

# ORGANISING AROUND HEALTH AND SAFTETY

**UNISON** BRANCH DEVELOPMENT AND ORGANISING TOOLKIT



---

# Organising around health and safety

---

## Overview

This module has been developed to enable branches to organise and campaign around health and safety issues. The module covers:

- using health and safety rights to organise
- developing a branch health and safety audit
- selecting a safety concern to campaign on which will resonate with many people
- enlisting support for the health and safety organising campaign
- producing a campaign plan.

As a result of the above process the branch will raise the importance of health and safety as a key issue. These priorities can be added to the Branch Development and Organising Plan (see core module).

The module will work best if you have already completed the core module of the Branch Development and Organising Toolkit (available from <http://www.unison.org.uk/activists>) and the branch mapping included within it. However, it can also be used as a stand alone activity.

### ***Who is the session aimed at?***

Branch officers, activists and active members.

### ***How long will it take?***

Allow 3.5 – 4 hours to complete the session.

## Objectives

This session will:

- encourage activists to examine health and safety at branch level, particularly with regard to organising
- analyse the branch map with regard to members and potential members from the perspective of health and safety issues and organisation
- analyse what the employer is doing around the issue of health and safety
- develop a relevant campaign around health and safety issues
- plan how to encourage more health and safety reps, members and others to get involved.



## Before the session

Discuss the pre-course work with the branch secretary. This will prepare the group for the session and will also encourage the branch to ask for key information from the employer. If the branch cannot get all the information required, still go ahead with the session and get their general impressions. Part of the action plan might be that the branch seeks more accurate information from the employer.



## Pre-course work

The information you will need for this session falls into two categories, information from and about the branch and information from and about the employer.

### **Branch**

Try to bring the following information:

- health and safety facilities agreement
- any mapping information that the branch has
- breakdown of health and safety reps within the branch (numbers and location)
- which stewards are active around health and safety and where
- the health and safety issues facing members – list as many as possible
- an indication of membership participation in health and safety matters (e.g high, some, none)
- those areas where the branch has been involved in health and safety issues in the last year (you can break this down by issue eg.. manual handling, stress, etc.).

### **Employer:**

- their health and safety policy
- risk assessment policy
- details of their health and safety committee structure
- details of how many injuries and accidents have occurred in the past year across workplaces.

If you do not know the answer(s) to any of the above, mark with a question mark and decide how you will find out the information.

### **What you will need to run this session**

You will need to have a preliminary discussion with the branch secretary and collate various resources:

- the pre-course information, including employer information and mapping information
- copies of the UNISON health and safety reps guide
- enough copies of the handouts
- flipchart paper and pens
- blu tack
- blank cards
- post it notes.



## Running the session – tutors' notes

### **Step one (timing 20 minutes)**

#### **Setting the context**

Why organise around health and safety?  
Which health and safety issues should we organise around?

1. Welcome the group. Set the context for the module and hold a brief discussion on why we should organise around health and safety issues. Use the following points as a guide:
  - surveys have shown that health and safety is the most important workplace issue identified by union members
  - members are at risk from a host of hazards – many of which are hidden. These include repetitive strain injury (RSI)/stress/lifting injuries/chemicals/infections/violence, etc
  - a million workers are injured each year at work
  - the more people recruited into UNISON, the more effectively we can take up health and safety campaigns
  - unionised workplaces are safer than non unionised workplaces
  - members: health at work is not a luxury but a right
  - union safety reps have special legal rights, for example to be consulted by employers and receive information or to inspect the workplace and investigate hazards
  - these special rights can be used to reinforce organising within the branch.

### **Step two (timing 45 minutes)**

#### **Using health and safety rights to organise.**

**Resource: Handout one 'Health and safety reps: basic rights'**

1. Break the group into smaller groups. Ensure as far as possible that each small group reflects a mix of experience.
2. Give out handout one and go through the basic health and safety rights first.
3. Tell participants they will be discussing how these rights can be used to build health and safety organisation within the workplace.
4. Go through steps (a) and (b) in the handout and the seven bullet points.
5. Ask for feedback on a flip chart.

The outcome of this session should be:

- an overview of the rights of health and safety reps
- a list of ideas on using such rights to build a safely organised workplace and branch.

### **Step three (timing 30 minutes)**

#### **What is our current health and safety position?**

**Resource: Handout two 'UNISON branch organisation – audit checklist'**

- Give out the hand out. Break the larger group into small groups and ask them to build a branch picture of health and safety organisation by creating a branch audit. We need to know where we are now in order to see where our organising efforts should be concentrated.

- Get each small group to fill in the audit checklist as far as possible. If they don't know some of the answers – that's fine, as finding out the information can be part of the action plan.
- Take a report back from each group sequentially on each question. Discuss and collate the information.
- Tell participants that the audit should be carried out each year and monitored to check for improvement. The results of the audit can be used to help reinforce any mapped workplaces, the branch development plan and the campaign action plan(s).

The outcome of this session should be an overview of current health and safety organisation within the branch.

#### **Step four (timing 1 hour)**

##### ***Campaigning on hazards***

##### ***Resource: Handout three 'Identifying Hazards for Campaigning'***

1. Put the group into pairs and give out handout three. Take them through it briefly. Then ask the pairs to check through the pre-course information on hazards facing members at work.
2. Now ask the pairs to identify as many hazards that they can think of within their workplace. Ask them to write these up on cards and place on the wall, table or floor.
3. They should now cluster the cards where there is similarity.
4. Now ask them to identify three of the hazards they believe:
  - a. could be turned into a campaign
  - b. would meet the campaigning criteria on page 12 of the core module, namely that

the issues should:

- have a good chance of success
- be widely felt
- be deeply felt
- involve members and potential members
- be worth the time and effort
- be easily understood
- be consistent with your values, priorities and strategic plans.

Refer them to 'Recruiting around an issue' on page 12 of the core module.

The outcome of this session should be to identify three campaigning health and safety issue to organise around.

#### **Step five (timing 1 hour)**

##### ***Building health and safety organisation*** ***Resource: Handout four 'Building health and safety organisation in the workplace'***

1. Set the context. Only with the support of recruited and retained members can we begin to ensure a safe working environment.
2. Give out the hand out. Go through each point.
3. Ask participants to report back on a flip chart.

The outcome of this step should be a list of ideas on how the branch can involve members/potential members/activists and others to support us in a health and safety campaign that will build branch organisation.

---

***Step six (timing 30 minutes)***

***Action planning***

***Resource: Handout five 'Action planning'***

Resource: information from previous activities, the action planning sheet, the action plan pro-forma.

This part of the session will identify key priorities for the branch around the chosen health and safety campaign issue(s).

Make sure that the information that has been gathered during the previous activities including the health and safety audit and building organisation activities, is recorded and that the next steps are agreed.

---

## **HANDOUT 1**

### Health and safety reps: basic rights



#### **Using health and safety rights to organise**

(a) In your small group read through this handout.

---

(b) Discuss and list ideas on how you can use these rights to build health and safety organisation at the workplace.

---

Think about how you can ensure that:

- members are aware of the health and safety issues they face at work and the need to support each other
- managers are aware of your rights and are ensuring that you can use them practically and without detriment
- there is consultation over health and safety issues
- best use is made of health and safety committees
- inspections and investigations can be carried out effectively
- information is received from employers and all information is passed on to members
- members and other workers can be contacted in areas not covered by a recognition agreement.

Be prepared to feed back the main points of your discussion to the larger group.

#### **Health and safety reps: basic rights**

Safety reps have rights, or 'functions' - not duties or any more responsibilities than ordinary employees, although increasingly employers attempt to use trade union safety reps as unpaid company safety officers. Those rights allow reps to:

##### **Investigate**

- Investigate complaints from/on behalf of members.
- Take up problems you identify yourself.
- Investigate accidents, diseases and dangerous occurrences.

##### **Inspect**

- Make a formal, planned inspection of the workplace at least every three months.
- Carry out extra inspections where there is to be, or has been, a change in the working conditions, or where new hazards information has become available.

##### **Get information**

- This means any information held by the employer that relates to health, safety and welfare (unless it identifies a particular member of staff).
- Reps have the right to see and take copies of any document that the employer is required to keep by law, such as risk assessments, safety policy, fire certificate, accident book etc.
- Reports from the enforcement authorities.

- 
- Information on any plans or proposed changes that might affect the health and safety of members.

### ***Time off***

You have a legal entitlement to paid time off to carry out your functions or undergo training.

The law is quite clear. You should be given time off for training, investigating complaints, negotiating with your employer, carrying out inspections, reading relevant papers, meeting enforcement officers and attending safety committees

Has your branch negotiated a time off agreement for safety reps?

### ***Safety committees***

Where there are two or more elected trade union safety reps (not necessarily from the same union), the employer must set up a joint trade union/management safety committee if the safety reps request one in writing. This must be done within three months, and membership must be balanced between management and unions.

### ***Facilities for safety reps – the law***

Every employer must provide any help and facilities reasonably required by safety reps to enable them to carry out their functions under Section 2(4) of HASAWA and under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committee Regulations 1977.

### ***Employers' health and safety responsibilities: a brief summary***

Employers have a legal responsibility to ensure:

- the safety, health and welfare of employees
- maintenance and improvement of health and safety standards
- the undertaking of assessments to protect employees and other people against risks to health and safety
- consultation with employees concerning arrangements for joint action on health and safety matters
- the preparation and publication of a written statement of their safety policy and arrangements
- the provision of information about any potential hazards to health and safety.

Although the law gives basic rights to safety reps, these are only reinforced through organisation and negotiation with employers from a position of strength.

---

**HANDOUT TWO****UNISON BRANCH ORGANISATION – AUDIT CHECKLIST**

	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>1</b> Are all workplaces/shifts covered by a safety rep?			
<b>2</b> Do all safety reps have adequate time off to carry out their duties?			
<b>3</b> Do all safety reps have adequate time off for training?			
<b>4</b> Do all safety reps have adequate facilities to do their work? (eg access to photo-copying, notice boards etc)			
<b>5</b> Are there effective arrangements for regular inspections?			
<b>6</b> Are there effective arrangements for reporting hazards?			
<b>7</b> Are there effective arrangements for investigating accidents, ill health and near misses?			
<b>8</b> Is the branch health and safety structure effectively linked with other parts of UNISON?			
<b>9</b> Is the branch health and safety structure effectively linked with the Health and Safety Executive and other relevant outside organisations?			
<b>10</b> Is there a system for keeping health and safety information up to date and available to safety reps?			
<b>11</b> Does the branch provide information to members to raise awareness of health and safety?			
<b>12</b> Does the branch deal with environmental issues as well as health, safety and welfare?			
<b>13</b> Any other relevant areas to audit.			

---

## **Handout Three**

### Identifying hazards for campaigning



#### **Background**

In a recent survey most UNISON members identified health and safety as the most important workplace issue for them.

Branches should be at the forefront of campaigns on issues such as stress at work and violence in the workplace. Many of our members are also at risk from problems such as:

- RSI from keyboarding or working in call centres
- back pain from lifting and carrying people and heavy loads
- insufficient training and equipment
- infected needles
- violence
- stress.

Identifying and campaigning on health and safety issues can make a real impact on members lives, since the union is dealing with issues that matter for members. It is no exaggeration to say that organising effectively around health and safety can make the difference between life and death and between illness, accidents and wellbeing. It's not surprising therefore that health and safety issues present a unique opportunity for the branch to increase its organising activities.

#### **What to do**

- In pairs, discuss the health and safety issues facing your members.
- Write these hazards onto cards provided. One hazard per card.

- Now check through the information below on hazards at work (overleaf). Write up more cards if you think any of these particularly affect your members.
- Place all cards as indicated (either on wall, table or floor).
- Help cluster the cards which are similar.
- Decide which three issues would make a good campaign bearing in mind the campaigns criteria on page 12 of the core module 'Recruiting around an issue'.
- Using a flipchart pen dab one ink dot on each card for your three main issues.

#### **Hazards at work**

##### **Chemicals and toxic substances**

These can cause irritation, sensitisation, skin disease, lung disease, reproductive risks and cancer.

Dusts can also cause the above reactions and are categorised as fibrous/toxic/radioactive/irritant/allergenic/carcinogenic.

##### **Biological hazards**

These include parasites, insects, bacteria, viruses. Some examples include AIDS, BSE, MRSA (Methicillin-Resistance Staphylococcus Aureus) and Legionnaires disease.

##### **Skin hazards**

These include injuries from burns, cuts, abrasions and work induced skin cancer and dermatitis.

---

### **Work equipment/machinery hazards**

These include: vibration from tools and equipment causing damage to joints, knees, elbows, shoulders and wrists; back strain caused by manual handling; these include injuries to feet, hand, arms and eyes.

Causes of hazards include: wrong machinery for the job; poorly designed - or lack of - equipment that causes accidents or ergonomic hazards; failure to provide the right information, instruction and training for users.

### **Noise**

Current Health and Safety Executive figures suggest that at least 1.3 million employees are exposed to noise levels which can cause permanent hearing loss.

### **Office hazards**

These include: sick building syndrome; lifting, handling, carrying; slips, trips and falls; and hazardous substances e.g. solvents, photo copier toner.

### **Violence**

Every week people are abused, threatened, and beaten up at work by people they come into contact with through their job. Many receive major or minor injuries, but the psychological effects-stress, depression, even fear of work can be even worse.

### **Stress**

Stress can damage your mental and physical health. It can be caused by: harassment/bullying, heavy workloads, job insecurity, long hours or lack of job control.

### **Other hazards**

These might include:

untidy and overcrowded workplaces

obstructed fire exits

poorly maintained toilets

extremes of temperature

shift-work

heavy workloads

sexual harassment

working alone.

---

## **HANDOUT 4**

### Building health and safety organisation in the workplace



You alone cannot ensure a safe working environment. We need the help and support of members, activists and others.

Dangerous or unhealthy practices in the workplace rightly cause strong feelings. These can be used positively to bring about change and improvements through organising.

In particular it is important to involve young members in organising around health and safety, as they are often less aware of such problems.

Health and safety is one of the main reasons why workers join unions and is an excellent recruitment tool, particularly when there are times of specific health and safety concerns.

#### ***What to do***

In your group choose one of the workplace health and safety issues faced by your members which were discussed in the last session.

On a flipchart brain storm ideas on how to enlist the support of the following to begin to tackle the issue:

- members/potential members
- stewards
- potential activists
- health and safety reps
- branch officers
- others (specify).

Write the names of potential allies, reps and activists on post-it notes. Include on the note their sections or departments.

Use these post-it notes to update your branch health and safety audit and mapped workplace(s).

Be prepared to feed back the main points of your discussion to the larger group.

---

## **HANDOUT 5**

### Action planning



This part of the session will identify key priorities for the branch around building organisation for a health and safety campaign and will draw up an action plan. If the core module has been completed the health and safety campaign issue can be added to part B of your Branch Development and Organising Plan. If this is the first module you have completed, you can download the outline plan document from the UNISON website, <http://www.unison.org.uk/activists>

Use the branch health and safety audit and issues identified in the activities to help you identify your action plan priorities. Use the action planning sheet to plan detailed actions which can be fed into the campaign plan sheet.

Other issues you may wish to consider for your action plan are:

- What information do we need, how can we get hold of it, how should we use it?
- Improving workplace mapping for organising. Mapping hazards.
- Use of members/activists surveys as a means of getting them involved.
- Improving how the branch communicates with its members and activists.
- Ideas for getting activists/members to 'gel' together.
- Identifying our allies and ways of influencing/working with them.
- Identifying obstacles to organising and ways of overcoming these.
- Having an effective campaign message.
- Using UNISON regional/national resources.
- Working with the health and safety committee.
- Tactics (our own and anticipating management's).
- Improving our networks.

---

**Action planning sheet**

Use this sheet for detailed planning



ISSUE

---

- Who will be involved?

---

---

---

AIMS

---

- Short term

---

- Medium term

---

- Link to recruitment of members/activists

---

---

---

TARGETS (who campaign is aimed at)

---

---

---

Timescale including for reporting on progress

---

---

---

Summary of strategy (your approach to the campaign)

---

---

Tactics (which fit the strategy)

---

---

**CAMPAIGN PLAN**

**CAMPAIGN ISSUE**

Use the sheet below or your own version of it, with appropriate timescale and relevant areas of work. Break each area down into tasks and write in with the initials of the lead person responsible in the appropriate time slot.

Main areas of work	Weeks 1 -3	Who?	Weeks 4-6	Who?	Weeks 7-9	Who?	Weeks 10-12	Who?

