

Contents

1. **Tagging the glass – new style graffiti, new hazard**
 2. **Workers Memorial Day consultation response**
 3. **Update on Ban Bullying at Work day**
 4. **HSE publications free of charge**
 5. **HSE topic packs and inspection checklists**
 6. **TUC organising resources**
 7. **ACAS urges employers to anticipate and manage mental health in the downturn**
 8. **Coggon report on Manchester University radiation contamination**
 9. **Employment tribunal case: failure to permit time-off for safety representative functions in the workplace**
 10. **European H&S week**
 11. **Revised 'Hazards at Work' manual from the TUC**
 12. **UCU health and safety training courses**
-

1. Tagging the glass - new style graffiti, new hazard

Railway property has always been a canvas for graffiti artists, but recently they have sought to expand their activities to include permanent marking of glass, according to a recent staff circular from Network Rail. In order to do this, they use hydrofluoric acid (HF). For the non-chemists amongst us, this is seriously nasty stuff. It is used in industry in oil refineries to dissolve heavy metals from oil, in the production of Teflon, as a cleaner for metal, especially stainless steel, and for etching glass. Small quantities of etchant are sold for use by glass artists, at a concentration of 5 – 10 percent.

Because of its ability to dissolve glass, it cannot be kept in a normal glass bottle, but has to be stored in certain kinds of plastic container. One of these is the same plastic used to make “bingo dabbers” – large felt-tips that put a big blob of ink on the numbers on a bingo card when they are called. Network Rail say that artists are using these, wrapped in insulating tape and loaded with HF to etch their tags and artwork onto the windows of carriages and buildings. One of Europe’s major HF manufacturers in Germany has told UCU health & safety advisor they are aware of similar problems in both Berlin and Cologne. We also understand, (but have not been able to finally confirm) that Lancashire Police have also issued warnings to staff about this, and instructed them to call for special assistance if such “bingo dabbers” are found on the street.

How dangerous is it?

HF is extremely corrosive and a contact poison, and is easily absorbed by human tissue. Because of its ability to penetrate skin, poisoning can occur very quickly through

contamination, as it can if HF is inhaled or swallowed. Symptoms of exposure to HF may not be immediately evident. Once absorbed into the bloodstream, it reacts with blood calcium and may cause cardiac arrest. Because of its interaction with calcium, it causes bone necrosis – it destroys the bone tissue. Skin contamination by HF can easily be fatal – six square inches is sufficient to cause death if not dealt with immediately.

HF burns are treated with calcium gluconate, which neutralises HF. First aid for skin contamination is flushing with copious amounts of water and then massaging with 2.5% calcium gluconate gel or special rinsing solution. Medical treatment must always follow. Calcium gluconate gel is not generally available except in places where HF is used. In some cases of contamination, amputation has been the only way to prevent death.

The European Technical Committee on Fluorine (see <http://www.eurofluor.org/>) provides a lot of safety information, including First Aid information and a warning poster. A material safety data sheet (MSDS) will give you more idea of the toxicity of HF. Download from <http://www.eurofluor.org/publications/STS%207930.pdf>

Colleges and universities are full of young people, a few of whom may be budding or actual graffiti artists, and who may want to make their permanent mark on the institutional structures. Glass etching may also be a part of the work of college and university art departments, so it's worth checking the precautionary measures in place if HF is a material in use.

We suggest that UCU reps keep a weather eye open for any signs of this, and as we old hippies say, "don't get burned".

2. Workers Memorial Day consultation response

UCU formally submitted a response to the DWP Workers Memorial Day consultation, which sought views on whether-or-not it should be officially recognised. The consultation period has now ended, but you can still read the formal UCU response at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/circ/html/ucu201.html>

3. Update on Ban Bullying at Work day

The national Hazards Campaign has now formally taken on the promotion and organisation of Ban Bullying at Work day, 7th November every year. The Campaign hopes to develop a range of resources, particularly posters and other awareness-raising materials, both independently and in conjunction with some unions, but this year's effort will be limited mostly to posters. The Campaign intends to work more closely with a number of unions to produce and sponsor future promotional materials.

As the day falls on Saturday this year, UCU and most unions recommend that any workplace activities are run on Monday 9th November

UCU produced some materials last year and a number of branches and LA's took the opportunity to use the day to raise awareness and run some awareness-raising activities. A range of meetings on bullying, and what UCU needs to do locally to organise against it also took place in the weeks around the 7th November.

Some posters and stickers are available from UCU – please order from Janet Pantland at head office – e-mail jpantland@ucu.org.uk or download material from the UCU website at <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3314>

4. HSE publications free of charge

Well, they have done it. The first hundred or so documents are now available to download free of charge from the HSE website. They say that the rest, making about 250 in total, will be available by early - mid-2010. The full catalogue is available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/index-catalogue.htm> and this takes you to the list of main categories. The two main series that will be most useful for safety reps are the Legal (L) series and the Guidance (HSG) series, and this is where the majority of freely-downloadable documents will be located.

Legal series are all numbered with the leading letter L, and are documents that contain the text of Regulations with their associated Approved Code of Practice and Guidance. These are all listed in the HSE on-line catalogue at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/index-legal-ref.htm>

The Guidance (HSG) series all have document numbers beginning with HSG, and contain lots of guidance and advice for employers on a wide range of topics – some technical, some organisational, at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/index-hsg-ref.htm>

To find out if it is available to download, scroll the list to the document you want, and click on the icon to access the document. There is a button that says "Buy or Download free". Click that link, and you go to the document detail page. If it IS available to download, there is a further link mid-page that says "Free pdf download available".

If you don't know what the HSE produces, go and spend a pleasant half-hour scanning the lists, downloading a few and checking the quality of the information. Happy scanning.

5. HSE topic packs and inspection checklists

The HSE produces a number of inspection packs for inspectors and checklists. These are a useful source of information for unions and safety representatives.

The checklists are either for both employers and employees or ones which have been produced specifically for safety representatives (often in conjunction with the TUC).

The inspection packs are intended for inspectors and it may be helpful for safety representatives to know what inspectors expect from an employer during an inspection. They also contain information on where specialist support can be obtained by an inspector and other information, however they should be seen as being the minimum an employer should do rather than good practice. There is also no guarantee that an inspector would automatically take action against an employer on the basis of them.

Thanks to Sarah Page, health & safety specialist for Prospect, the HSE Inspectors union, for this information.

Checklists produced for health and safety reps

VDU workstations

www.hse.gov.uk/campaigns/euroweek2007/pdfs/vduchecklist.pdf

Manual handling inspections

www.hse.gov.uk/msd/campaigns/pdf/manualhandling.pdf

Slips and trips checklist

www.hse.gov.uk/shatteredlives/hazardchecklist.pdf

Psychosocial risk – pace and intensity of work

www.hse.gov.uk/pharmaceuticals/checklists/psychosocial.pdf

Musculoskeletal disorders body mapping tool

www.hse.gov.uk/campaigns/euroweek2007/pdfs/bodymapping.pdf

RSI checklist

www.hse.gov.uk/campaigns/euroweek2007/pdfs/upperlimb.pdf

Checklists for all

Health & safety leadership – useful in the context of corporate responsibility

www.hse.gov.uk/leadership/checklist.htm

Stress Topic Pack for inspectors – contains their inspection aide memoire (Appendix 2)

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/stress.pdf

Asbestos campaign

www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/campaign/checklist.pdf

Vehicles at work checklist

www.hse.gov.uk/forms/transport/wtchk1.pdf

Manual handling assessment chart (MAC) tool

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg383.pdf

Scaffold checklist

www.hse.gov.uk/construction/scaffoldinginfo.htm

Slips assessment tool

www.hsesat.info/

HSE Topic Inspections Packs

Put together for inspectors use – of use also to H&S reps.

Worker Consultation and Involvement – 2007, due for update soon

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/workerinvolve.pdf

Stress – 2008

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/stress.pdf

Workplace Transport – 2007

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/transport.pdf

Noise – 2008

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/noise.pdf

Asbestos – 2008

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/asbestos.pdf

Hand Arm Vibration - 2008

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/hav.pdf

MSDs – 2007

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/msd.pdf

Falls from Height – 2007

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/falls.pdf

Work-related Contact Dermatitis - 2008

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/dermatitis.pdf

Slips and Trips – 2008

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/slips.pdf

Migrant Working – 2007/08

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/migrantworker.pdf

Wood Dust – 2006

www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/fod/inspect/wooddust.pdf

6. TUC organising resources

Just a reminder to all UCU reps and officials. In 2008 the TUC produced a series of resource booklets on organising around health & safety issues. They contain resource information and a number of discussion activities that can be used to help local associations and branches develop ideas and membership recruitment and retention focussed around health and safety issues and their resolution. Well worth downloading and thinking about as part of a local development session - even a two-day workshop.

Organising for health and safety: a workplace resource

www.tuc.org.uk/extras/1.%20ORG_H&S.pdf

Organising for health and safety: safety reps course

www.tuc.org.uk/extras/2.%20ORG_H&S%20Reps.pdf

Organising for health and safety: union officers course

www.tuc.org.uk/extras/3.%20ORG_H&S%20Officers.pdf

What makes health and safety a good organising issue?

www.tuc.org.uk/extras/4.%20ORG_H&S%20What.pdf

7. ACAS urges employers to anticipate and manage mental health in the downturn

ACAS is encouraging UK businesses to prepare for the longer term effects of the recession and implement policies and procedures to help cope with mental health issues in the workplace. In a recently published policy discussion paper, ACAS looks at some of the lessons that can be learnt from tackling workplace stress. It advises business and managers to look at how they can anticipate and identify mental health problems in the workplace and what steps should be taken to respond to them.

Figures published in Policy Paper 8 from the Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health show that mental health problems cost UK organisations around £26 billion each year. The latest unemployment figures also reveal that the total number of unemployed has now reached 2.47 million, which could have a further adverse impact on employees' wellbeing.

Measuring the impact of the recession on employees' mental wellbeing can be difficult as the stigma associated with mental health creates barriers to measuring the true extent of the problem. ACAS is urging organisations to implement effective policies and procedures to help managers deal with the long term impacts of the downturn and safeguard the health and wellbeing of employees. This might include:

- Training - to raise awareness of stress and mental health so that line managers, in particular, can tell if an employee is suffering from additional or excessive pressures

- Good interpersonal skills - to help nurture trusting relationships with staff who may be anxious about disclosing their mental health problems
- A supportive organisational structure - that guides managers by providing clear policies and procedures for managing mental health.

Download the discussion paper at

<http://www.acas.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=2595&p=0>.

8. Coggon report on Manchester University radiation contamination

The report of Professor David Coggon's investigations into what happened in the rooms formerly used by Ernest Rutherford for a number of years in the early 20th century, and the risks that staff may have faced as a result of working in the contaminated rooms was published recently. There was radiological contamination in the fabric of the rooms, liquid mercury under the floorboards and white (chrysotile), brown (amosite) and blue (crocidolite) asbestos. Professor Coggon concluded that neither the effects of the individual contaminants, nor a combined effect of the contamination posed great risk to people who had worked in those rooms in the past, or who would work in them in the future, and said that the cluster of pancreatic cancers (3 former lecturers who had worked in those rooms died of pancreatic cancer) was chance coincidence.

The case continues to excite attention, and was the subject of an extended item on the Granada TV North West news on Sunday evening, 18th October.

Download Prof Coggon's report and other documents related to the issue from

<http://www.manchester.ac.uk/rutherfordreview/> The original report published in June 2008, written by John Churcher, Don O'Boyle and Neil Todd is a cracking read, as is Neil's later paper '*Historical and radiological perspectives on the use of radioactive substances by Ernest Rutherford*' available on the same site.

9. Employment tribunal case: failure to permit time-off for safety representative functions in the workplace

Dating back to mid 2007, this is the only case we know that has been taken because the employer, in this case London Underground Limited, refused an ASLEF safety representative time-off to undertake a quarterly workplace inspection, one of the most important statutory functions given to safety reps. The tribunal judgment is very critical of the employer's behaviour, and the compensation awarded against them reflects this.

Most ET cases on time-off have been because of the employers' failure to permit safety representatives time-off to attend training course. We have no way of knowing if that is because employers have been permissive in allowing time-off for safety reps to undertake their functions at work, so it hasn't been a problem; or because there are problems, and it's

because either unions have not pursued ET applications related to functions, or employers have backed-off from refusing time-off under pressure, and allowed it. The experience of the UCU helpline is that many reps still have problems getting time-off to undertake their functions; and many UCU reps are still not taken seriously enough, or treated with the respect they deserve.

I have the tribunal decision – if time-off for safety rep functions is a problem where you work, and you think a copy of the decision might help you to resolve that, e-mail a request to jbamford@ucu.org.uk and I'll send you a copy.

10. European H&S week

This is European Health & Safety week. We know that Cornwall College UCU organisation is using the opportunity to do some inspections and investigations on the college's risk assessments, but have had no other feedback. We'll happily circulate any other examples of positive trade union activity by Branches and LA's.

11. Revised 'Hazards at Work' manual from the TUC

The TUC has now published the revised version of the Hazards at Work manual. This is an important publication, as it provides a lot of information about specific work hazards and health issues, as well as guidance on trade union organisation, the law, regulation and enforcement, and important contact details.

The revised version contains updates on the new guidance to the SRSC Regulations; a whole new chapter on initiatives to improve workplace organisation and safety rep functions; a much-expanded chapter on chemicals, dusts and substances, including nanotechnology and more on regulation and standards and the new EU regime under REACH; an update on occupational health issues stemming from the Dame Carol Black report last year; the implementation of the 2005 noise standards in music and entertainment, which includes music classes; new material on stress, bullying and work-related violence; and a revised and updated contacts section.

UCU recommends that all safety representatives should have a copy of this book, and that each Branch or LA should keep an office copy. It costs £18 from the TUC

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/publications/viewPub.cfm?frmPubID=591> or £12 from the tutor if you are attending a TUC safety representatives course. Following the 2007 revision, we advised UCU safety reps that they should ask their employer to purchase them a copy. The employer has a duty under SRSC Regulation 4A(2) to **"provide such facilities and assistance as safety representatives may reasonably require for the purpose of carrying out their functions"**. This is a reasonable requirement. We know that some of you

did, and were successful, and at least one employer's safety officer also purchased a copy for himself.

12. UCU health & safety training courses

UCU health and safety training courses are for all UCU representatives and branch & LA officers, not just safety representatives. Most workplace issues and collective bargaining matters that UCU deals with on behalf of members have a health, safety or welfare element, and successful resolution of a safety problem can give a boost to recruitment efforts and the quality of UCU organisation at the workplace. For further information and to book a place, visit: www.ucu.org.uk/training

Safety Reps 1: induction

3 & 4 Nov 09 – London
24 & 25 Feb 10 – Birmingham

Safety Reps 2: the management of health & safety

25 & 26 Jan 10 – London
15 & 16 Feb 10 – Belfast

Safety Reps 3: preventing injuries and ill health

18 & 19 Mar 10 – London
12 & 13 May 10 – Belfast

Safety Reps 4: bargaining for health & safety

12 & 13 Nov 09 – Birmingham
2 & 3 Dec 09 – London
17 & 18 Jun 10 – Belfast

Contact UCU Health & Safety Advice

UCU Health & Safety Advice is provided by the Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, and is available for 3 days each week during extended term times. The contact person is John Bamford: jbamford@ucu.org.uk (t) 0161 636 7558

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