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HSE - the good, the bad and the downright disgraceful

HSE prosecutes FE college

On Friday 4 April City of Bristol College is due to appear in court following a prosecution brought by the HSE under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. The prosecution followed an incident which occurred on 2 May 2006 in which a lecturer was injured when a bottle of nitric acid exploded.

During the course of their investigations, the Health and Safety Executive has already served a prohibition notice and two improvement notices on the college, which required the college to review its systems relating to hazardous substances in the workplace.

We will keep you posted on developments and in the meantime send our support to our member Gary Baird and to the City of Bristol UCU branch who have acted vigorously following the accident.

HSE concern 1: Contacting the local HSE

In the January newsletter we reported the disappearance of the HSE local office telephone numbers from the HSE's website. One of the TUC Health and Safety Commissioners has taken this up, but they haven't been replaced yet.

So until normality is restored, don't forget it is still possible to get the number from the **HSE's Infoline** – telephone them on **0845 345 0055** and ask for the telephone number of your local office. It helps to know which one that is, of course. Check your own employers 'What you should know about health & safety' poster for the address.

HSE concern 2: New Headquarters

Some time ago, the HSE decided to 'rationalise' its headquarters operation. It is currently based between Rose Court in London, and the Bootle complex. They decided to consolidate a single HQ centre at the Bootle offices. Currently, HSE policy staff are based in the Rose Court office in London. UCU has heard on the trade union grapevine that only a dozen or so of the highly experienced policy and other staff there have so far committed themselves to make the transfer 'up North'. It seems that well over 300 will therefore be opting for early retirement, severance, redundancy or a job outside the HSE. Quite a few have already gone.

UK health and safety can ill-afford the loss of such a vast pool of experience, knowledge and intellectual power. Does this presage the 'dumbing down' of the HSE, and even less of a service to workers who daily face a huge range of hazards and risks because of their work?

HSE concern 3: Cuts threat

The news that HSE is to receive a flat-cash settlement, and not have to find the 5% year-on-year cuts imposed on its parent department, has come as a great relief.

Under the government's Comprehensive Spending Review, the Department for Work and Pensions is committed to a 5% real terms cut in public spending which will reduce its budget from April 2008 by 16% over the three years. A flat-cash settlement at HSE means its funding will remain constant, but will still be a reduction in real terms through the effect of inflation over the same period.

However, this funding settlement does nothing to advance the real need of the HSE for a considerable increase in funding to ensure there are sufficient enforcement resources available to ensure good health & safety workplace standards.

In the past, we have asked our readers to contact their MP and raise health and safety related issues. Once again, please ask your MP what they are doing to raise these matters in parliament, to ensure the HSE remains a serious organisation capable of defending workers' health & safety.

Wales region takes on the health and safety challenge

Attached to this newsletter are extracts from an excellent speech by Alan Gwyn, safety rep and safety representative on the Wales UCU Executive. We'd like to hear of similar approaches in other regions.

Reps lists – thank you

Many thanks to all the safety reps and branch secretaries who have helped ensure our health and safety reps database is as accurate as possible. We are now fast approaching 800 UCU health and safety reps!



Essential new publications

Safety Reps Regulations booklet

UnionLearn has published the Safety Representatives & Safety Committees Regulations on the TUC website, for training purposes. It is downloadable at www.tuc.org.uk/extras/brownbook.pdf

TUC Handbook

A new comprehensive TUC Handbook entitled '**Organising for safe and healthy workplaces**' has been published. All branches and LAs are strongly encouraged to make sure they have at least one copy.

LRD handbook

An excellent new booklet from Labour Research www.lrd.org.uk has just come out. Entitled '*Safety, health and equality - a guide for union reps*' it tackles a number of important issues on equality and Health and Safety

A new UCU health and safety factsheet listing essential sources of information is available at www.ucu.org.uk/hsfacts.

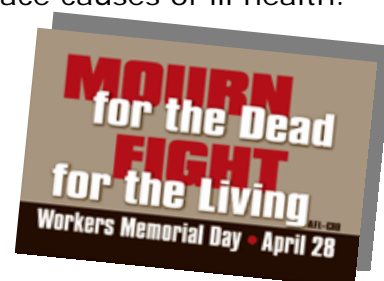
Stress and well being yet again

The government consultation on work and occupational health by Professor Carol Black has published. UCU, like the TUC has been critical of the ways in which the government – and employers – have been linking the consultation to the drive to 'get staff back to work'. Work has been presented as 'good' for health whilst being off sick is bad for 'health'. Unfortunately, as too many people know, work can also be bad for one's health – hence the epidemic of stress and bullying in further and higher education.

The proposals made will undoubtedly encourage more employers to adopt 'well-being' policies which are often used to divert attention from the workplace causes of ill health. Detailed advice to reps in the next couple of months

Workers' Memorial Day - 28 April 2008

This year's Workers' Memorial Day theme is:
'Good Occupational Health for ALL Workers'



The purpose behind Workers' Memorial Day has always been to '**remember the dead: fight for the living**' and unions are asked to focus on both areas, by considering memorials to all those killed through work but at the same time ensuring that such tragedies are not repeated. That can best be done by building trade union organization, and campaigning for stricter enforcement with higher penalties for breaches of health & safety laws. For more details visit: http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/index.cfm?mins=293

Mothers at work – HSE site

A useful HSE site for new and expectant mothers is available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/mothers/index.htm>

It includes advice for mothers, health professionals, case studies and frequently asked questions.

National training - Health and Safety Stage 1 course

The UCU Health and Safety Stage 1 course consists of five two-day modules. All new UCU health and safety reps should undertake training as soon as possible after they take up post. Existing health and safety reps and potential reps are encouraged to attend the Stage 1 course to develop and maintain the skills needed to perform the job of a health and safety rep.

It is vitally important that your branch/LA be up to date with changes in health and safety law and that each branch/LA has a trained health and safety rep on site. A trained health and safety rep with an understanding of their role and their rights will be able to play a vital role in representing members effectively. The following national courses are being **held in London**.

April 8 & 9	Module 3	Using your rights as a Health and Safety Rep
May 13 & 14	Module 4	Dealing with Accidents and Tackling Hazards
May 20 & 21	Module 1	Health and Safety Induction
June 19 & 20	Module 5	Trade Union Action to Tackle Stress

For further information please visit the UCU website at www.ucu.org.uk/training then click on national or contact Linda Ball at lball@ucu.org.uk

UCU Health and Safety Advice Line

UCU's Health and Safety Advice Line for safety reps and branch officers offers information about health and safety legal standards, and how they can be applied and advice on dealing with health and safety issues/problems.

The Health and Safety Advice Line is for branch officers and safety reps only, not for individual members. The advice line will be staffed three days a week only. When you phone the advice line you will be asked to leave a message. You will then be contacted as soon as possible.

The **advice line number** is **0161 636 7558** **Email** healthandsafety@ucu.org.uk

Or by post to John Bamford, UCU Health and Safety Advice Line

Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, Unit 2.5 Windrush Millennium Centre,
70 Alexandra Road, Manchester M16 7WD

Don't forget to visit the UCU health and safety web page at:
www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2132

Extracts from speech to UCU Wales conference by Alan Gwyn health and safety rep, on Wales Executive Committee - 1 March 2008.

Welcome to the UCU Wales Conference. Over the last year the number of UCU safety representatives in Wales being trained and taking up their new responsibilities has grown. Although this is encouraging there still is room for further growth.

UCU membership has often increased because of good safety representation from branch safety reps, who consult regularly with their employers on measures for promoting safety and health at work. The Health and Safety at Work Act, sections 2 (4), 2 (5), and 2 (7), provide for regulations to appoint safety representatives who in turn could request the establishment of health and safety committees.

The college in which I am employed has increased the facility time available in order for safety reps to carry out their duties and has reviewed and up-dated its health and safety at work policy. It has have carried out a college wide stress survey implementing short and long term goals to improve employee working conditions. Our safety reps have chaired working parties to form new polices and procedures in placement monitoring and the carrying out of departmental safety inspections. Regular safety committee meetings also take place with joint Union representation.

Other successful UCU stories include the work that has been done at Leeds University, where the UCU Branch has recently signed a new partnership agreement with the University to promote and safeguard the health and safety of staff and students. At the heart of the partnership is a declaration that health and safety is the university's highest priority. This is being backed by a substantial annual investment of £1.4m in health and safety, together with an awareness-raising campaign and a package of improvements; we congratulate our colleagues on their success.

There are regular training events for Safety Reps and the Stage One Health and Safety Course comes well recommended for those new reps wanting to understand the role of the safety reps at work. The training courses are free and time should be made available for those elected safety reps to attend under s168 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) ACT 1992 to time off work with pay for training provided by the union or the TUC. If you are interested contact the regional office or Linda Ball for details of UCU Health and Safety Courses, at lball@ucu.org.org.uk .

UCU produces an extensive range of fact sheets specifically for UCU health and safety reps as well as examples of good practice and useful tools. A regular email newsletter for local health and safety reps, branches and LA's is also available. There is also access to the UCU Health and Safety team who have dedicated health and safety staff offering help and support on any work Health and Safety issue.

Your local safety representative at your college or university should be your first port of call for any health or safety query or problem. As I end this report, on behalf of the executive committee would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have helped make their establishments a safer and healthier places to work in.

Remember a trained health and safety rep with an understanding of their role and their rights will be able to play a vital role in representing members.