

# HEALTH AND SAFETY UNDER THREAT



**The government believes  
that health and safety is a  
burden on business**

**REGULATION  
ENFORCEMENT  
COMPENSATION**

A pair of orange-handled scissors is shown cutting through a red banner. The banner has white, distressed-style text that reads 'REGULATION', 'ENFORCEMENT', and 'COMPENSATION' stacked vertically. The scissors are positioned diagonally, with the blades cutting through the banner.

The actions of the government are putting the safety and health of Britain's workers under threat, by trying to slash the laws that protect you, cut enforcement and inspection and make it harder to win compensation for injuries.

**Don't let this happen. Take part in the  
TUC Day of Action on health and safety on  
28 April 2012, Workers' Memorial Day.**



## **These proposed cuts are not inevitable. Trade unions, safety campaigners and the TUC want proper legal protection for all those in work, a strong HSE, and a right to seek justice if things go wrong.**

Join any events in your area on 28 April 2012. This is International Workers Memorial Day when we traditionally remember the dead and fight for the living. Never has that message been more important than now. Let's ensure that we make it clear that we want clear commitments and action from those who should be protecting us.

### How safe is work?

The government tells us that work is good for you. While it is true that sometimes working can be good for your health, for many people it certainly is not. If it is not organised properly, or risks are not managed, it can kill you, injure you or give you an illness that may be with you for the rest of your life.

The number of fatalities last year is given as 171. This is the number of workers who actually were killed in the workplace last year. However it is less than 1 per cent of the number killed by work. According to HSE figures, every single year, over 8,000 people die of cancers that are caused by their work, and another 4,000 die from lung disease. In addition 800 people are killed on the roads while working. If you add the 7–8,000 deaths from heart or circulatory problems caused by work then the figure is already well over 20,000. And these figures are a minimum. Many experts put the real figure as much higher.

However it is not only deaths. Last year a staggering 1.9 million people were suffering from an illness that was caused or made worse by their work.

All these deaths and injuries were avoidable if employers took the proper precautions.

### **Not just about safety**

In 2011, a survey of more than 2,000 adults for Mind found that work was the biggest stress in most people's lives, but one in five believed they would be in line for redundancy if they mentioned they had a problem. Half of those questioned were too scared to take time off sick and most believed their boss would not offer to help them cope with stress.

### Britain is not the "safest place to work"

The government has claimed that "Britain is the safest place to work". This is nonsense. Although it comes out near the top of the league when looking only at immediate fatalities, this is because Britain has far less manufacturing and heavy

engineering than most comparable countries. If you compare deaths caused by work, or ill-health, then Britain comes well down the list.

According to the Health and Safety Risk Index, published in January 2010, the UK's health and safety performance was 20th out of the 34 OECD nations.

## Protection is being taken away

The government is obsessed with removing regulations rather than trying to ensure that regulation is effective. In its first year it set up no less than three separate reviews of the "burden of health and safety regulation" on business and is planning to get rid of as many laws as it can. Unions have supported getting rid of unnecessary laws or simplifying laws where this does not reduce protection but the government wants to go much further and wants all regulation reviewed and cut back if possible. It has already said it will remove protection for some self-employed, and has reduced the number of injuries that have to be reported.

## Safety budgets slashed

The HSE has had the amount of money that it gets from government cut by 35 per cent over the next three years. This will mean that it will have to try to make up as much of the difference as it can by increasing charges and cutting services. A number of services have already been closed, including its information line.

The HSE admits that the cuts will lead to increased deaths and injury. In a consultation document on charging issued in 2011 it said *"the expected 'lower level of enforcement' would mean a consequent decrease in health and safety standards throughout Great Britain, with ensuing costs to society."*

## Inspections

Over the past 10 years there has been a big fall in the number of inspections, and even 10 years ago there were not nearly enough. However there will be an even bigger fall in the next few years. In March, the government instructed the HSE not to make any further proactive inspections in any but the most hazardous industries. Proactive inspections are ones where an inspector calls to check that everything is OK rather than those where they investigate after a report of an injury or death. They are a major part of the HSE's work.

The decision means that many industries, including light engineering, electrical engineering, docks, transport, electricity generation, health care, postal services, retail and quarries, will only see an inspector AFTER something has gone wrong.

Local authorities have also been told they must cut inspections dramatically.

## **Not everyone will suffer**

*"Cuts to HSE inspection regime offer an opportunity for brokers"*

Headline from Insurance Age – April 2011

## **When things go wrong**

If you are injured through your work and it is your employer's fault then you may be entitled to compensation. Unions ensure that you get the full amount you are awarded with no deductions. The government is trying to stop that by changing the way that the claims are dealt with. This will mean that workers will have to pay some of the legal costs out of their damages even when they win.

They are also trying to make it easier for employers to dismiss workers by making it harder (and more expensive) to take an employer to an employment tribunal.

## **Unionised workplaces are safer**

Safety representatives are volunteers who make a huge difference. Workplaces that have trade union safety representatives and safety committees have half the serious injuries than those without.

In January 2007 the government published a report which said that safety representatives save society between £181m and £578m each year as a result of lost time reduction from occupational injuries and work-related illnesses of between 286,000 and 616,000 days. Yet the government is trying to cut down on the amount of time that trade union representatives can spend doing their job.

## **What you can do**

- Find out what is happening in your area on 28 April. The TUC have a website which will list all the local activities, but you can ask your union branch or trades council.
- If nothing is happening then get together with some of your workmates or others in the area where you work and organise something.
- Write to your MP or local paper telling them why what the government is doing is wrong. Some ideas on what to say are on the TUC website.
- If you are working on 28 April then organise a minute's silence at noon to remember those who have died because of their work.

## **TUC website [www.tuc.org.uk/wmd](http://www.tuc.org.uk/wmd)**

**Workers Memorial Day 28 April 2012**  
**Remember the dead – but fight for the living**