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1. Fire safety breaches cost the Co-op more than £238,000

The Co-operative Group was fined £210,000 on 28th April, after pleading guilty in Southampton Crown Court to fire safety breaches at one of its stores.

They were prosecuted by Hampshire Fire Authority (the enforcing agency) for six breaches of fire safety under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. They were fined £35,000 for each offence and ordered to pay costs in excess of £28,000. They asked for three other offences to be taken into account.

The offences came to light after fire safety inspections at the premises in September 2007 revealed that the responsible person:

- failed to maintain the rear emergency exit doors unlocked so that they could be easily opened in an emergency;
- fitted a lock requiring a security code on the emergency door between the retail and storage areas which could not be easily opened in an emergency;
- was responsible for a fire alarm call point in the storage area being obstructed, potentially delaying the activation of the fire alarm to give early warning to occupants in the premises;
- failed to ensure that the store manager was provided with suitable and sufficient fire safety instruction and training;
- failed to ensure that the fire alarm system was being regularly tested; and
- failed to ensure a means of early detection of fire in the retail area to give early warning to the occupants of the manager's office to allow a safe evacuation.

The judge said the severity of the fire safety failings demonstrated a lamentable approach to fire safety that had created a potential death trap. Hampshire's Chief Fire Officer commented that a number of general problems have emerged since the new Regulations came into force in 2006. These include blocked or locked exits, poorly maintained fire escape staircases, lack of staff fire training, storage of combustible materials in boiler rooms, lack of fire alarms, lack of emergency lighting, lack of fire doors, and in far too many cases lack of suitable fire risk assessment. According to the info4fire.com newsletter, a Co-op spokeswoman said:

“As a responsible retailer, the Co-operative Group takes health and safety issues very seriously. At the time of these incidents, the Group was introducing substantially more stringent health and safety procedures, investing heavily, both in time and money, in all aspects of fire safety. The Co-operative Group deeply regrets the breaches but reiterates that its rigorous measures, now established and continually reviewed in conjunction with fire authorities across the country, ensure the safety of its valued customers and staff.”

So even employers based in the labour movement do it, and say the same things as Tesco! (See Newsletter Issue 38) But it's even worse than that - the Co-op is a serial offender. In 2007 they were fined what was then believed to be a record £250,000 for 13 offences under the previous Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations in six stores in East Sussex. You would have thought they had learned something from their earlier experience. That's my divi they are paying the fines with.

Another reminder, if we needed it, to check the fire risk assessments, precautions and training for staff, and the competence of the “responsible person” appointed under the Order to conduct fire risk assessments. (Regulation 4A(1)(b) of the SRSC Regulations requires employers to consult with the unions on all appointments of risk assessors and those who take charge in emergency situations like fire.) The breaches prosecuted here are VERY basic and should NOT happen.

To help you carry out a basic workplace inspection on fire precautions, download our fire precautions checklist and guidance from the Factsheets pages of the UCU website http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/docs/5/3/ucu_firecheck_1.doc and an inspection report form from http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/docs/f/9/hsinspect_form.doc

For more information and useful links visit the TUC “Hazards at Work” fire precautions chapter at http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/fire.cfm

The official guidance on fire risk assessments and good practice in educational premises is at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/150865.pdf> , and the Order itself at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051541.htm#5>

2. Fire evacuation training and practice

I missed this due to my recent illness, but this survey highlights the importance of monitoring fire precautions and management systems. The Royal Sun Alliance insurance company issued the results of a survey of fire precautions in mid-April. They reported that:

- a quarter of workers had never participated in a fire evacuation drill;
- over 40% said they would spend time to collect their belongings or work documents before leaving the building, and
- 10% said they waited at least a minute before leaving their desk when the alarm sounded

More worrying still; 5% of workers said they had no marked fire exits in the workplace.

It's a fact that workplace fire deaths are, fortunately, relatively rare; it's mostly residential fires that kill people. However, one group of workers who have seen a big increase in fire-related deaths are fire-fighters themselves, and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) says this stems from government inspired changes to their service that have happened since 2002. FBU figures show that 8 fire fighters died in 2007, the worst year for fire-fighter deaths for a quarter of a century, and the total since 2002 now stands at over 20.

3. New Regulations to protect workers from hazardous sources of artificial light

We circulated an e-mail to the mailing list on 30th April on this issue. The Control of Artificial Optical Radiation at Work Regulations came into force on 27th April. These ensure the UK complies with EU Directive 2006/25/EC, one of the family of directives aimed to protect workers against the risks associated with physical agents. Go to http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2010/uksi_20101140_en_1 to download a copy of the Regulations.

To help those employers who are not already managing the risks understand what's required and what they need to do, the HSE has produced guidance downloadable from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/radiation/nonionising/employers-aor.pdf> to ensure workers are appropriately protected. The HSE's general non-ionising radiation page links are at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/radiation/nonionising>

Some sources of artificial light, particularly UV radiation and light from lasers can harm the eyes and skin of workers and must be properly managed. Common sources of light in the workplace such as office lights, photocopiers and computers are not affected by the Regulations. However, UCU health & safety has had a number of enquiries regarding interactive white boards and their associated ceiling-mounted projectors, and it's possible they might be covered by the Regulations. See the last bullet point in List 2 under Note 2 in the HSE Guidance. It's worth asking the question of your employer where you have these boards.

The HSE says that workers in Great Britain are generally well protected from dangerous sources of light and the majority of employers know how to manage the risks effectively, so the Regulations will mean few practical changes for most employers.

4. New HSE woodworking website

Aimed at workers in the woodworking sector, UCU members in construction, joinery and furniture should find this a useful resource.

Last year over 300 people in the woodworking industry suffered major injuries and over 1,100 were off work for more than three days following an injury.

The new website at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/woodworking> aims to make it easier for workers, supervisors and managers to understand the risks they may face and learn how to deal with them.

New information, including woodworking machine demonstration videos and advice on best practice has been added. HSE's 23 Woodworking Information Sheets (WIS) are available on the site, and the 1998 Approved Code of Practice 'Safe Use of Woodworking Machinery' (L114) can be downloaded free of charge. This contains a useful reminder on pages 10 -11 on the extra precautions and supervision that are needed where there are young people using machinery and tools.

5. TUC Biennial safety reps survey

This is the eighth TUC safety reps survey, and we encourage all our reps to participate and contribute their experience. The survey gives an invaluable insight into the role of activists and the problems they and members face at work, and helps us all to identify developing

issues and problems, and any progress in addressing those previously identified by earlier surveys.

The main survey page is at http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-17914-f0.cfm from there you can complete the survey on-line at http://www.tuc.org.uk/h_and_s/tuc-17914-f0.cfm/formbuilder/71/p/1 or download an MS Word or .pdf form to complete and post.

We will have printed copies of the survey form to UCU Congress at the end of May, so if you are a Congress delegate you can pick copies up from the H&S stand.

Final date for submission of completed questionnaires is 1st July 2010.

6. UK workers put in even more hours – and become ill

Research published by banking group Santander confirms TUC claims earlier this year that British workers have the longest working hours in the EU, and that much of the excessive hours worked are unpaid. Santander's "Real Wage Report" based on a survey of 2,000 workers says that 23% of those in full-time employment are working longer hours than ever, and that less than half (41%) of all workers are being paid extra for their efforts.

The average annual salaried worker in Britain earns £29,157 and works 40 hours a week. The report says that around one in ten full time workers take on at least 11 hours of overtime each week. Though some salaried workers do receive additional pay for extra hours worked, 70% don't.

The Real Wage Report also highlights a considerable gap between the average full-time hourly rates for male and female employees. The average full-time hourly rate for men worked out at £13.75 an hour, over £3 or 31% more than the £10.47 earned by women. If paid by the hour, women would have to work a 55-hour week to equal the £30,360 earned by the average male employee.

The average man taking on extra work clocks up just over eight hours (8.1) a week compared to the average women who takes on just under six (5.9). Women, as always, display more good sense than men.

See <http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4460> for the results of the TUC survey for 'Work your proper hours day 2010' in respect of teachers unpaid work, as reported by UCU. UCU research shows that excessive workload, (and long hours are one way that our members deal with the extra work) is the most reported cause of work-related stress in the tertiary education sector.

Further evidence from the prestigious and long-running Whitehall study into the health of over 6,000 civil servants has just been published in the current edition of the European Heart Journal.

The report suggests that long hours at work can damage your physical health, and in particular, is linked to heart disease. It suggests that those who regularly work a 10 – 11 hour day increase their risk of a heart attack or developing other heart problems by almost two-thirds. There were 369 cases where people suffered heart disease that caused death, had a heart attack or developed angina, and the number of hours spent working appeared to be strongly linked in many cases. According to researchers, the increased risk may be caused by workers having less time to rest and relax; or it may be due to the greater stress associated with working longer hours. Employees who regularly work overtime are also less likely to take time off, even when ill.

Specialists have commented that more work is needed to confirm these initial findings, but experts have believed for some time that a reasonable life-work balance is one important factor in maintaining a state of good health.

See the BBC news report at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/8674372.stm>

7. Women face greater risk of heart disease if stressed at work

In the same week that an HSE report into occupational cancers suggests that an estimated 2,000 women shift workers in the UK develop breast cancer every year, Danish research has now suggested there is a link between high pressure jobs and heart disease risks in women. Published in the journal Occupational and Environmental Medicine, the Danish study found that heart disease risks in women increased if they were under pressure at work.

Researchers looked at the heart health of more than 12,000 women working as nurses. While there has previously been research done into stress at work and heart disease in men, there has been much less focus on women workers and the disease.

The researchers asked over 12,000 female nurses aged between 45 and 64 about pressure at work and tracked their health from 1993 to 2008. By then 580 nurses had been admitted to hospital with ischaemic heart disease, including 369 cases of angina and 138 heart attacks.

After accounting for risk factors such as smoking and diabetes, the researchers found that those who described pressure at work as "much too high" were 50% more likely to have developed heart disease than those who were comfortable with the pressure. Nurses who reported work pressure to be "a little too high" had an approximately 25% increased risk.

Read the paper at <http://press.psprings.co.uk/oem/may/oem043091.pdf>

8. Stress updates

The HSE has established some new pages with links to HSE's stress-related research reports, statistical information and two mildly interesting papers charting the development of the stress management standards. Access this at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/research.htm>

The HSE's recently updated Stress microsite still doesn't have a "success" case study from the tertiary education sector, despite it remaining one of the 5 worst employment sectors for stress-related illness and absence. The previous website had four of them – but UCU did question their validity. One from a post-92 university was withdrawn by the HSE as it had been described by the local UCU branch as "a complete work of fiction", and apologies were made. Is it that there ARE no successful interventions in our sector? Surely not. Check those case studies that are available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/experience.htm>

UCU has now established a joint HEC/FEC working group on stress, and one of its first jobs is to provide a chronology of the HSE's response to this modern-day epidemic caused by work, and that will be available shortly. This will be posted on the UCU website, and circulated to our contact lists soon.

9. UCU needs more safety reps

Formal enforcement of many of the health, safety and welfare issues that face our members at work is notoriously limited and weak, and doesn't work at all in many respects. For

example, on stress-related matters, the HSE will only enforce the duty on employers to conduct “sufficient and suitable” risk assessments, and that only by issuing an improvement notice. The HSE say that they will never prosecute an employer, because they cannot achieve the standard of proof necessary for a criminal case; and health and safety law is criminal law. So we urgently need to expand our capacity to deal with employers via the mechanisms established by the Safety Representatives & Safety Committees Regulations, and resolve problems and improve working lives using the consultation and bargaining structures.

UCU is launching a campaign for more of our members and activists to become safety representatives, and for workplace health, safety and welfare issues to become mainstream bargaining issues, and not relegated to a separate structure around a health & safety committee. Health, safety and welfare issues are not separate from the other collective bargaining and consultative matters that affect our members at work; there are health, safety or welfare implications in any decision or action that employers take. So it is important that they are agenda items for the local UCU committee, and they are tabled for discussion on the main bargaining agenda with the employer, along with issues like pay and grading, grievances, disciplinary cases, absence management and so on.

We have made some considerable progress over the past couple of years or so in appointing more safety reps, and starting to develop our local organisation, and universities like Leeds and Manchester have led the way. More need to follow.

10. Congress fringe meeting

We’ve called it **Space – the final frontier**, and will use the current trend towards open-plan office accommodation, often coupled with “hot-desking” as a case study to discuss the issues that arise, and the need for UCU to develop a more effective workplace organisation to tackle the problems.

One major consequence of such developments is to raise the stress levels of staff, and so amongst other things we’ll consider how we deal with the stress that arises from this kind of development in the absence of any meaningful action by the HSE.

This will be a participative meeting, so bring along your experiences of open-plan developments; the way employers have introduced this and related aspects like hot-desking; how members have reacted; and what we need to do to recruit more safety reps and ensure employers tackle the real problems related to stressful work environments. Our flyer is attached.

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

Visit the [UCU Health and Safety web page](#)

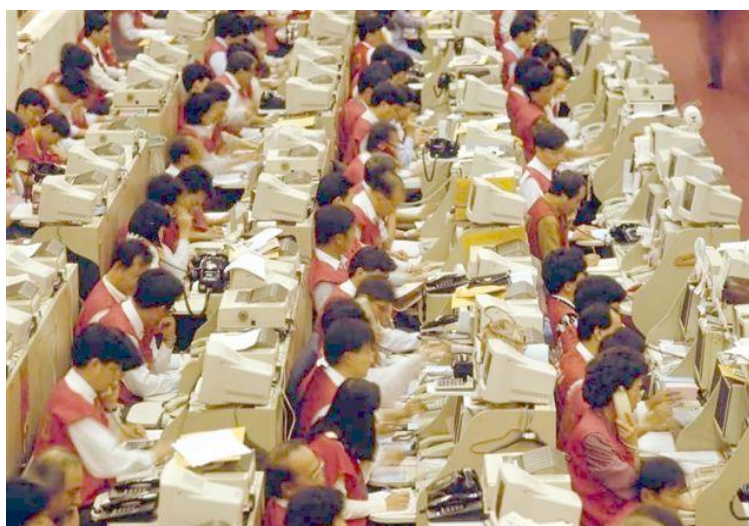
UCU Congress 2010: H&S Fringe meeting Space – the final frontier

Space costs money

Maximum utilisation means
new and often inappropriate
ways of working.

Is this the HEFCE view of
the lecturer's room of the
future?

Is this how the LSC (now
SYA) think lecturer's should
work when they are not in
class?



You think we are joking. Here's what one university built in 2009.



Do these radical changes in working conditions impact on our health?

What are the implications for the health & welfare of staff?

How do they affect the quality of our lives at work?

Were we ever asked our opinions about all this?

Come to our fringe meeting to find out more about what:

* funders are promoting & architects are pushing

* councils and corporations are sanctioning, and

* behaviouralists are saying employers should do to get us to accept this.

Sunday Lunchtime: 13.00 – 14.00 in room Exchange 4
Bring YOUR experience along, and we'll discuss how we
organise to make our voice heard.