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Working hours, mental ability and tobacco smoke

"University lecturers are doing even more unpaid overtime than last year and far more than the national average, according to new figures from the Trades Union Congress (TUC)."

See <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3736&from=3691> for further information

The Daily Telegraph reports the latest research from the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health published in the American Journal of Epidemiology, has found that middle-aged workers clocking up more than 55 hours a week at work have poorer mental skills, including short-term memory and ability to recall words, than those working fewer than 41 hours. The findings suggest that long-term damage to the brain caused by excessive time at work has been underestimated.

One in eight British workers does more than the European maximum of 48 hours a week. The study has been following the lives of over 2,200 British civil servants since the 1980's, regularly putting them through tests that monitor a range of health conditions related to work. In this most recent study, the participants, all in their early 50's, were put through a series of brain function tests. Those doing the most overtime recorded lower scores in two of the five key brain function tests - reasoning and vocabulary.

The report says: "This study shows that long working hours may have a negative effect on cognitive performance in middle age. The link between cognitive impairment and dementia later in life is clearly established. The difference between employees working long hours and those working normal hours is similar in magnitude to that of smoking, a risk factor for dementia." <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/healthnews/4803218/Long-hours-put-workers-at-risk-of-dementia-according-to-research-into-damage-to-brain.html>

Research findings published in the British Medical Journal link passive smoking and cognitive impairment - http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/extract/338/feb12_2/a3070 - related to the level of the chemical cotinine, a by-product of nicotine. Those with a higher level were 44 per cent more likely to develop early memory problems, which can be a warning sign for dementia, than those with low levels

Previous studies have suggested a link between smoking and the development of dementia, but the new study is the first to show that adults could be at risk by taking in the smoke of others. Researchers believe that the connection could be heart disease, a known risk factor for dementia and which can be triggered by smoking.

Dr David Llewellyn, from the University of Cambridge, who led the research, said: "Our results suggest that inhaling other people's smoke may damage the brain, impair cognitive functions such as memory, and make dementia more likely. Given that passive smoking is also linked to other serious health problems such as heart disease and stroke, smokers should avoid lighting up near non-smokers.

Almost three quarters of a million people in Britain have dementia; more than 400,000 suffer from Alzheimer's disease, the most common form. Experts estimate that the number of sufferers will increase sharply in future years, mainly because of an increasingly ageing population.

Go to <http://www.nhs.uk/news/2009/02February/Pages/PassiveSmokeDementia.aspx> for more information

TUC Women's Conference 2009

Held on the 11th – 13th March, this year's women's conference debated and unanimously approved the following resolution on gender sensitive health, safety and welfare. The motion was moved by our sister education union NASUWT.

Composite 9: Gender sensitive health, safety and welfare

Conference asserts that a key part of health and safety at work is an issue of gender equality and justice for women. Conference supports the Government and all organisations who are working to improve the health and well-being of the population via risk management, education, health screening and treatment.

Conference is concerned that despite women workers having very different needs in regards to HS&W, that health and safety monitoring and assessment of women workers is often still identical to that of men. When employers carry out risk assessments, gender is rarely considered. Where women suffer from gynaecological or reproductive problems and other possible work-related concerns, a link is hardly made by their GP's regarding work or working patterns. Traditionally, the health problems of women have been put down to events such as childbearing, child-rearing and the menopause, instead of occupational risk factors.

Conference notes the work already carried out by the TUC on women's health and safety. Conference welcomes the publications of the TUC Gender Occupational Safety and Health (GOSH) 'Gender-sensitivity' checklist for workplace health and safety representatives.

Conference calls on the TUC to continue to develop work by affiliates in support of gender sensitive health and safety practice by integrating the TUC GOSH 'Gender sensitivity' checklist into appropriate TUC training courses, promoting the use of the checklist by affiliates and campaigning to secure its endorsement by the Health and Safety Executive.

In continuing its good work we call upon the TUC to:

- i) Organise a gender sensitive HS&W day for affiliates in the next 12 months;
- ii) Produce better research and guidance on the health and safety issues connected to the menopause;
- iii) Produce new research and guidance into GP's attitudes and awareness of women's occupational health issues; and
- iv) Develop guidance and training for trade union officials and negotiators which specifically deals with women's occupational health issues.

Conference also urges all unions to ensure that employees are fully supported in maintaining their well-being. This should encompass:

- a) Health education in the workplace;
- b) Ensuring robust risk management and health and safety procedures are in place;
- c) Paid time-off for screening appointments; and
- d) Provision of support and time-off for any treatment that is required.

All UCU safety representatives should ensure that employers pay due regard to gender sensitive issues in respect of workplace health, safety and welfare. UCU will be shortly publishing its guide to Women's Health and Safety which includes the latest version of the TUC GOSH checklist which can also be downloaded from http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-14179-f0.cfm and user guidance from http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-14178-f0.cfm

Nanotechnology

It has come to our attention that two universities in the UK have had enforcement action taken against them by the HSE because of concerns about a particular type of carbon nanotube (CNT) structure. We don't know which two institutions they are yet, or the reason for action being taken, (a good guess would be failure to conduct suitable and sufficient risk assessments) but details of the actions taken will appear on one or other of the HSE's "name and shame" databases in the next couple of months.

The main issue is that these CNTs have similar physical properties to asbestos, and research at Edinburgh University recently published in *Nature Nanotechnology* has found that long, straight multi-walled CNTs (MWCNTs) with a high aspect ratio produced a marked inflammatory reaction and the formation of granulomas when injected into the abdominal cavity of mice. Granulomas are small nodules of cells that form around foreign bodies that cannot easily be cleared. The reaction was similar to that seen when asbestos fibres with a high aspect ratio are injected into the abdominal cavity of mice. When short asbestos fibres, nanoparticulate carbon black and short or tangled MWCNTs were injected there was little or no inflammation. This suggests that the inflammatory response seen in this study may be due to the long, thin shape of the fibres. Long-thin fibre shape is believed to be an important factor in the development of asbestos-related diseases.

While this research does not prove that CNTs will cause the same diseases as asbestos, it does raise the level of concern. This finding applies only to long and thin CNTs (and possibly other nanomaterials that are long and thin). It does not apply to other nanoparticles that have different shapes. The HSE has been sufficiently concerned to issue an information leaflet on CNTs, available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/web38.pdf>. The HSE says this information sheet is specifically about the manufacture and manipulation of carbon nanotubes and has been prepared in response to emerging evidence about the toxicology of these materials. However, the risk management principles detailed here are equally applicable to other nanodimensioned bio-persistent fibres with a similar aspect ratio.



New fact sheets and posters

A reminder to all reps to check our website pages regularly for new and updated fact sheets. Factsheets available now for download are **Cyber-bullying** and **Slips and Falls**.

We are also pleased to announce new posters on **Violence at Work** and **Cyber-bullying**. Both are available for download at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=2424>

A warning shot on health & safety regulation?

The body responsible for promoting and safeguarding equality in the UK appears to be backing away from its duty in respect of equal pay. Despite the old Equal Opportunities Commission position that pay reviews are an essential first step in the process of addressing equal pay issues, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) will not recommend that the government includes equal pay reviews on employers in its forthcoming draft equalities bill, due to be published in April. Its reason is that they think the economic climate is too fragile.

The chief executive of the EHRC, Nicola Brewer said "(Reviews) can be a helpful diagnostic tool, but they are not the whole answer. I think we do need to be realistic about the economic climate".

With women's pay on average 17% less than men's and the gap increasing, you also have to ask about the fragility of women's position in the pay structure generally.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/16/equal-pay-commission-business>

So it appears that at least some of those in positions of power and influence believe that equality and justice are conditional on the economic climate. The national Hazards Campaign has already expressed concerns that employers may try to use the state of the economy as an argument to further reduce health, safety & welfare standards, or further restrict safety representatives activity. Given the business-friendly nature of British government's over the past 30 years, and the soft-touch regulatory systems that have been developed by the HSE, some employers may see this as an opportunity to cut back. We must not get caught in a trap where employers are saying that in difficult times they will reduce health & safety standards or UCU involvement.

If any UCU reps have examples of where this has happened, please drop the UCU health & safety team an e-mail with details.

HSE enforcement databases

Some years ago the HSE decided to "name and shame" those employers against whom it had taken enforcement action. There are 3 databases available.

The prosecutions database is at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/Prosecutions/>

The Improvement and Prohibition notices database is at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/notices/>

The historical cases database is at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/noticeshistory/>

You can search using partial names like University or College. There is approximately a 3 month gap between the enforcement action and the record appearing in the database.

Safety rep conferences

Hazards Conference

The 20th national Hazards Conference, Hazards 2009 takes place from 10th – 12th July 2009, at Manchester University city centre campus (the former UMIST). Hazards attract over 500 active trade union safety representatives and campaigners, and UCU sponsors 4 delegates. A number of UCU members are already involved as speakers and workshop facilitators.

For more details, visit the hazards website at

http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/hazardsconference/haz_conference_2009_application_form.pdf

A full weekend of debates, meetings, plenaries, and workshops are being planned. Closing date for applications is 19th June.

WorkStress Network Conference

This year's WorkStress Network conference is entitled **Stress – the 21st Century Epidemic?** The event takes place on November 21st & 22nd at the NASUWT Education Centre at Hillscourt, Birmingham. UCU sponsors a delegation of four to the conference. Closing date for applications is 31st October.



TUC regional education courses for safety reps

Regional brochures for the TUC regional education programme of safety reps courses can be accessed from <http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/education/index.cfm?mins=145> and select your region to find the booklet link.

UCU safety reps who wish to apply for sponsorship to either of these conferences should first make sure they have the support of their branch or local association, and then ask the secretary to send an email complete with contact details of the delegate to Sharon Russell before completing any application forms.

Both conferences are residential, and UCU sponsorship includes the delegate fee and reasonable travel expenses to attend - Please let us know in advance if travelling to this event would involve substantial outlay for the union. Places will be allocated on a first come-first served basis. After the first 4 have been received, names will go on a waiting list.

Branches and local associations can also send delegates to both these conferences independently using local resources. An increasing number of delegates to Hazards get their employers to pay the delegate fees; and many get paid time-off as it is an educational event.



Sound Advice website - music teachers

The Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 allowed the music industry a 2-year derogation period before coming into force in April 2008.

Sound advice sets out a range of simple and cost-effective actions that can reduce workers' average daily or weekly exposure to noise. There is general information telling people what they need to know about the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005, and advice for specific sections of the industry. Drafted by the music industry for the industry with the Musicians' Union involvement, the Sound advice website contains practical guidance on the control of noise at work in music and entertainment, including advice for staff in educational institutions at <http://soundadvice.info/schoolsandcolleges/schoolsandcolleges-step1.htm>

The guidance is useful for musicians, performers, entertainers and their employers, teachers and lecturers and UCU safety representatives. <http://soundadvice.info>

UCU Training courses

Details of all UCU training courses can be found on our website at:

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3311> Forthcoming health and safety courses are as follows:

Health and Safety 1: Induction 6 – 7 April 2009

London

Click here for further details: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3156>

Health and Safety 2: Understand Health and Safety Law 12 – 13 May 2009

London

Click here for further details: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3155>

Health and Safety 3: Using your rights as a health and safety rep 20 – 21 May 2009

Birmingham

Click here for further details: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3200>

Health and Safety 4: Dealing with accidents and tackling hazards
22 – 23 April 2009
Glasgow

Click here for further details: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3201>

Health and Safety 5: Trade Union action to tackle stress
6 – 7 May 2009
Glasgow

Click here for further details: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3202>

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 may be asked to leave a message. You will then be contacted as soon as possible.

Telephone 0161 636 7558
Email healthandsafety@ucu.org.uk
Postal John Bamford
UCU Health and Safety Advice Line
Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, Windrush Millennium Centre
70 Alexandra Road, Manchester M16 7WD

Don't forget to visit the [UCU Health and Safety web page](#)