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1) UCU reps training 2014-15

The new brochure for courses beginning in September 2014 is now on the website here: http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/a/2/Activist_Ed_Guide_June14.pdf

There are two 3-day Health and Safety 1 courses:

London 17–19 September, and Birmingham 15– 17 October.

They are followed by two Health & Safety 2 courses:

London 21–23 January 2015, and Manchester 4–6 March 2015.

We are still sadly short of safety reps, and we need to exploit the opportunities that the SRSC Regulations give us to build and develop a strong local organisation. I attended a recent meeting at Sheffield Hallam University; almost everyone there had no idea that the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations gave trade unions such power to deal with health, safety and welfare matters in the workplace.

Local reps understand that every employer decision or action will have some implication for the health, safety or welfare of our members at work; H&S is just one of the combinations of issues that affect our working lives, so it's also

important for all Branch and LA officers and activists to attend the H&S courses. Please encourage other local officers and activists to apply, and remind them that it isn't an issue just for specialists, and they don't need to be an expert; it's about representing members concerns and issues to the employer and taking action to improve working conditions. If you have members who think they might become a safety rep if they knew a little more about it, this course is also for them.

Safety representatives should also attend the union reps courses; the skills and knowledge are common to both roles.

2) EU finally giving-up on worker health, safety & welfare?

Many of us remember the heady days of the early 1990's, when the Thatcher government was forced into policy U-turns, and had to introduce substantial numbers of regulations on occupational health & safety as a result of EU directives. British trade unions became convinced that the European Union believed the health, safety and welfare of workers was so important that it finally had a strategy to ensure that workplaces were safe, that there were adequate facilities for staff welfare, and that work generally didn't pose significant threats to the health of employees. From that strong point, as neo-liberalism gained the ascendancy, the Commission progressively lost the plot, so that by 2012 when the strategy was due to be renewed, nothing happened. Since then, trade unions, the European Parliament and employers bodies had been calling for a renewed strategy to be developed.

In May 2014, the Commission announced that they would definitely issue a revised strategy for health & safety. By then there was concern that the current Commission, whose term of office ends soon, would simply issue a strategy which continues with the non-regulatory approach that it has taken for the last three or four years. The European trade unions called for the Commission to delay issuing any new strategy until the new body was in place. This request was ignored – so much for stakeholder influence, some might say.

On 6 June, the European Commission announced its new strategy on health and safety for the period 2014-2020. The press release at

http://europa.eu/rapid.press-release_IP-14-641_en.htm appears to be, rather strangely, the complete strategy document.

This document contains nothing new. Once again there are statements about "Simplifying existing legislation where appropriate to eliminate unnecessary administrative burdens" but nothing about the need for new regulation. One of the few positive proposals is that they will be "Improving enforcement by Member States for example by evaluating the performance of national labour inspectorates." How that will fare in the UK with the coalition government's cuts and restriction to HSE's and local authorities operation is anyone's guess. Overall, it is little more than a re-statement of the present, ineffectual policies that have done nothing to reduce the huge levels of stress-related illness, musculo-skeletal injury and exposure to carcinogenic substances across Europe.

The ETUC will be seeking early talks with the in-coming Commission to seek real and effective policies to ensure that member states take action to reduce the huge levels of death, injury and ill-health caused by work across the EU.

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=2053&furtherNews=yes> to download the document which also gives links to other EU initiatives.

3) UCU Congress

UCU Health & Safety had the usual stand at Congress, and we met many old friends and well-wishers. Our fringe meeting focused on death caused by work, based on the two Japanese concepts of Karoshi – death caused by overwork, and Karojisatsu – suicide from overwork and stressful working conditions. Both are recognised by the Japanese government as conditions resulting from work, and what happens to people there. See this http://www.ilo.org/safework/info/publications/WCMS_211571/lang--en/index.htm from the International Labour Office for more information. Our fringe was attended by 18 delegates – which seemed to be about par for a number of the fringe meetings this year.

4) HSE releases new fatalities at work statistics

HSE published its figures for work-related deaths on 2 July. There were:

- **106 fatal injuries in England** - a rate of 0.41 deaths per 100,000 workers, compared to an average of 134 deaths in the past five years and a decrease from the 119 deaths (and rate of 0.47) recorded in 2012/13
- **20 fatal injuries in Scotland** - a rate of 0.78 deaths per 100,000 workers, compared to an average of 21 deaths in the past five years and a decrease from the 23 deaths (and rate of 0.90) recorded in 2012/13
- **7 fatal injuries in Wales** - a rate of 0.52 deaths per 100,000 workers, compared to an average of 10 deaths in the past five years and a decrease from the 8 deaths (and rate of 0.61) recorded in 2012/13

The new figures also show the rate of fatal injuries in several key industrial sectors. UCU has members working in the two sectors with significant numbers of deaths:

- There were **27 fatal injuries to workers in agriculture**, lower than the average of 33 for the previous five years. The rate of fatal injury in 2013/14 is 8.77, compared to the five-year average rate of 9.89.
- There were **42 fatal injuries to workers in construction**, lower than the average figure of 46. The latest rate of fatal injury is 1.98 per 100,000 workers, compared to a five-year average of 2.07.
- There were **4 fatal injuries to workers in waste and recycling**, lower than the average count of 7 over the last five years. The latest rate of 3.33 deaths per 100,000 compares to an average rate of 5.48.

<http://press.hse.gov.uk/2014/new-figures-show-all-time-low-in-fatal-injuries-to-workers/>

HSE has also published the mesothelioma statistics for 2012. There has been a significant increase in the number of recorded cases. Statisticians are now expressing doubt over earlier future projections as increasingly people are dying from every day exposures not related to the high risk occupational exposures of the past.

- 2,535 people died of mesothelioma in 2012, an increase from 2,291 in 2011.
- Female deaths have increased from 360 in 2011 to 409 in 2012, an increase of 14%; male deaths have increased from 1,931 in 2011 to 2,126 in 2012, an increase of 9%.

- Male deaths are expected to peak 'towards the end of this decade', but peak female deaths are not expected until 'well beyond 2020'.
- The date of the peak has gradually been extended and these latest figures add to the uncertainty. There is uncertainty about future projections as the model was based on historic high level industrial exposures and much less is known about the level and extent of exposure since 1980.

See: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/mesothelioma/mesothelioma.pdf>

UCU welcomes fewer reported worker deaths for 2013/14 but the usual caveats apply. HSE only counts those worker deaths that must be reported under RIDDOR to the HSE, and ignores occupational illness deaths, so 133 is only a fraction of the total deaths caused by work. HSE excludes all workers killed on the roads or driving as part of their work, and those at sea and in the air. It also excludes the tens of thousands dying of work-related cancers; heart disease from stress overwork and long hours; lung conditions and other diseases, as the increase in mesothelioma deaths reminds us.

It's a bit of a statistical trick using five year averages to cover up some worsening trends. For example, three more workers were killed in construction than last year, and Scottish fatalities are 25% worse than for 2011; using the 5-year average hides this worsening effect. Thus claims that "workplaces are getting safer" are over optimistic and not only notable for excluding deaths caused by occupational illness and other causes.

5) UCU biennial stress survey 2014

The biennial survey will take place in the new academic year. Professor Gail Kinman of Bedfordshire University has once again agreed to carry out the survey for us, and we'll flag this up again in September. The survey questionnaire will probably go out in early October, with 2 weeks allowed for responses. We hope to have the results for at least the Workload element of the survey available for this year's Anti-stress and Bullying Week; 17– 21 November. We will have at least one recommended activity for Branches and LA's to run during that week.

It is important to get as many members as possible to respond to the survey. A number of HE Branches have asked me why their results don't appear in the result

tables; that's because they didn't reach the number of responses that is the HESA standard – results with fewer than 52 responses are not included. Branches need to consider raising the profile of the survey locally, to encourage sufficient members to respond. We'll circulate more information about this in September.

6) Final H&S News for 2013/14

This is our last newsletter for 2013/14, but the H&S Advice Line will still be available until the 24 July. We'll then be taking our usual summer break, starting with "fish and chip week" in Whitby, followed by some time travelling a few more miles on our wonderful canal network. Wolverhampton here we come! Give us a wave if you see NB Tsumeb on her travels – she's the only boat on the cut with that name. We'll be back in harness, all being well, on the 15 September 2014. I hope you all have a restorative break from the stresses and strains of work, and will return refreshed to another stint of H&S rep activity into the new academic year.

John Bamford

UCU Health & Safety Advice

Contact UCU Health & Safety Advice
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