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Out to UNISON safety reps and officers every two months – inside this issue:

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Issue 43

Asbestos - still a hazard, still a risk, still a killer!

Despite a UK ban, the risk to workers still remains, with the number of deaths from Mesothelioma still yet to peak.

Action Mesothelioma Day takes place on Monday 27 February and is being promoted by the **British Lung Foundation**.

Mesothelioma also known as meso (pronounced “meezo”) is a form of malignant chest cancer which affects the lungs. It is one of the most virulent and violent asbestos related illnesses. From the point of diagnosis victims have a very short time to get help or advice on compensation. It develops up to 40 years after exposure to asbestos and experts have predicted that within the next decade cases will peak within the UK.

A Mesothelioma Charter has been developed, which has the full support of UNISON. It is calling for better rights for sufferers and for the government to acknowledge Mesothelioma as a national priority. The Charter further calls for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) to enforce existing regulations on asbestos and for employers to work with unions to ensure their enforcement.

You and your members can also support the campaign by signing the petition and emailing your MPs to ask them to also support it. Go to: <http://www.lunguk.org>

Show your support at work by displaying UNISON’s checklist poster, *Asbestos - Still A Killer* (stock no. 2145) and the stickers (available in A4 sheets), *Stop! Is Asbestos Here?* (stock no. 2144). These are orderable from UNISON’s Communication Unit (see page 4 for details) or can be downloaded from: <http://www.unison.org.uk/safety/leaflets.asp> **Also available** on a first come first serve basis, are some **new** asbestos posters, leaflets, and stickers **from the TUC**. For copies of these, contact UNISON’s Health and Safety Unit ASAP.

UNISON's information sheet, *Asbestos - Still a Risk!* will be of use to branches and safety reps wishing to check whether their employer is managing the risk of asbestos at work. It explains that reasonable steps must be taken to identify asbestos in the workplace, with an accurate up-to-date written record of its location kept, and regular monitoring of its condition. A risk assessment must: identify the type of asbestos involved, assess the nature and degree of exposure, consider the level of control measures needed, consider the results of any monitoring, or health surveillance, and record the significant findings. A management plan must detail how the control measures will be implemented. Download the information sheet at: <http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B161.pdf>, or contact the Health and Safety Unit.

Further information on asbestos and workplace cancer is available from the following websites: TUC (http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s), HSE (<http://www.hse.gov.uk>), and *Hazards* (<http://www.hazards.org>). In the last issue of *Health and Safety Organiser* (December 2005), *Burying the Evidence* examined the cancer epidemic facing Britain.

Work Deaths Campaign Poster

Continuing UNISON's campaign to hold employers to account for work-related deaths, we've ordered our own version of *The Killers* poster from *Hazards Magazine*, with UNISON colours and logo. Order your free copies from the Health and Safety Unit, perhaps for Workers Memorial Day, and raise awareness of work-related deaths.

Have You Got It?

Has your branch received UNISON's Sickness Absence questionnaire? If so, please get it completed and returned ASAP. We want to identify good and bad practice, expel the myths, and continue to campaign on this important workplace issue.

Who's Watching?

Workers are facing more invasions of their privacy and increased surveillance. With ever more: call centres, vehicle tagging, phone monitoring, and CCTV; members need security against the abuse of these and their privacy protected.

UNISON plans to revise its guidance on privacy at work, and is looking for examples of agreements negotiated at local level; plus case studies (these will be anonymised) of abuses of privacy, the unions response, and if it was successful. Please forward a copy or details (including the names of the branch and employer) to Simon Watson at: s.watson@unison.co.uk or at: Bargaining Support Group, UNISON, 1 Mabledon Place, London, WC1H 9AJ. For more information, phone Simon on: 020 7551 1309

Save Money Now

Don't forget to ask for the 10% discount for UNISON reps and branches when taking out or renewing a subscription to *Hazards Magazine*. Email: sub@hazards.org, or tel: 0114 201 4265.

Violence and Bullying in H.E.

Alarming levels of bullying and harassment found by a UNISON survey of members working in Higher Education (H.E.) received extensive media coverage. Around 20% of staff reported being subject to violence at work, just under one third reported being harassed by other staff, and around a third of women respondents reported some form of sexual harassment.

As a result the Equality Challenge Unit has been funded by the H.E. Funding Council for a project to investigate both the causes of such behaviour and how to prevent it. UNISON remains involved and a project worker has now been appointed.

Get Nominated

UNISON branches should nominate any active safety reps who have made an outstanding contribution on behalf of their members for the TUC's Safety Rep Award 2006. Complete and return the nomination form sent to all UNISON branch health and safety officers, by no later than **2 June** to Shelley Cole at UNISON's Health and Safety Unit. **All entries must be signed by the General Secretary Dave Prentis.**

Free Training

Want to gain a free British Safety Council (BSC) qualification in basic health and safety at work, supervising staff safely, or risk assessing? Of benefit to both employees and their employers (who must be BSC members), for further information go to: <http://www.bscawards.org/GrantFundingAD.pdf> or tel: 020 8600 1034. Call now before the funding runs out!

Diary Dates

ACTION MESOTHELIOMA DAY

27 February - see page 1 for more.

WORK YOUR PROPER HOURS DAY

Support this campaign to stop the long hours culture on **24 February**. Find out more at: <http://www.worksmart.org.uk/workyourproperhoursday/> The TUC also has some useful information on working time at: http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s

RSI AWARENESS DAY

Repetitive strain injuries (RSI) are a serious occupational health concern and include injuries affecting the soft tissues, and aches and pains which may progress to become crippling disorders that prevent sufferers from working or leading a normal life.

Be sure to mark International RSI Awareness Day on **28 February**. Consider: writing to the local press; surveying branch members; organising an awareness raising meeting perhaps with a guest speaker; organising safety rep inspections or risk, hazard or body mapping exercises; or negotiating with the employer for some form of recognition of the Day. UNISON's information sheet on RSI is available on the web at: <http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B179.pdf> or from the Health and Safety Unit.

SAFETY LAW CONFERENCE

This conference on **3 March** will examine new developments in safety law, including: directors duties, the proposed corporate manslaughter law, and the push towards more HSE "advice" and less formal enforcement. Speakers include the Safety Minister Lord Hunt, plus senior HSE and union officers. For more information go to: <http://www.corporateaccountability.org/conference/mar06.htm> , or tel: 0207 490 4494. Further details have also been sent to all branch health and safety officers.

NATIONAL NO SMOKING DAY

National No Smoking Day on **8 March** aims to raise awareness and support those wishing to stop smoking. For further information on the day including campaigning ideas go to: <http://www.nosmokingday.org.uk/> , email: enquiries@nosmokingday.org.uk , or tel: 0870 770 7909. Other useful information is available from Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) at: <http://www.ash.org.uk/> , by email: enquiries@ash.org.uk , or tel: 020 7739 5902. UNISON's revised information sheet, *Smoking at Work* is on the web at: <http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B182.pdf>

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Stress, manual handling, musculo-skeletal problems, and violence at work are the four big health problems for working women. They also suffer the highest rates of depression. All preventable, these seem a good place start to make workplaces healthier for women. Men would also benefit because much occupational health and safety is still based upon traditional industries rather than the modern workplace with computers.

To mark International Women's Day on **8 March**, UNISON and the TUC have launched a new Gender Occupational Safety and Health webpage. It includes: information and links, campaign ideas, and a discussion board. Go to: <http://www.tuc.org.uk/gender> For more on the Day go to: <http://www.internationalwomensday.com>

WORLD TB DAY

UNISON's information sheet, *Tuberculosis* is available on the web at: <http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/B185.pdf> or from the Health and Safety Unit. Further information about World TB Day on **24 March** is available from: <http://www.tbalert.org/resources/worldtbdays.php> , by email: awareness@tbalert.org , or tel: 0845 456 0995.

WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY

28 April - see page 4 for more.

HAZARDS CONFERENCE

Manchester, 14 - 16 July. More information will be sent out in due course.

A Participant's Report “Health and Safety: Revitalised or Reversed?”

This is a summary of a report on the recent conference: “Health & Safety: Revitalised or Reversed?” The full report by John Bamford of the Greater Manchester Hazards Centre (GMHC) is available at: <http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/docs/ierconf.htm>

Progress so far?

The main aim of the conference was to review and evaluate what progress has been made towards meeting demands for improving workplace health and safety, including: more rights for safety reps; more and better enforcement; stiffer penalties; new laws on corporate killing and directors responsibilities; and meeting the targets in the government's policy statements of 2000, “Revitalising Health and Safety” and “Improving Health Together”.

Revitalising targets not met

Mick Clapham MP, Chair of the parliamentary all-party group on Occupational Health and Safety opened the conference, with a view from parliament. Setting the tone quite firmly, Mick said that the Revitalising targets had not been met, and there was genuine disquiet that little has been done to address issues of work-related death and major injuries, or to develop appropriate legislation backed-up by effective enforcement in all areas of workplace health and safety. In mid-2004, the DWP Select Committee had called for substantial improvements and progress, but the Government rejected its recommendations.

The Revitalising targets set in 2000 are to: reduce the number of working days lost by 30%, reduce fatal and major injuries by 10%, and reduce the incidence of occupational ill-health by 20. An interim target was also set to achieve half the reductions within five years (i.e. by mid-2005).

The Revitalising Strategy set out 44 Action Points, most of them administrative and bureaucratic, (i.e. not law), and the HSE has acted on some, but there are major issues where no progress has been made. For example, dealing with the changing structure of employment, increased penalties and imprisonment for offences, and establishing the right to take private prosecutions for breaches of the law. Traditional means

of enforcement (inspection, enforcement notices, and prosecutions) are increasingly being replaced with encouraging voluntary compliance and reform.

Still waiting for the unlikely

Steve Tombs from the Centre for Corporate Accountability pointed out that we were still waiting for a corporate killing law. In 1996 a Law Commission report called for such and since then, there have been almost 6,000 work-related deaths, many due to management failures and negligence. The current draft law will not deal with many of the concerns about the present law and may represent a step backwards.

Worker involvement is necessary

Dave Walters discussed the lack of progress on worker involvement in the last 10 years. We know that union organised workplaces are safer, so extending worker organisation and involvement is a key to more general improvements. However, for effective worker representation, involvement, and meaningful consultation to take place; there needs to be an appropriate legal framework.

Hugh Robertson from the TUC highlighted the priority areas, including new rights for safety reps rights: placing a duty on employers to formally respond, formalising union inspection notices, and allowing roving safety reps. At the same time, safety reps must make full use of their current rights and we must challenge the lack of recognition by the HSE, and their failure to enforce the consultation regulations.

New hazards? No idea!

Simon Pickvance from Sheffield Occupational Health Advisory Service argued that ideas about what are work-related health issues have not caught-up with the real world, and that today's common problems such as stress, RSI, and musculo-skeletal injuries are often not recognised as work-related. Research has shown that many others are massively under-reported. The state doesn't know what the occupational diseases of the moment are, nor where they are most prevalent, nor what real damage they cause, nor what needs to be done.

The union role

John McDonnell MP suggested that unions need to influence Government more aggressively. Given the reduction in the Government's majority, it would only take 35 Labour members to vote against to defeat the government. In the House of Commons, there were hundreds of Labour MPs in contact with their sponsoring unions.

A race to the bottom - UK catching up

Mick Holder of the London Hazards Centre presented a paper on the Government's continued drive towards deregulation, despite the fact that Britain is one of the most deregulated economies in the industrialised world. Despite evidence that business generally do not find health and safety regulation a particular burden, the risk based approach to inspection and the call for an end to "unnecessary" inspections and paperwork, does not inspire confidence. Chilling statements by the prime minister about the need to compete with India and China, where the death and injury rate is more than 10 times the UK level do not bode well for the future, and indicate the need for a solid campaign of opposition.

Steve Kay, Chair of the HSE Branch of Prospect, which represents 80% of HSE professional and technical staff gave a worker/trade union perspective from the inside. Adverse changes in the organisation, management, and work of the HSE were small but continuous, and were leading to a position where employers would be able to do as they please unfettered by regulations or HSE inspectors.

In the real world

In the final session, the current state of play was examined. In the real world, the scale of work-related harm continues: over a million workers injured every year, 3 million suffer ill-health caused or made worse by work, and 25,000 permanently leave the workforce. There is no clear evidence that the Revitalising targets have been achieved, and any improvements may be incidental and related to other factors.

In the real world, it is the harmed workers and the taxpayer who bear 70% of the costs of work-related death, injury, and ill-health; and consequently employers take little notice of the HSE banging-on about the business case for safe and healthy workplaces. The real evidence shows that, like all criminals, it's the fear

WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY ♦ 28TH APRIL Remember the Dead: Fight for the living

Union workplaces
are safer workplaces!



The theme for this year's WMD is “**Union workplaces = safer workplaces**”. UNISON has produced a poster for this year (stock no. 1288) which may be ordered from UNISON's Communications Unit (see below). You may also want to use the *Killers* poster - see page 1.

HOW TO TAKE PART?

Make sure that workers at your workplace are not at risk. Use WMD locally to campaign and organise around, and negotiate for better workplace health and safety.

Nationally, take part in an organised campaign: for better rights for safety reps including provisional improvement notices and roving reps, for more effective enforcement of current laws, for higher penalties, for more inspectors in the HSE and local authorities, for a law of corporate killing to make it easier to prosecute negligent employers (both organisations and individual bosses at the top), and for a legal health and safety duty on directors and their equivalents.

Wear the ribbon, put up the posters and stickers, and plan an event!

The familiar forget-me-not purple ribbon will be worn by workers across the world as a symbol of remembrance and solidarity. Also, new to this year is the WMD car sticker (see top of page or go to: <http://www.gmhazards.org.uk/carsticker>). Order a bulk load of the ribbons (30p each, discounts for bulk orders) or car stickers (£1 each, discount for bulk orders) for your branch or workplace from the GMHC. An order form for ribbons is at: <http://www.gmhazards.org.uk/wmdribbonof.doc> Alternatively, tel: 0161 636 7557 or email: mail@gmhazards.org.uk

Suggested branch activities include:

- displaying UNISON's posters;
- ordering and distributing the purple ribbons and car stickers;
- writing a letter to the local press;

- organising a special meeting;
- organising a safety reps inspection or carrying out some risk, hazard, or body-mapping;
- focusing on a particular issue of concern where you work;
- remember the workers who have been killed at the workplace or in the community, by arranging an event such as planting a memorial tree in a public place, putting up a plaque, dedicating a sculpture, a piece of art, or a bench,
- asking local religious centres to include WMD in their worship during the week;
- negotiating with your employer to allow some form of recognition of the Day, such as a one minute silence to remember anyone who has died at your workplace or suffered a work-related illness;
- negotiating for any official flags on public buildings to be flown at half-mast on the Day; and/or
- finding out what your branch/other branches/unions, your local Hazards group, or regional TUC or Trades Council are planning and taking part or organise a joint event.

Some UNISON Regions/Regional Health and Safety Committees may also be organising events. Contact your region for further information.

AND LET US KNOW!

Let us know what you plan to carry out. Email or send a brief note to the Health and Safety Unit (see details on page 1).

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on WMD go to the websites of the following organisations:

- the GMHC - <http://www.gmhazards.org.uk/events.htm> ,
- the TUC - http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index.cfm , and
- *Hazards Magazine*-<http://www.hazards.org/wmd>
- Also keep a look out for UNISON's WMD 2006 campaign page. Going live soon it will include UNISON branch and regional activities and events planned for this year and highlights from last year.
- To order from UNISON's Communications Unit, tel: 020 7551 1455, email: Communications@unison.co.uk , or write using the same address as on page 1.