded as less of a problem. By contrast violence (40%) was up compared with 2006, when it was 37%. Most significantly, infections came into the top five with (30%), displacing RSI and no doubt reflecting the high profile of MRSA, C-dificil and other infections in hospitals.

Distribution and hotels

Musculoskeletal disorders continue to be a major hazard in distribution and hotels, with back strain (67%), slips, trips and falls on a level (58%) and RSI (49%) all highlighted. Both stress (38%) and heavy loads (33%) made the top five, as they did in 2006.

Energy and water

Stress has persistently been identified as the major hazard in the energy and water sector, with 63% of safety representatives noting it in 2008. DSE (57%) and RSI (50%) were also highlighted, though slips, trips and falls was significantly less of a problem this time, with 37% of representatives identifying it, compared with 51% in 2006. Long hours made it into the top five with around one third (33%) registering it as a concern.

Voluntary sector

In the voluntary sector, DSE (67%) displaced stress (58%) as the top hazard. Bullying was again worst in the voluntary sector, as it was in the last survey, with over two in five (42%) of representatives identifying it as a concern. Back strain (42%) again made the top five, although RSI and violence dropped out, the former replaced by lone working (42%) and the latter by bullying.

Education

Education was the second worst sector for overwork and stress and remained a concern for nearly three-quarters (74%) of representatives. DSE was considered a greater problem this time, with nearly half representatives (47%) seeing it as a hazard, compared with a quarter (25%) last time. This may

reflect the ongoing use of IT in classrooms, for reporting and other tasks. Other categories that appeared in the top five were lone working (35%), bullying (35%, up from 20% last time) and slips, trips and falls on a level (33%). These displaced earlier concerns with long hours, high temperatures and violence.

Manufacturing

Noise was again the top hazard in manufacturing, with 45% of safety representatives identifying it. Chemicals (44%), slips, trips and falls on a level (42%), RSI (37%) and machinery hazards (34%) the other key problems. Manufacturing was one of only two sectors not to list stress in its top five. Dermatitis and vibration (both 12%) were highest in manufacturing.

Banking, insurance and finance

Stress was again the most frequently identified hazard in banking, insurance and finance (57%), but this was significantly down on two years, when over three-quarters perceived it as a major hazard. Long hours has been displaced from the top five, replaced by lone working (45%), now the second most cited hazard. DSE (45%), slips, trips and falls on a level (42%) and RSI (32%) continue to be major concerns.

Leisure services

Long hours (50%) continues to be a high-priority hazard for safety representatives in the leisure services sector, coming just behind stress (56%) as the major concern. MSDs are again prevalent in the sector, with DSE (38%), back strains (31%) and slips, trips and falls on a level (31%) cause for concern. Noise, which was a major concern in 2006, has halved to 18% in 2008, perhaps indicating that the Control of Noise Regulations 2005 are having an effect.

Construction

There are a number of worrying changes in the construction industry. Back strains was the most prominent hazard for more than half (52%) the safety representatives. It wasn't in the top five two years ago. Similarly, slips, trips and falls from height was the second most cited hazard (48%), yet it too was not in the top five in 2006. This is especially significant given the introduction of the Work at Height Regulations 2005. Dusts (45%) and lone working (36%) again featured, with RSI (36%) displacing noise. Construction was the most prominent sector for asbestos, which nearly a third of representatives (31%) still considering it as a problem. The construction sector along with manufacturing were the only two sectors where stress was not counted in the top five.

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Local government

The same five hazards from the last survey were also in the top five in 2008 for local government. Stress was again the most cited hazard, with over two-thirds (68%) identifying it as a concern. DSE (43%), lone working (41%), violence (39%) and RSI (36%) the other major hazards – although these were slightly down on 2006, except for lone working, which stayed as before.

Central government

Safety representatives in central government were in clear agreement on what the top three hazards were. Stress was cited by over four-fifths (81%) of representatives, the highest of any sector and slightly higher than in 2006. DSE (71%) and RSI (65%) were also prominent, as they were two years ago – reflecting ongoing problems with equipment and working practices in the sector. High temperatures (35%) were most cited in central government too, reflecting the working environment many civil servants have to endure and bullying (32%) came into the top five, replacing violence (28%), although the latter still remains a huge concern.

Transport and communications

Transport and communication safety representatives again identified stress as the main hazard in 2008, with the same number (54%) as in the previous survey. Slips, trips and falls on a level (44%) was second and up from 39% in 2006. Lone working (37%) and long hours (35%) were again prominent concerns, with DSE (33%) the fifth hazard, replacing back strains from 2006.

Other services

Other services had the same five hazards as previously, though not always in the same order. Stress was again top with 61%, followed by slips, trips and falls on a level (44%), back strains (42%), RSI (40%) and DSE (35%).

Hazards and workplace size

There is also a relationship between certain hazards and workplace size. *Table 4* shows the five major health and safety concerns identified by safety representatives, compared to the number of people in their workplaces.

Table 4: Main hazards at work and workplace size (%)

Number of workers	1st concern	2nd concern	3rd concern	4th concern	5th concern
Under 50	Stress (53%)	Lone working (36%)	Back strains (32%)	DSE (30%)	RSI (28%)
50-100	Stress (58%)	DSE (43%)	RSI (41%)	Slips on level (37%)	Violence (31%)
Over 100	Stress (57%)	DSE (46%)	RSI (43%)	Slips on level (32%)	Lone working (31%)
Over 200	Stress (63%)	RSI (46%)	DSE (41%)	Slips on level (36%)	Back strains (32%)
Over 1000	Stress (66%)	DSE (44%)	RSI (38%)	Lone working (34%)	Slips on level (34%)

Note: percentages exclude respondents who ticked more than five main hazards.

Table 5 compares some of the main hazards (apart from stress) identified by safety representatives according to the size of their workplace.

Table 5: Comparison of some different hazards by workplace size, as a %

Hazard	Under 50	50-100	Over 100	Over 200	Over 1000
Noise	(11%)	(16%)	(18%)	(14%)	(13%)
Slips on a level	(24%)	(37%)	(32%)	(36%)	(34%)
DSE	(30%)	(43%)	(46%)	(41%)	(44%)
RSI	(28%)	(41%)	(43%)	(46%)	(38%)
Lone working	(36%)	(30%)	(31%)	(23%)	(34%)
Violence	(27%)	(31%)	(30%)	(23%)	(23%)
Bullying	(14%)	(13%)	(18%)	(22%)	(27%)

Note: percentages exclude respondents who ticked more than five main hazards.

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from these tables.

Overwork and stress is the top hazard, whatever the size of workplace. However there appears to be an upward trend in stress as workplaces get larger, rising from 53% for workplaces with fewer than 50 workers to 67% for those with over 1000 employees.

Display screen equipment is a concern in all workplaces, but is significantly less of a concern in small workplaces, with 30% of safety representatives in workplaces under 50 concerned, compared with at least 10% more in bigger workplaces.

RSI is also a concern in workplaces of all sizes, and like DSE is generally of greater concern in larger workplaces, although slightly less so in the largest category (those with over 1,000 employees).

The same trend is evident for bullying at work, where the figures suggest that it gets worse as the workplace gets bigger. Some 14% of representatives thought

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bullying was a problem in workplaces with under 50 employees, where almost double (27%) saw it as a concern in workplaces with over 1,000 employees.

As expected lone working is a problem in small enterprises, where 36% of representatives identified it as a hazard. More surprisingly, almost as many representatives (34%) in workplaces with over 1,000 employees also saw it as a concern.

Violence at work peaks in workplaces with 50-100 employees (31%), as does noise (18%).

Slips, trips and falls on a level is a concern in workplaces of all sizes, but seems to be worse in workplaces with 50-100 employers (37%), followed by those with over 200 employees (36%).

Hazards by region/country

The distribution of hazards also shows some variation by region, reflecting the uneven industrial structure of the UK. *Table 6* shows which hazard was of most concern to reps from different regions or countries within Britain.

Table 6: Main hazards by region/country (%)

Hazard	Worst area	2 nd worst area	National concern
Overwork or stress	London 68%	East Anglia 67%	60%
Display Screen Equipment	Yorkshire 48%	South East 44%	41%
Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI)	South West 44%	North West 43%	40%
Slips, trips, falls on a level	Northern 39%	Wales 38%	33%
Back strains	Yorkshire 34%	East Anglia 32%	31%
Working alone	East Anglia 38%	Yorkshire 38%	30%
Violence and threats	South East 33%	London 32%	26%
Long hours of work	South West 29%	Wales 26%	23%
High temperatures	London 31%	Midlands 21%	20%
Bullying	London 30%	Midlands 22%	20%
Noise	Wales 23%	North West 17%	14%
Handling heavy loads	South West 16%	Wales 16%	13%
Chemicals or solvents	Scotland 15%	Wales 15%	11%
Dusts	Wales 16%	North West 11%	9%
Slips, trips, falls from a height	East Anglia 12%	Wales 12%	9%
Machinery hazards	South West 11%	Wales 11%	9%
Low temperatures	London 14%	East Anglia 14%	9%
Workplace transport accidents	Northern 14%	South East 9%	7%
Road traffic accidents	East Anglia 10%	Yorkshire 9%	7%
Infections	Wales 7%	Yorkshire 6%	5%
Asbestos	Wales 7%	Northern 6%	4%
Dermatitis/skin rashes	North West 5%	Northern 5%	3%
Vibration	Wales 6%	Scotland 5%	3%
Passive smoking	Northern 2%	North West 2%	1%
Asthma	London 2%	Northern 2%	1%

Note: percentages exclude respondents who ticked more than five main hazards.

A number of notable trends are clearer from *Table 6*:

Wales appears in the table with the greatest frequency (11 times). It is the area most concerned with noise (23%), dusts (16%), infections (7%), asbestos (7%) and vibration (6%). In these cases, almost twice the proportion of Welsh safety representatives were concerned, compared with the national average. Wales is also second worst for slips, trips and falls from a level (38%), long hours of work (26%), handling heavy loads (16%), chemical and solvents (15%), slips, trips and falls from height (12%) and machinery hazards (11%).

London is notable for psycho-social hazards. It is the worst area for concerns about overwork and stress (68%), bullying (30%) and second worst for violence (32%). London is also worst for high temperatures (31%) – significantly higher than the national average, as well as for low temperatures (14%) and asthma (2%).

The South West was highest for RSI (44%), long hours (29%), handling heavy loads (16%) and for machinery hazards (11%).

The Northern region was also prominently represented. It was the region most concerned with slips, trips and falls from a level (39%), workplace transport accidents (14%) and for passive smoking (2%). In the case of workplace transport, this was double the national average. The Northern region was second worst for asbestos (6%), dermatitis (5%) and for asthma (2%).

East Anglia appeared frequently in this table. It was the area most concerned with lone working (38%), slips, trips and falls from height (12%) and road traffic accidents (RTAs, 10%). East Anglia was second worst for stress (67%), back strains (32%) and for low temperatures (14%).

Yorkshire and Humberside appeared in the table on five occasions. It was the region most concerned with DSE (48%) and for back strains (34%) and second worst for lone working (38%), RTAs (9%) and infections (6%).

Although the North West appeared only once in the worst column, for dermatitis (5%), it was second worst for four hazards. These were RSI (43%), noise (17%), dusts (11%) and passive smoking (2%).

The South East of England was the area most concerned with violence (33%) and second most concerned with DSE (44%) and workplace transport accidents (9%).

Scotland appeared only twice in the table. It was the country most concerned with chemicals and solvents (15%) and second most concerned with vibration (5%).

The Midlands did not appear as the worst area for any of the hazards, but was second most concerned with high temperatures (21%) and for bullying (22%).

hazards at work

The correlation between concerns and regions can also be represented by looking at how the top five hazards compare across areas. This is set out in *Table 7*.

Table 7: Main hazards of concern by region/country (%)

Region/country	1 st concern	2 nd concern	3 rd concern	4 th concern	5 th concern
Scotland	Stress (46%)	RSI (34%)	DSE (33%)	Back strains (32%)	Slips level (29%)
Wales	Stress (57%)	RSI (43%)	Slips level (38%)	DSE (37%)	Lone working (33%)
Northern	Stress (55%)	RSI (40%)	Slips level (39%)	DSE (39%)	Back strains (32%)
North West	Stress (58%)	RSI (43%)	DSE (43%)	Slips level (32%)	Back strains (32%)
Yorkshire	Stress (63%)	DSE (48%)	RSI (41%)	Lone working (38%)	Slips level (36%)
Midlands	Stress (60%)	DSE (40%)	RSI (40%)	Slips level (34%)	Back strains (31%)
South West	Stress (62%)	RSI (44%)	DSE (42%)	Slips level (35%)	Long hours (29%)
South East	Stress (67%)	DSE (44%)	RSI (41%)	Violence (33%)	Slips level (32%)
East Anglia	Stress (67%)	RSI (40%)	Lone working (38%)	DSE (36%)	Slips level (34%)
London	Stress (68%)	DSE (43%)	RSI (38%)	Violence (32%)	High temps (31%)

Note percentages exclude respondents who ticked more than five main hazards.

The top five hazards from the 2008 survey were stress, DSE, RSI, slips, trips and falls on a level and back strains. Although there is a high degree of overlap between the main hazards in different areas, with stress the biggest concern, some differences stand out:

- Lone working also comes into the top three in East Anglia (38%) and the top five in Yorkshire and Humberside (38%) and Wales (33%);
- Violence is a more significant concern in London (32%) and the South East (33%);
- Long hours came into the top five for representatives in the South West (29%);
- High temperatures are a particular concern for safety representatives in London (31%).

Some other issues can be drawn out by comparing the results of the 2008 survey with the previous one in 2006:

Stress was a significant concern in Yorkshire and Humberside (63% this time, compared with 55% in 2006) and in East Anglia (67% in 2008, compared with 54% in the previous survey).

In Scotland, the position regarding stress appears to have improved, with 46% of representatives regarding it as a concern, compared with 62% last time. However RSI was worse this time in Scotland, up from 27% to 34%.

Section three

stress and overwork

Overwork and stress was the most common concern for safety representatives in the 2008 TUC biennial survey, as it has been in the previous six surveys. Three in five (60%) of representatives in 2008 cited stress as a major hazard, slightly less than in 2006, but still higher than in 2004 (58%) and 2002 (56%). And in 2008, some 50% more representatives identified stress as a major hazard than any other options, such as repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI) or Display Screen Equipment (DSE).

Overwork and stress occurs across workplaces of different sizes, different regions and in most economic sectors:

- Stress is cited in more than half of all workplaces, from 53% in workplaces with under 50 employees and rising to 66% of those in workplaces with over 1,000 employees;
- Stress is more prevalent in the public sector, where two thirds (66%) of safety representatives identified it as a major concern, compared to 47% of representatives in the private sector. In 10 out of the 14 economic sectors, stress was the top concern for safety representatives, and in the top five in 12 out of the 14 sectors;
- Stress was the major hazard in all 10 regions of Britain, with the percentage of safety representatives citing concern ranging from 46% in Scotland to 68% in London.

The causes of stress

The TUC survey asked safety representatives to state the likely factors leading to stress in their workplaces, so as to identify the causes of the hazard.

These were grouped into nine categories: workloads, cuts in staff, change, long hours, bullying, shift work, redundancies, poor working conditions and sex or racial harassment. *Table 8* contains a breakdown of these factors, together with a comparison with the previous two TUC surveys.

Table 8: Factors linked to overwork or stress (%)

Factor	Problem issues 2008 survey	Problem issues 2006 survey	Problem issues 2004 survey
Workloads	73%	76%	79%
Cuts in staff	58%	57%	49%
Change	50%	53%	47%
Bullying	40%	33%	27%
Long hours	35%	34%	37%
Shiftwork	24%	21%	22%
Redundancies	17%	20%	14%
Cramped working conditions	13%	16%	17%
Sex or racial harassment	5%	3%	3%

Note: This table was derived only from those who identified stress as a top five hazard.

Workloads

Workloads were the highest factor linked to stress in 2008, as it was in the previous survey. Just under three-quarters (73%) of representatives cited it as a problem, continuing the downward trend from previous surveys.

Workload was of greatest concern in the private sector in the new survey, with three-quarters of representatives (75%) noting it as a problem, compared with 72% in the voluntary sector and 68% in the public sector. This reversed the order of the previous 2006 survey, where the private sector was the “least stressed” sector.

For individual economic sectors, workload was a particular problem identified by safety representatives in:

- Leisure services (90%);
- Banking (85%)
- Education (81%)

Workload as a cause of stress was identified in workplaces of all sizes, but was above average in workplaces with over 1,000 employers and those with between 50-100 employees.

In terms of regions and countries, workload was most frequently cited by safety representatives in Wales (77%) and in London (76%).

Cuts in staff

Cuts in staff are the second most cited reason for stress in the workplace, according to the 2008 survey. Nearly three in five (58%) of representatives cited it as a cause of stress, compared to 49% in 2004.

Cuts in staff was identifying most in the voluntary sector, with nearly three in five (58%) of representatives believing it caused stress, compared with 57% in the private sector and 54% in the public sector.

stress and overwork

For individual sectors, cuts in staff were a particular problem identified by safety representatives in:

- Central government (72%);
- Agriculture and fishing (65%);
- The health service (62%).

Cuts in staff were a more significant contributor to stress in workplaces with over 1,000 employees.

Regionally, cuts in staff were identified by safety representatives in Yorkshire and Humberside (68%) and London (63%) as a more significant problem.

Change

Organisational change was third factor identified as a cause of stress, with half of the representatives (50%) citing it as a problem. This was less than in 2006 (53%) but still higher than in 2004 (47%).

Change was most significant as a stressor in the private sector, with half (50%) the safety representatives citing it as a problem. The public sector was next with 45%, followed closely by the voluntary sector with 43%.

For economic sectors, change was a particular problem identified by safety representatives in:

- Central government (63%);
- Local government (62%);
- The health service (53%).

Stress caused by rapid change was significantly lower in smaller workplaces (45%) those with under 50 employers, and significantly higher in the largest workplaces with over 1,000 employees (58%).

Change was quite evenly distributed across regions, with Wales (56%) and East Anglia (55%) highest.

Bullying

In the 2008 survey, bullying overtook long hours as the fourth most identified factor causing stress. Bullying has significantly grown as a problem in the last three surveys, with two in five (40%) safety representatives identifying it as a problem leading to stress in this survey, up from 33% in 2006 and 27% in 2004.

Bullying was fairly evenly distributed between sectors, being highest in the public sector (34%), followed by the voluntary sector (34%) and then the private sector (33%).

For individual economic sectors, bullying was a particular problem identified by safety representatives in:

- Construction (55%);
- Education (53%);
- Central government (51%).

Bullying was found in workplaces of all sizes, but the largest workplaces with over 1,000 employees were significantly higher, with 52% citing bullying as a cause of stress.

Regionally, bullying varied significantly, with London the highest (55%), compared with 35% in the North West.

Long hours

Long hours has declined as a factor in stress over the last three surveys, but it rose slightly in 2008, with over a third (35%) of safety representatives citing it as a cause of stress.

Long hours were also quite evenly distributed, with the public sector most concerned with 32%, followed by the voluntary and private sectors, both with 31%.

For individual economic sectors, long hours were a particular problem identified by safety representatives in:

- Leisure services (80%);
- Energy and water (48%);
- Transport and communications (43%).

As with other factors, it was workplaces with over 1,000 employees that suffered most from long hours, according to the safety representatives in our survey.

In terms of regions, Wales (42%) was well above average for long hours, while Scotland was significantly below it (22%).

Shift work

Shift work has increased as a cause of stress, according to safety representatives who responded to the 2008 survey. Almost a quarter (24%) identified it as a factor in 2008, compared with one in five (21%) in the last survey.

Shift work showed some of the biggest differences between sectors in the 2008 survey. Nearly a third (32%) of safety representatives in the public sector cited it as a problem, compared with under a quarter of voluntary sector representatives (24%) and 17% of private sector representatives.

stress and overwork

For individual economic sectors, shift work was a particular problem identified by safety representatives in:

- Distribution, hotels and restaurants (57%);
- Manufacturing (48%);
- Transport and communications (48%).

Shift work was most frequently cited by safety representatives in those small firms with fewer than 50 staff.

Wales (34%) was by far the highest area for shift work, with almost 50% more representatives concerned about the issue than the national average.

Redundancies

Redundancies were not quite the same concern in this year's survey, with 17% of safety representatives citing it as a factor in stress. The previous three years had seen redundancies rise in importance, reaching 20% in 2006. It may well increase in the next survey, if current economic predictions are right.

Redundancies were of most concern in the voluntary sector, with 16% of representatives viewing it as a stressor, compared with 13% in the private sector and 11% in the public sector.

For individual sectors, redundancies were identified as a particular problem by safety representatives in:

- Education (32%)
- Central government (24%);
- Energy and water (24%).

Redundancies were a big cause of stress in workplaces with over 1,000 employees (22%), twice the number (11%) in workplaces with under 50 employees.

In London nearly a quarter (24%) of safety representatives felt redundancies were a big cause of stress, almost double the figure for Wales (13%), which was lowest.

Cramped working conditions

Cramped working conditions fell again as a factor behind stress, with 13% of safety representatives citing it as a cause. This was down from 16% in 2006 and 17% in 2004.

Cramped working conditions were fairly evenly raised as a concern across the sectors (around 11%), with the voluntary sector slightly higher.

For individual sectors, cramped working conditions varied widely, but was a particular problem identified by safety representatives in:

- Leisure services (40%);
- Education (25%);
- Local government (15%).

Cramped working conditions was cited by safety representatives in the largest workplaces as a significant problem (19%, compared with an average of 13%).

The Northern and London regions, both with 18%, were the regions most affected by cramped working conditions.

Sex or racial harassment

Reports of sex or racial harassment increased alarmingly in the 2008 survey, with 5% identifying it as a cause of stress. This compares with 3% in both the previous two surveys.

Sex or racial harassment was most cited in the public sector, with 6% of safety representatives signalling it as stress factor, significantly higher than the private and voluntary sectors, both with 4%.

For individual economic sectors, sex or racial harassment were a problem identified by safety representatives in:

- Agriculture and fishing (12%);
- Construction (11%);
- Energy and water (10%).

Sex and racial harassment figured most frequently in either very large or very small workplaces, with the largest workplaces worst (7%), followed by those with under 50 employees (6%).

Regionally, the South East of England fared worst on sex and racial harassment, with 9% of safety representatives citing it as a factor in stress, triple the lowest figure in the North West (3%).

Section four

managing health and safety

As well as questions about the main hazards at work, safety representatives were asked about the way health and safety is managed in their workplace. In particular, the TUC asked about health and safety policies, risk assessments and about occupational health services.

Health and safety policies

More than nine out of ten (93%) of safety representatives in the 2008 survey said that their employer had a health and safety policy - the same figure as in 2006. Policies were quite evenly distributed across Britain, with the South West notable for the highest number of compliant employers, in 96% of cases. No region had a score less than 90% in the survey.

Risk assessments

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, and other regulations, employers have a duty to make “suitable and sufficient” assessments of the risks. Where there are five or more workers, they should also record the significant findings.

Adequate risk assessments

The key building block of good risk management according to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is the ability of employers to conduct risk assessments. Over half (55%) of the safety representatives in the 2008 survey said their employer had carried out adequate risk assessments, though this was slightly down from the highpoint in 2006, where (56%) said risk assessment were adequate.

Further analysis found:

- Three in five (60%) risk assessments were adequate in the private sector, compared to 53% in the voluntary sector and 52% in the public sector;
- The best individual sectors for risk assessments were in banking, insurance and finance (75%) and in energy and water (69%);
- The sectors with the lowest number of adequate risk assessments were education (32%) and the health service (43%).
- In terms of the regions, the North West (59%) was best while London had the lowest proportion, with 43%.

Workplace size does not appear to make much of a difference for the adequacy of risk assessments, with all sizes of workplace clustered around the average. Workplaces with 50-100 employees had slightly more adequate risk assessments (58%).

Inadequate risk assessments

However an increased proportion of safety representatives said that their employers' risk assessments were inadequate. Three in ten (30%) of representatives came to that conclusion, compared with 27% in the last survey. Other findings were:

The most inadequate sectors where risk assessments had been carried out were education (43%) and manufacturing (32%).

London also had the highest number of safety representatives who said their employers' risk assessments had been done but were inadequate (36%), while East Anglia (27%) had the lowest in this category.

There was more variation on inadequate risk assessment. Safety reps in small organisations with less than 50 people had the fewest inadequate risk assessments (25%), while those in workplace with over 200 employees had the most (34%).

Risk assessments not done, not recorded or not known

The same number of safety representatives in 2008 (7%) as in 2006 said their employer had not carried out risk assessments. A similar number (7%) did not know whether they had been carried out, while 2% said they were not recorded.

The sectors with the highest proportion of risk assessment not done were education (14%) and the health service (13%). For those where safety representatives did not know if they had been done, the health service (12%) and distribution, hotels and restaurants (10%) were worst. Representatives in energy and water (3%) and other services (3%) were the highest to report that assessments had been done but not recorded.

The Northern region had the highest proportion of safety representatives (10%) who said that risk assessments had not been done, and the lowest proportion of those that were done but not recorded (1%). London had the highest proportion of those not recorded and the highest number of don't knows, in both cases three times the lowest figures elsewhere. The South East of England was the lowest region for risk assessments not done (5%), whilst Wales had the highest don't knows (3%).

Small organisations with under 50 employees had the highest number of risk assessments not done (8%) and the most "don't know" (10%), while those

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with over 200 employees had the least (5%) not done and workplaces with over 1,000 employees the least “don’t knows”.

Safety representatives’ involvement in the risk assessment process

Safety representatives have an unsurpassed experience and knowledge of the hazards faced in their workplaces. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 require that employers consulted with recognised trade union safety representatives on health, safety and welfare matters.

However, many safety representatives still find the risk assessment process unsatisfactory in terms of their own involvement:

- Little over a quarter (27%) of safety representatives said they were satisfied with their involvement in risk assessments, slightly worse than in 2006;
- Over four out of ten (44%) said they were not involved in helping their employer draw up risk assessment at all;
- Another 29% said they were involved, but not enough.

These figures were similar to previous surveys, indicating that despite HSE efforts to cajole employers into including safety representatives, this is not happening on anything like the scale necessary.

Employer provision of occupational health services

An occupational health scheme is a service which gives access to a range of professional advice and services to employees. Nine out of ten safety representatives (91%) said that their employers provided some sort of occupational health service, a significant increase on previous years.

However the proportion of those provided externally has jumped again in 2008, and for the first time is greater than those provided in-house. Some 46% said their occupational health service came from an external provider, compared with 44% in-house. By comparison, in 2006 38% were externally provided, whilst 48% were provided in-house.

However access to occupational health services varies across different sectors and by workplace size. These differences are captured by *Tables 9 and 10*.

Table 9: Provision of occupational health services by workplace size (%)

Number of workers	Occupational Health Services provided		
	2008	2006	2004
Under 50	85%	83%	77%
50-100	91%	84%	77%
Over 100	87%	87%	84%
Over 200	90%	90%	89%
Over 1000	98%	95%	95%

Table 10: Provision of occupational health services by sector (%)

Sector	Occupational Health Services provided		
	2008	2006	2004
Agriculture & Fishing	88%	83%	63%
Health Services	98%	97%	98%
Distribution & Hotels	78%	77%	68%
Energy and water	100%	78%	85%
Voluntary Sector	86%	80%	74%
Education	86%	79%	71%
Manufacturing	92%	90%	88%
Banking, insurance and finance	93%	97%	95%
Leisure Services	73%	80%	75%
Construction	59%	79%	72%
Local Government	94%	92%	92%
Central Government	94%	90%	88%
Transport & Communications	92%	86%	83%
Other Services	87%	85%	78%

These tables indicate that access to occupational health services varies according to workplace size and is widely different according to the individual economic sector.

Workers in the largest workplaces, with over 1,000 employees were most comprehensively provided with occupational health services – almost all (98%) were covered in some way. Workers in smaller workplaces are worse off, with those in small workers with fewer than 50 employees with the lowest coverage (85%). However the smallest workplaces have improved significantly since 2004, when just over three-quarters (77%) were covered.

A number of sectors were well covered by occupational health services – notably energy and water (100%), health (98%), local and central government (both 94%).

However a number of sectors were significantly worse off than average and even worse than in previous surveys. Less than three in five (59%) construction safety reps said their employer provided an occupational health service, down

from around four-fifths (79%) in the last survey. Similarly, leisure services had less than three-quarters (73%) covered, and distribution, hotels and restaurants had 78%.

The regional distribution of occupational health services was fairly even (between 88% in Scotland and 94% in the South East of England). However further analysis revealed some significant differences. For example over three in five (61%) of occupational health services in Wales were provided in-house, whereas only a third (33%) of those in Scotland and 38% in London were in-house.

The role of occupational health services

The term “occupational health services” covers a wide variety of provision. The TUC survey sought to find out the type of provision available, in order to help assess the quality of service available to workers. The survey asked safety representatives about particular forms of provision, including sickness monitoring, first aid, prevention and treatment. The proportion of representatives who said these were provided is in *Table 11*.

Table 11: Types of occupational health services provided (%)

Service provided	2008	2006	2004
Sickness monitoring	68%	63%	61%
First aid	50%	55%	60%
Health surveillance	53%	52%	53%
Pre-employment medical screening	41%	44%	46%
Disciplinary assessments	43%	36%	32%
Access to rehabilitation	38%	35%	33%
Advice on prevention	38%	34%	34%
Treatment	21%	23%	25%
Records which safety reps are given	12%	11%	11%

Note: percentages do not total 100% because reps could tick any relevant services provided

These figures indicate some deteriorating trends in occupational health provision. More safety representatives are reporting sickness monitoring (68%) and disciplinary assessments (43%) than previously, indicating a more draconian approach by some employers. The provision of treatment has also fallen to around one in five workplaces (21%) and first aid now appears in only half (50%) the workplaces surveyed, despite the legal requirements to do so. And records are still provided to only one in eight (12%) safety representatives, indicating wide scope for improved information and consultation.

More encouragingly, there have been small improvements in advice given on prevention, now 38% and for access to rehabilitation (also 38%), an agenda the TUC has promoted for many years.

Section five

rights of safety representatives

Safety representatives have wide-ranging rights and powers under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 and other subsequent health and safety legislation. The TUC biennial survey 2008 asked safety representatives about the extent to which they have been able to exercise these rights and powers.

Training

Employers must permit safety representatives to attend training during working time without loss of pay. The Approved Code of Practice (ACOP) to the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 states that this training, approved by the TUC or independent unions, should take place as soon as possible after the safety representative has been appointed. The ACOP also allows for further training as necessary.

Unionlearn, formed by the merger of TUC Education and Learning Services in 2006, provides a range of courses through the network of trade union studies centres in further and higher education colleges and through the Workers' Education Association (WEA). Individual unions also provide their own approved training courses, for induction and a range of safety matters. In addition, some employers provide training on specific issues.

The 2008 TUC survey asked safety representatives about the range of training they had received. The responses are set out in *Table 12*.

Table 12: Training received (%)

Health & Safety training received	2008	2006	2004
TUC/Union Stage 1	72%	64%	60%
TUC/Union Stage 2	44%	37%	34%
Own union introductory course	27%	29%	31%
Other TUC/Union courses	18%	15%	25%
Course provided by employer	16%	18%	20%
Joint union-employer course	8%	6%	7%
TUC Diploma/Certificate in OSH	17%	12%	10%

Note: percentages do not total 100% because respondents could tick any relevant courses attended

The survey shows that union training in health and safety continues to thrive. In all three general TUC courses, more safety representatives than in previous surveys have received training.

rights of safety representatives

Almost three-quarters (72%) had completed the stage 1 course, up from around two-thirds (64%) in 2006.

The proportion of those completing stage 2 courses has also risen significantly compared with previous surveys, and now stands at 44%.

At the higher end, one in six (17%) of safety representatives said they had completed the TUC diploma/certificate in occupational safety and health. This is almost three times the proportion in only six years.

Slightly fewer safety representatives have attended their own union's courses (27%), though more are attending other courses (18%) compared with 2006 (15%).

The provision of courses by employers has continued to fall, from one in five (20%) in 2004 to one in six (16%) in the 2008 survey. However slightly more safety representatives are attending joint union-management courses (8%).

Training and experience

The TUC survey 2008 also analysed the training safety representatives had received relative to the amount of time they had been fulfilling the role. *Table 13* compares the training received to the length of time served as a safety representative.

Table 13: Training received by term as a safety representative (%)

Health & Safety training received	Under 1 year	1-5 years	Over 5 years
TUC/Union Stage 1	63% (55%)	74% (65%)	76% (68%)
TUC/Union Stage 2	12% (15%)	48% (38%)	57% (50%)
Own union introductory course	17% (19%)	28% (29%)	33% (36%)
Other TUC/Union courses	7% (5%)	15% (13%)	27% (25%)
Course provided by employer	7% (10%)	13% (14%)	26% (28%)
Joint union-employer course	3% (3%)	6% (4%)	15% (11%)
TUC Diploma/Certificate in OSH	4% (3%)	16% (12%)	27% (19%)

Note: Figures do not total 100% because respondents could tick any relevant courses attended. Figures in brackets indicate the results from the 2006 survey.

A number of key points stand out from *Table 13*:

The proportion of safety representatives in post for less than a year who have taken a TUC/union Stage 1 has risen from just over half (55%) in 2006 to nearly two-thirds (63%) in 2008. However, this still means that a third of new safety representatives have not participated in this essential course in their first year.

A higher proportion of more experienced safety representatives have attended a stage 2 course, with almost half (48%) of those with for 1-5 years experience having done the course, and nearly six out of ten (57%) representatives with more than five years' experience completing the course.

A growing number of the safety representatives with over five years experience have taken the TUC diploma/certificate in occupational safety and health. Over one in four (27%) said they had completed this course, compared with less than one in five (19%) in 2006. These representatives are also taking more joint union-employer courses (15%).

Time off for training

The regulations and subsequent court cases have established the right of safety representatives to time off for training. However, some of those responding to the 2008 survey said they had had trouble getting time off to undergo training.

The most common reason cited was being “too busy at work” (45%), an upward trend from the last two surveys.

Most alarmingly, four in ten safety representatives (40%) said that management had refused permission to take time off. This was significantly higher than in the last survey (25%) and worse than the picture in 2004 (38%) and will be a major cause for concern for union safety officers.

Just over one in five (22%) said that family responsibilities prevented them from taking time off, similar to the previous survey (21%). And more safety representatives than before (21%) said the course was not at the right time of the day or week, up from 15% in 2006.

Consultation in “good time”

Safety representatives have the right to be consulted on health, safety and welfare matters by their employer. The TUC 2008 survey asked about consultation in two different situations: firstly when safety representatives ask or make requests, and secondly under normal conditions when consultation ought to be automatic. The responses to these questions are contained in *Table 14*.

Table 14: Management consultation with safety representatives (%)

Consultation	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
Automatically	27% (29%)	49% (49%)	24% (22%)
When you ask	37% (38%)	56% (56%)	7% (7%)

Note: Figures in brackets refer to the results of the 2006 survey

The figures for 2008 are again very similar to previous surveys, which is disturbing in the light of HSE’s worker involvement programme. Almost a quarter (24%) of safety representatives are never automatically consulted by their employer over health, safety and welfare matters. Even when representatives specifically requested to be consulted, barely a third (37%) were frequently consulted as a result.

rights of safety representatives

Further analysis of these figures by economic sector, workplace size and region also revealed some differences.

Of those who responded about automatic consultation, the situation was worst in education (41%), other services (34%) and the health service (29%), where consultation never takes places. The smallest workplaces were the worst culprits, with 27% of those under 50 never consulting representatives. Safety representatives in Wales have the most employers who never consult (32%), significantly worse than most other regions.

Even where safety representative ask to be consulted, the distribution was uneven. The worst sectors were construction (28%) and education (32%), while safety representatives in banking, insurance and finance were most frequently consulted (57%). Frequently consultation seems to be strongly related to workplace size, with the largest workplaces with over 1,000 employees doing best (42%), while those with fewest (under 50) employees were worst (31%). East Anglia (44%) was the best region for frequent consultation, whilst Welsh safety representatives were least frequently consulted (26%), even where they had made requests.

Inspections

The right to inspect the workplace is one of the most crucial rights safety representatives have to identify hazards and highlight action to be undertaken by management. The ACOP states that safety representatives can inspect every three months, or more frequently by agreement, as long as they notify the employer in writing.

The 2008 survey found a huge variation in the frequency of inspections, as well as some confusion as to what constitutes an inspection, rather than a more frequent intervention (which might take place every day or every week). Of those who answered the question about the number of inspections they had carried out in the last 12 months, the following results were obtained:

- One in five (20%) had conducted one inspection;
- One in six (17%) had conducted two inspections;
- Almost a third (33%) had conducted three or four inspections.
- Just over one in eight (13%) had conducted more than four inspections.

These figures were slightly down on the 2006 survey in all categories.

Further analysis revealed that more experienced representatives tend to carry out more frequent inspections. Over a third (34%) of safety representatives with more than five years in post carry out 3-4 inspections a year, while 29% of those with between one and five years experience do so, compared to 13% of those in post for less than a year.

Time spent on safety representatives' duties

Getting time off for training is not the only problem safety representatives face. It extends to time off for functions in the workplace, including for investigations, inspections, gathering information from members on hazards and meeting management. Previous TUC and academic research has identified the lack of time and facilities as serious impediments to safety representatives carrying out their functions.

The 2008 TUC survey asked respondents to quantify how much time they had spent on health and safety matters in the previous week. There results were:

- Nearly half (47%) had spent no more than an hour;
- Over one third (37%) had spent between one and five hours;
- Nearly one in ten (9%) had spent between 5 and 10 hours;
- Some 6% had spent over 10 hours on safety matters.

Again, the more experienced representatives tended to spent longer on their health and safety functions. One in nine (11%) of representatives with more than five years experience spent over 10 hours on this work, while another 11% of these representatives spent between five and 10 hours.

Joint union - management safety committees

The work of safety committees has been identified as key factor in making safety representatives' work effective. The 2008 survey found that the proportion of safety representatives who said their employer had set up a joint committee was in line with previous surveys (83%), while those that had been established but rarely met was 13%. Again one in six (17%) workplaces with accredited safety representatives do not have a safety committee.

There is some variation across sectors, according to analysis of the 2008 survey. The sectors with the highest proportion of safety committees were manufacturing (94%), the health service (93%) and banking, insurance and finance (91%). The worst sectors were construction (72%), other services (72%) and agriculture and fishing (78%).

There was less variation by region or country, but the best area for safety committees was the Northern region (88%), whilst the worst were Yorkshire and Humberside (82%), the South East of England (82%) and East Anglia (82%).

Section six

enforcement

The TUC has asked safety representatives in the last three surveys about visits by Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors and local authority environmental health officers (EHOs). This has generated more information about enforcement – a key concern for unions.

HSE and EHO inspections

The 2008 TUC survey of unionised workplaces found that fewer inspections have taken place, continuing the trend from previous surveys. The key results were:

- Almost half (49%) of safety representatives said that as far as they know, a health and safety inspector has never inspected their workplace;
- Another one in eleven (9%) said the last inspection was over three years ago, while a further 15% said it was between one and three years ago;
- Almost three in ten (28%) said their workplace had received a visit over the last 12 months.

The sectors with the most inspection activity in the last year were in distribution, hotels and restaurants (51%) and in manufacturing (48%), while by far the worst sector was central government (8%), with energy and water (21%) significantly below average.

The survey also supported previous research, which found a strong relationship between workplace size and the number of inspections. In the new survey, almost two in five (38%) of the largest workplaces (with over 1,000 employees) had been inspected in the last 12 months, falling to less than half that figure (18%) for small employers with less than 50 employees.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of these smaller employers had never had an inspection, according to the safety representatives who responded. This compares with just over a third (38%) of the largest workplaces.

The worst regions for inspections in the last 12 months were London (21%) and the Midlands (23%), while Yorkshire and Humberside (56%) was the area where most safety representatives said they had never known of an inspection in their workplace.

Inspectors and safety representatives

Contact between safety representatives and inspectors was again patchy. Some 43% of safety representatives were aware of the most recent visit before it happened, better than in the previous survey in 2006 (38%).

In terms of discussions during the visit, the following results were found:

- Four out of ten (40%) said they spoke with the inspector (compared to 34% in 2006);
- Almost another four out of ten (38%) said neither they nor other safety representatives had spoken with the inspector, almost the same as in 2006.
- Over a fifth (22%) did not know whether (other) safety reps had spoken to the inspector.

Improvements and enforcement action

The TUC survey 2008 asked safety representatives about whether their employers had made improvements to health and safety management either because of the possibility of a visit by inspectors, or because of enforcement action taken against other employers, such as a notice or prosecution. The responses are in *Tables 15 and 16*.

Table 15: Improvements because of the possibility of a visit (%)

	2008	2006	2004
Not at all	25%	22%	16%
A little	18%	22%	23%
Somewhat	15%	15%	25%
A lot	19%	18%	21%
Don't know	23%	23%	15%

Table 16: Improvements after hearing about a notice or prosecution (%)

	2008	2006	2004
Yes	21%	23%	27%
No	29%	32%	28%
Don't know	51%	45%	45%

The results in *Table 15* suggest that the proportion of employers who make at least some attempt to make improvements (“a little”, “somewhat” and “a lot”) has continued to fall, from 69% in 2004 to 55% in 2006 and now 52% in 2008.

In this category, a quarter (25%) of workplaces are failing to see improvements made because the employer fears an inspectors visit, another significant fall since the last survey.

enforcement

With regard to employers who make improvements because of the fear of enforcement action, a similar picture emerges. Only just over one in five (21%) made improvements because of this possibility, fewer than in previous surveys. Over half the safety representatives did not know their employers' view on this vital matter.

The survey went on to ask safety representatives about actual notices served. The results are contained in *Tables 17 and 18*.

Table 17: Involvement of safety reps in taking steps to comply with a notice (%)

	2008	2006	2004
Heard about it after the changes were made	24%	21%	18%
Heard about the changes planned but no safety reps involved in planning	38%	38%	40%
Safety rep(s) involved in planning after receipt of notice	38%	41%	42%

Table 18: Employers' response to a legal enforcement notice (%)

	2008	2006	2004
Minimum to comply	34%	34%	30%
Comply and review other practices elsewhere	43%	43%	61%
Implement best practice, effect short term in one activity/area	12%	11%	10%
Implement best practice, effect longer term in one activity/area	15%	12%	13%

The results from these questions also show causes for concern. Less than two in five employers (38%) involved safety representatives in planning changes following receipt of a safety enforcement notice. A third (34%) of employers do the minimum to comply with a notice.

However there were some indications that enforcement remains an effective stimulus to action. Over four out of ten employers (43%) reviewed other practices in the company in different departments and/or work activities after their most recent enforcement notice. This was the same as in 2006. Also, the proportion of employers who implement best practice with an effect that lasted at least several months in one work activity or area increased from 12% in 2006 to 15% in 2008.

Section seven

conclusions and recommendations

The main purpose of the biennial survey is to help the TUC and its affiliated trade unions better understand the hazards and problems faced by union safety representatives. This information should help unions and the TUC to improve the support they provide for safety representatives in workplaces, as well as to prioritise strategically in national political work with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and the government.

This section summarises the findings from the survey in context and suggests ways the TUC and unions can act to develop health and safety work.

Profile

The stereotype of safety specialists as old, white blokes does not fit the reality in many workplaces and organisations, but unions still have much to do to improve the diversity of safety representatives, in line with the workforce they represent.

There is still a job to do to recruit more women safety representatives, more safety representatives from different backgrounds and cultures, and among workers new to the workforce. With a layer of experienced safety representatives nearing retirement, it is vital to replace them with others at earlier stages of their working lives.

There is also the need to recruit more safety representatives in the private sector, as part of union renewal in this area. Thirty years ago this was an area of strength for unions – it needs to be become so again. However there are still opportunities in the public sector to take up huge issues, which will help improve union density where there is already a base and often recognition.

The growing number of safety representatives with access to the internet offers new opportunities for spreading and sharing information, posting questions and answers and forming networks. Safety representatives have shown themselves to be able to adapt to changing technologies.

The TUC recommends that:

- Trade unions renew their drive to recruit safety representatives, either as stand alone positions or as stewards, to reflect the full diversity of the workforce;
- Health and safety materials continue to be produced to contribute to the wider organising agenda.

conclusions and recommendations

Hazards

The top five hazards identified again by the TUC survey 2008, were overwork or stress, Display Screen Equipment (DSE), Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI), slips, trips and falls on a level and back strains. These are also reflected in HSE figures and in other academic research.

Stress remains the top concern, despite several years of voluntary guidance for employers, in the shape of HSE's stress management standards. Clearly many employers are failing to tackle the issue, and big public sector organisations such the central and local government, the NHS and education are major culprits. However the private sector is also blighted by stress, with banking and leisure services particularly affected. Regionally, the situation for safety representatives in Wales was markedly worse than in previous surveys, particularly from workloads, change, long hours and shift work.

Musculoskeletal disorders such as back strain and RSI do not show the kind of step change required, with thousands of workers suffering in agony while employers do little or nothing to help. It is clear from other indicators such as lifting heavy loads that it is not enough to produce guidance on manual handling. Workers in a range of sectors and workplaces experience these hazards. Concerns around DSE stood out in this year's survey, and given the increasing use of technologies for work, this highlights an area for HSE to take up more vigorously.

The fact that slips, trips and falls on a level continue to rise as an issue for safety representatives suggests that voluntary guidance and even ongoing publicity campaigns are insufficient to tackle this hazard.

Bullying is the hazard which increased most compared with previous years in the 2008 survey. Although some funds have been made available for Dignity at Work, which has been driven by unions, much more could be done to tackle this issue. It is one of the main contributors to stress, so joined up thinking is required.

Lone working has also risen in importance in this year's survey. Workers across a range of sectors, including health and education – but also construction and transport and communications - complain about the hazards of working alone. There is a link with the use of agency workers and with cost cutting working practices which needs to be examined.

The TUC recommends that:

- Unions step up campaigning on stress with employers and HSE, including for specific regulations to make sure something is done. There should be more use of enforcement measures by inspectors and the stress management standards should be incorporated in an Approved Code of Practice (ACOP). The HSE should, in particular consider new ways of tackling stress in Wales in the light of its prevalence in this survey.

- Unions campaign on display screen equipment (DSE), alongside other initiatives, as part of a drive to make HSE campaigns more effective. This would include emphasis on work station assessments, paid time off for free eye tests and taking regular and frequent breaks away from the desk.
- The TUC should encourage more take up of specific courses and materials on slips and trips, bullying and lone working, in conjunction with other sympathetic organisations (such as the National Group on Homeworking and the Andrea Adams Trust) as well as within HSE to progress these issues over the next two years.

Managing health and safety

This year's TUC survey found further concerns about the extent of risk assessment carried out by employers. This is particularly significant, given the prominence of risk assessment in the management of health and safety in recent decades. If the situation is so bad in unionised workplaces, then the picture in weaker and less organised sectors is likely to be far worse.

Only half the safety representatives surveyed said that their employer's risk assessments were adequate. The situation was worse in the public sector, especially in health and education, and worst in the London region. More safety representatives than in the previous survey said their employer's risk assessments were inadequate, with smaller organisations particularly affected.

These concerns are amplified by the lack of consultation. Employers are simply not listening to and discussing the risks with specialists in the workplace who have a unique and valuable perspective. Less than half the safety representatives said that they were satisfied with consultation over risk assessments, and only a quarter were fully satisfied with their role. If HSE is serious about improving the quantity and quality of risk assessment, it will need to take action in this area: safety representatives are best placed to ensure that risk assessments are carried out and are done to the required standard.

Given the scale of psycho-social and musculoskeletal hazards faced by workers in Britain, the absence of coherent and comprehensive occupational health provision is particularly disturbing.

The TUC 2008 survey found an accelerating trend of "buying in" the provision of occupational health services, but this has not overcome the differences in provision in some smaller workplaces. The only place to buck the trend on declining internal provision was Wales.

Particular sectors also suffer from a lack of provision of occupational health services. Construction and leisure services were particularly badly affected, despite well-established hazards and concerns in these sectors.

Most significantly, the draconian sickness absence culture promoted by some employers appears to have grown, with more disciplinary and monitoring going on, but less treatment. Safety representatives revealed that even their

conclusions and recommendations

well-established right of access to records is often denied, and that other long-standing practices such as first aid provision are increasingly being put aside. The only small encouragement is the slight increasing in prevention and rehabilitation- though employers have a long way to go before these are adequate across the whole of the world of work.

The TUC recommends that:

- HSE investigate the reasons behind poor compliance with risk assessment legislation, and seek to back this up with changes in the law and stronger enforcement.
- The TUC and affiliated unions continue to campaign for a duty on employers to consult with safety representatives. This survey provides more evidence of the need for such a duty.
- The government and HSE should invest resources in developing an integrated occupational health strategy, covering all areas from prevention to rehabilitation. This should be about making all work decent, quality and safe work – alongside supporting those who suffer from work-related injury and ill-health.

Safety representatives

Although safety representatives have wide powers under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977, these have not been adequately enforced by HSE inspectors or through prosecutions. In particular rights such as getting time off for training and functions, being consulted by employers and management, getting facilities for inspectors and taking part in effective health and safety committees need to be better enforced.

The TUC biennial survey 2008 found that the majority of safety representatives are still not being consulted automatically by their employers over vital matters in the workplace. Even when safety representatives requested to be consulted, only a third was frequently consulted as a result. These concerns were particularly felt in education and health, and smaller employers generally consulted less.

Although the majority of workplaces had joint health and safety committees, a stubborn minority still do not. Since safety committees are a vital element in ensuring safety representatives are effective, this finding suggests the need for enforcement by inspectors.

Safety representatives are still experiencing problems in getting time off to fulfil their functions. Around half the safety representatives surveyed said they could only spend an hour a week on their safety work.

The situation with regard to time off for training was also worse than in previous years. Almost half the safety representatives who responded told the TUC that they were too busy at work to take time off for training, whilst an alarming 40% said their manager had refused permission for time off.

These concerns about training are particularly worrying, because training is another factor that makes safety representatives so effective in the workplace. The 2008 survey found that a third of new safety representatives had not done their stage 1 in their first year.

Despite the problems getting time off, the survey did register that safety representatives at all levels of experience are increasing their knowledge and expertise in safety matters. More safety representatives than before said they had completed TUC stages 1 and 2, and the third stage Certificate/Diploma.

Two years ago HSE consulted over improving worker involvement in health and safety. The consultation did not envisage giving safety representatives wide powers for “roving” into non-unionised or poorly unionised workplaces, or the power to impose legally binding provisional improvement notices, as in some Australian states. It did however ask for views on imposing a duty on employers to consult with safety representatives over risk assessments and for employers to respond to safety representatives’ requests. This would have gone some way towards addressing some of the key problems safety representatives’ face, as identified by previous TUC surveys and by other research.

Despite an overwhelming response to the consultation in favour of giving safety representatives these rights, HSE rejected these small extensions after lobbying from business organisations such as the CBI. The 2008 TUC survey indicates that these issues remain on the agenda for trade unions.

The TUC recommends that:

- Employers should implement existing law on safety representatives’ rights and powers, and HSE and environmental health officers should enforce this law, issuing notices where compliance is found to be lacking;
- HSE should review and strengthen the regulations and guidance on time off for training;
- Unions should use the results of the survey and their own research to press the case with government for a duty on employers to consult with safety representatives over risk assessments and a duty to respond to concerns raised formally by union safety representatives;
- Unions should continue to campaign for extended rights and powers for safety representatives, particularly on roving representatives, provisional improvement notices and stopping the job.

Enforcement

The TUC and its affiliated unions have consistently raised concerns about the lack of enforcement of health and safety law with government and HSE for a long time. *Hazards* magazine obtained figures this year showing that employers get a visit from an inspector once ever 14.5 years, whereas in 2001-02 the average was every seven years.

conclusions and recommendations

This picture is supported by the views safety representatives gave in the 2008 TUC survey. Almost half the safety representatives who took part said they had never known an inspector visit their workplace, whilst only just over a quarter had had a visit over the last 12 months. Their responses showed that workplaces across the public and private sectors, including in those considered “higher risk” as well as those with a high incidence of work-related injury and ill health, were not being adequately inspected. Small workplaces – the overwhelming majority in today’s labour market – were particularly under-inspected.

Despite the low level of inspection, safety representatives generally believed that visits were effective in improving employers’ compliance with health and safety law. Three quarters of safety representatives believed their employer took some action because they might be visited, and two thirds of employers do more than the minimum to comply with a legal enforcement notice. These figures suggest that the law, the threat of enforcement and actual prosecution remains key drivers of change.

HSE inspectors and local authority environmental health officers could also do more to involve safety representatives. The majority of safety representatives were not aware that a visit was planned and a majority did not speak to inspectors when they did come to the workplace. This indicates a missed opportunity for everyone involved.

The TUC recommends that:

- The government provide the funding necessary for HSE and local authorities to increase the number of inspectors, investigations and prosecutions for health and safety matters.
- Enforcement authorities should ensure that inspectors liaise fully with safety representatives in order to make their visits most effective.
- Employers should consult fully with safety representatives after receiving an enforcement notice and after a prosecution, so that the necessary changes can be implemented.



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