

# THE DAILY HAZARD

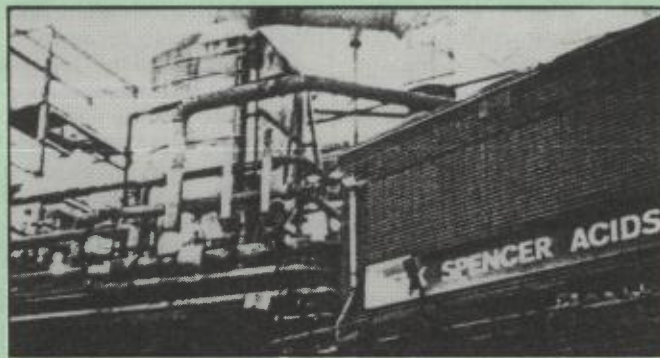
## Major hazard secrecy ends – but do the locals know?

London's most hazardous chemical and gas installations are no longer an official secret. In March the Health and Safety Executive named the seven sites covered by new regulations on control of major accident hazards (see box).

The Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards (CIMAH) Regulations 1984 require manufacturers to make arrangements for informing local people of the dangers they face if the plant should leak or explode. And local authorities have to prepare a plan for dealing with emergencies. Local councils should have completed their work by October last year; companies should have made their arrangements by 1 January this year. Although the HSE believes that "all these requirements have been complied with by the companies", our inquiries suggest that people living near some of these sites have still not been informed about the hazards or what to do in an emergency.

The London Borough of Newham has three of the seven plants – Berk Spencer Acids, where there is storage for 60 tonnes of chlorine gas, and the British Gas high pressure holder stations at Bromley-by-Bow and Beckton. "The deadlines are well passed," said Bob Simpson, the environmental health officer handling the CIMAH regulations. In the case of the chlorine plant there had been delays in getting details from the HSE of the zones which could be affected by a leak. But the zones were now defined – although leafletting of local people had not yet begun and it was still to be decided if public meetings would be held. As for the gas storage plants, Mr Simpson said that delays had been caused by fears about the security implica-

Cory Gases, Pickett's Lock Wharf, Enfield, N9.  
Berk Spencer Acids, Canning Road, Stratford, E15.  
British Gas Fulham Holder Station, Imperial Road, Fulham, SW6.  
British Gas Southall Holder Station, Southall, Middlesex.  
British Gas Bromley Holder Station, Twelvetreves Crescent, Bromley-by-Bow, E3.  
British Gas Beckton Holder Station, Beckton Road, Winsor Terrace, Beckton, E6.  
May and Baker, Crabtree Manor Way, Belvedere, Kent.



tions of the CIMAH regulations.

Berk Spencer Acid's safety officer told us that a preliminary notice had been put in a local paper. The final notice to local residents was awaiting delivery of the siren which would be used to warn of an emergency.

We could not find out what information has been provided to people near Cory Gases in Enfield. We were given a mes-

sage from the safety officer that "company policy is that we don't give information to outsiders".

The London Hazards Centre would like to hear from people living near the CIMAH sites. Have you received information from the company or the local authority? Were you satisfied that it told you enough about the risks from the plant and what to do in an emergency?

● Local people should find it easier to get information about the possible hazards of all local firms and installations, thanks to a recent document from the Health and Safety Commission (HSC). The commission has told the HSE and local authorities to open up their files on a wide range of hazardous activities. Some information, such as the prosecution records of local firms, will take time to reorganise for public access. Other

items, such as the location of explosives stores in a borough, should be available immediately. People should start to ask now, before enforcement agencies forget the instruction.

Copies of the HSC policy statement can be obtained by phoning the HSE public enquiry point (01-221 0416 or 01-221 0870) or the nearest HSE area office – London N: 594 5522; S: 407 8911.

## Funding crisis drags on

The Hazards Centre has for the time being been refused a full year's funding for 1986-87 by the London Boroughs Grants Committee. The Committee met on 16 April just before we went to press and we haven't yet been officially notified of their decision. But we understand that they have asked for more evidence that the Centre is not doing work which could be done by statutory bodies. The Centre will have three months' funding, to July, while the Committee's officers gather the evidence and report back.

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## HAPHAZARD

### Count dermatitis and teno out

You'll remember from our March issue the HSE's laudable aim of reversing the tide of sickness and disease which besets the country's workplaces through the new and improved reporting regulations (the RIDDOR Regs). Backed up by an extended list of reportable diseases, the HSE intends to identify the areas of greatest risk and take action. Pretty impressive, but for the two notable absences from the list of reportable diseases: dermatitis and tenosynovitis. Presumably the HSE doesn't want to tax further its limited resources by concerning itself with the two most common prescribed industrial diseases.

### Asbestos stolen in transit

This is the story of some asbestos waste. It may have been in the back of a van stolen from outside Beta Construction's yard in January. It may have been at a licensed asbestos dump. Or an authorised transit station. Or perhaps it was secured in a sealed skip – there's some uncertainty. Wherever this mysterious asbestos was, 170 very real sacks of the deadly substance finally came to rest in an empty factory in the East End.

Were they part of the asbestos waste removed from Marmesbury School by Beta Construction several days before the theft? No: at a meeting attended by the Hazards Centre, Beta promised faithfully that all waste would be placed in sealed skips or taken to a licensed asbestos dump on the day of removal.

Or could they have been from Marmesbury School after all? Out of 400 bags removed, guess how many were unaccounted for at the dump: 170.

It would seem that by some, no doubt perfectly understandable, oversight the 170 sacks didn't quite make it to the licensed dump or transit station on the day of removal. Hardly significant really: had the van not been stolen no-one would have been any the wiser. Or perhaps, again understandably, someone confused the term "transit station" with "Transit van".

Beta Construction were recently removed from ILEA's list of approved asbestos removal contractors.

## HSE backs union stand on dieldrin

Shop stewards in Hackney's Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) have helped to reveal further contradictions in Britain's ramshackle system for protecting people from pesticides.

The story began in January when Derek Miles, Deputy Convenor of the DLO Joint Shop Stewards Committee, phoned the Centre to ask about a wood preservative called Vacsol. Hackney's joinery was being impregnated with it at a plant in Barking. Workers handling the window frames and doors afterwards in the Hackney joinery shop were feeling sick.

At first it sounded like a simple case of overexposure to solvent vapour. Literature in our files from Hickson's, the manufacturers of Vacsol, did not indicate any particularly hazardous ingredients. Nor did it identify the "contact insecticide" used in the formulation. We phoned Hickson's head office in Castleford, Yorkshire and were shocked to learn that the insecticide is dieldrin.

When we passed the news on, the DLO stewards agreed that the members would not work with the treated timber until the situation was investigated.

Borough Safety Officer Peter Yeuman made his own inquiries. Hickson's Barking branch gave him a "categorical assurance" that the insecticide was Gamma HCH (Lindane). This was not true and further investigations at Hickson's head office confirmed

the union's and Hazards Centre's information.

On 25 March the Barking HSE office put a prohibition notice on any further use of Vacsol-treated domestic joinery in Hackney's council housing. Robert Sheath, the Principal Factory Inspector involved, told the Hazards Centre that he had been "flabbergasted" to find dieldrin being used on confined spaces in an inner-city location where there was small risk of woodworm attack. "The balance of need to risk is so low that I couldn't be a party to it," he said.

The prohibition notice doesn't cover external joinery and roof trusses. But Mr Yeuman has recommended Hackney to end these uses of dieldrin as well, to use fungicides by themselves without insecticides wherever possible, and to find safer chemicals where insect treatment is really necessary.

The DLO unions will also ensure that their members don't have to use dieldrin again. But their concerns are not only with future prevention. "We are worried about the health of our members who have used it and the tenants who have lived with it," said Derek Miles.

The HSE at Barking is also interested in the persistence of dieldrin in humans and their homes. In April Mr Sheath arranged for air tests to be carried out in a selection of homes in Hackney and for blood tests on the joinery shop workers.

● Dieldrin was banned in the United States in 1976, after a long fight with the Shell Chemical Company, on the grounds of "imminent carcinogenic hazard".

In Britain, under the gentle and secretive supervision of the Pesticides Safety Precautions Scheme (PSPS) run by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), permitted uses were gradually closed off. By 1984 there were no approved applications in agriculture.

Outside agriculture, the HSE administers the PSPS and decides what uses to license. In an unpublicised deal with the HSE, the industry agreed to stop supplying chemicals containing dieldrin by the end of 1984 and to use up existing stocks by the end of 1985.

The exception, it now appears, was pre-treatment of timber in vacuum tank processes. Hickson's could go on using dieldrin in its "Vac-Vac" double vacuum tank process.

It remains to be seen if this conscientious approach meets with the approval of the HSE's PSPS department at Bootle, which licensed Vacsol. Lively phone calls can be expected between Bootle, Barking and Castleford, where a senior Hickson's executive said, "I am absolutely staggered that an inspector off his own bat can stop a product when HSE have given us a licence for it to be used".

## Lousy dousing

Many of London's homes are now host to millions of unwelcome guests – cockroaches, Pharaoh's ants, fleas and every other imaginable infestation, from vermin through to dry rot. The council's response is almost always the same – to liberally douse the place in pesticide and hope that none of the offending nasties sneak in from next door.


The London Hazards Centre's Community Support Group hopes to identify situations in which unsafe chemicals and systems of work threaten human health. The group would be pleased to hear from any tenants interested in campaigning on the issue. Anyone wanting further details should contact Roslyn or Rory at the London Hazards Centre on 01-261 9558.

**Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Sections 22–24**

To: The London Borough of Hackney  
The Town Hall, Mare Street, London E8  
(and copies in particular, The Housing Directorate)  
I (a) Robert Sheath  
one of (a) HM Inspectors of Factories,  
of (a) The Health and Safety Executive, 1, Linton Road,  
Barking, Essex 01 594 5522  
to (a) \_\_\_\_\_

herby give you notice that I am of the opinion that the following activities,  
namely:— the installation of domestic joinery treated on  
or off site with dieldrin insecticide in areas where  
there is a low risk of insect attack,  
which are (a) being carried on by you/about to be carried on by you/under your control  
(a) in housing units in parts likely to be occupied,  
involve, or will involve (a) a risk/an imminent risk, of serious personal injury.  
I am further of the opinion that the said matters involve contraventions of the following statutory  
provisions:—  
Sections 2(1) and 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc  
Act 1974 in respect of an undertaking likely to injure the  
health of some employees and tenants  
because dieldrin is very persistent both in the body and  
in the environment and existing levels are likely  
to be significant.  
and I hereby direct that the said activities shall not be carried on by you or under your control  
immediately/ALSO except where the joinery is external to  
an occupied area (e.g. roof voids) and the insect risk is to

**PROHIBIT**



Health &  
Safety  
Executive

**This Prohibition Notice was put on the use of dieldrin-treated timber in Hackney. Dieldrin is known to cause cancer: where else have products like Vacsol been used?**



# Fightback on diesel fumes

Diesel exhaust fumes have had a relatively easy press in recent years, while concern has centred on the lead spewing remorselessly from the exhausts of Britain's 20 million petrol-fuelled cars. But though diesel exhaust fumes are free from lead, the catalogue of disease and premature deaths in exposed workers demonstrates that breathing these fumes is hardly free from risk.



Passer-by gets lung-full of fumes: workers get it all the time

The Centre has had several inquiries from workers suffering through exposure to diesel exhaust fumes:

- TGWU members at Truman's Brewery walked out when the blue haze of exhaust fumes from forklift trucks worsened from the merely unhealthy to the totally unbearable. Acting on advice from the Hazards Centre, the union won suitable workplace ventilation and the air cleared, so to speak.

- Garage workers in Merton Bus Garage endured levels of fume so high that headlights had to be used in enclosed areas. Breathing problems and persis-

tent irritation of the eyes, nose and throat were common complaints.

Diesel exhaust fumes affect tens of thousands, from bus-workers to car park attendants, from miners to mechanics. Recent studies on exposed bus-workers confirmed that they are four times as likely to die of heart disease. Exposed workers are also more susceptible to certain cancers, lung damage, bronchitis and asthma. Their children may run an increased risk of developing leukemia.

Not all workers will live long enough to be bothered by these diseases. Research has repeatedly shown that even low levels of fumes can drastically affect judgement, and so increase the risk of "accidental" deaths.

The hazard is easily remedied. Scrubbers, extractors and catalytic converters will remove fumes and are all readily available. Even regular maintenance can significantly reduce certain pollutants. The legal position is clear: an employer must

prevent the build-up of any hazardous fumes in the workplace. Often, regular monitoring of the air will be needed to confirm that this has been done effectively.

Monitoring is not, however, foolproof. Diesel exhaust fumes are a complex mixture of toxic chemicals. To measure just one constituent of the fume may not give a real indication of the level of risk.

Workers in Selfridges' loading bays found this out when they were told carbon monoxide was at a safe level, so diesel fumes were not a problem. Yet workers were so badly affected that they frequently had to go outside for a breather to avoid throwing up. The level of carbon monoxide may not have been particularly high but the total concentration of toxic gases was dangerously so.

The solution is to remedy the fumes at source. If this has not been done then you can monitor until workers are blue in the face – by which time it may simply be too late.

## The chemicals in diesel exhaust fumes

- **Smoke particles:** Diesel engines produce 30–50 times more smoke particles than a comparable petrol engine. Easily inhaled deep into the lung. Carry many toxins on their surface, including PAHs and heavy metals.

- **Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs):** Potential cancer-causing agents in humans.

- **Sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, aldehydes and acrolein:** Irritate lungs, eyes and mucous membranes and can cause long-term damage to lungs. Increase the risk of asthma and bronchitis.

- **Carbon monoxide:** High concentrations can kill. Lower levels can cause headaches, fatigue and dizziness. May increase the risk of heart disease.

# Shopped: cashiers counter claims

The problem of shop workers accused of dishonesty is the subject of *Fingers in the Till?* from the North Kensington Law Centre Employment Unit. Within its 46-page A4 format, the report presents an impressively well researched and comprehensive picture of the issues.

The report opens by putting such accusations in the context of a mainly female, part-time, underpaid workforce, already under severe emotional and physical stress due to repetitive boring work, poor cash desk design, child care commitments and low esteem – not helped by insensitive and patronising (male) managers.

The lengthy second section details employment rights, generally in terms of pay and conditions and more specifically in relation to surveillance, searches, security and disciplinary procedures.

The rights are the theory. In practice, deregulation, abolition of wage councils and the time and expense of enforcing rights leave most cashiers with little chance of relieving the daily stress.

For organised workers the final section gives examples of collective agreements that some unions have achieved. This report offers no easy solutions but has done the groundwork for unions and law centres prepared to take up this issue for a much exploited but overlooked group of workers.



*Fingers in the Till?* can be ordered from North Kensington Law Centre, 74 Golborne Road, London W10 5PS. Price £1.00 plus 20p postage.

# 2,000 jobs down the tube

One man – 2,000 jobs (what – no women?) is a 25-minute video funded by the late GLC Popular Planning Unit which examines the effects of the introduction of One Person Operated (OPO) trains on the London Underground. The evidence is stylishly presented through the testimony of guards and drivers. Like the video *And then there was one* which looked at similar issues with OPO buses, this video shows how the health and safety of both passengers and workers will be hit by this crude attempt to cut jobs by getting drivers to double as guards.

OPO entails an increase in the stress of what is already a very demanding job. Far from the driver's job becoming automated, he or she is required to maintain constant vigilance not just whilst driving but in supervising passengers on and off the train.

As for the public, without the security of travelling in the guard's car many more women will be deterred from using the Tube at night. But perhaps the greatest dangers are in the event of a fire or accident, especially if the driver is incapacitated. In

previous fires on the Tube – and the smoking ban will not eliminate the fire risk – guards have saved lives by guiding passengers to safety.

The video concludes that in the balance between safety and cost, London Regional Transport has clearly opted for as many job losses as possible at the cheapest price. But the real price will sooner or later be loss of lives.

One man – 2,000 jobs in VHS format is available for loan by groups from the London Hazards Centre.



# Crumbling sewers threaten health

Our ageing, overloaded sewerage system is only kept in operation by crisis maintenance. Backsurges – the flow of raw sewage back into homes – are becoming increasingly frequent and to Londoners could signal far more than an unpleasant smell. London could be host to the 1986 Dysentery Epidemic; already Bradford, Belfast and Bootle have suffered major outbreaks this decade.

Dysentery in England and Wales	
1982	3,000
1983	5,000
1984	6,844
1985 provisional	6,059

Human sewage can also contain the organisms responsible for typhoid fever, giardiasis, infective hepatitis and poliomyelitis. Source: OPCS.

When London was being rebuilt after the war, scant attention was paid to the substructure. Eighteen per cent of London's sewers predate 1860 and the majority are pre-war. The system is overloaded and, with



A bath can fill with filth at any moment – even when you're in it

inspection intervals averaging 40 years, problems take a long time to be detected. The faulty design of the sewers serving many council homes has often worsened the problem. Frequently the sewage outflow for the whole block is linked to the ground floor properties. Consequently, ground and first floor flats suffer dramatic backsurgers in the event of blockages or changes in pressure, particularly during storm rainfalls.

Patching up a failing sewerage system obviously offers no long-term solution. At present, the nation's water authorities spend a paltry £8 million a year on preventative maintenance.

Already floods of sewage have triggered floods of queries to the Hazards Centre which have highlighted another problem – getting some authority to admit responsibility. The water authority is responsible for sewers and the council housing department or landlord for particular properties. Responsibility for the pipes and drains in between can be hard to establish. To confuse things further,

the water authority may make the local authority its agent and then again it may not. Some councils have sewage departments, others do not. Getting hold of the right people can become as big a headache as the sewage itself.

'... households 'upstream' are filled with foul sewage. In the Thames Water Authority area approximately 12,000 properties are at risk of such flooding more than once every ten years'.

William Johnson, *New Statesman*, 1 March 1985

This was the situation facing tenants on the Acorn Estate, Peckham. After weeks of wading through gardens submerged in sewage and enduring sinks regularly filling with waste, they despaired of getting anything done and contacted the Hazards Centre. The Housing Department was adamant that the problem had been dealt with – they had been out more than once to clear above-ground pipework. The fact that sewage was welling up through the soil and was totally unaffected by the department's antics continued to go unnoticed. The Hazards Centre tentatively suggested to the Sewage Department that the problem might lie underground – and, sure enough, a broken drain was located and mended, a full month after first becoming damaged.

The tenants of Tanswell Estate, Waterloo, would have been more than pleased to have their backsurge remedied in a month. Experts could not find a fault. Tenants, however, found sewage in their sinks with distressing regularity, over a ten year period. Recently a camera survey at last found the fault. Tenants now hope that legal action will bring an end to council inaction.

## Bad news from Greenwich...

Promises from Greenwich Council that there would be full consultation with tenants and urgent action to remove asbestos from the Ferrier Estate have come to nothing.

Following disclosure of the fact that door vibration could release millions of asbestos fibres (*Daily Hazard*, November 1985) the council promised that emergency taping over would be rapidly followed by removal of asbestos panels. Yet a recent housing committee report stated that in some cases taping may have to remain in place for four years. New tenants have not been told about the asbestos in their homes; the specialist taken on as the tenants' adviser has not been formally employed; and the council still has not come up with one solid proposal for getting rid of the asbestos.

In January consultations were totally suspended. As John Edwards of the Ferrier Action Group put it: "They have failed even to inform us, never mind consult!"

## ... and from Africa

Harassment continues for our friends of the Black South African asbestos miners' union BAMCWU (see *Daily Hazard* May 1985 and March 1986). On 23 March Pandelani Nefolohodwe, the Secretary General, was arrested and beaten up by the police of the Lebowa "homeland" in Northern Transvaal. Pandelani's wrist was fractured. He and 27 others were held for two days and charged with "public violence" and "holding an unlawful gathering".

## New councillors

A crowd of 40 interested activists turned up at the Centre on 17 March to discuss deregulation with Dave Gee, national Health and Safety Officer of GMBATU.

The other purpose of the evening was for the members of the London Hazards Centre Limited to elect new Management Council members. To our delight, a number of new people stood for election, and we welcome the following elected members:

**Jane Keeper** College Place Tenants' Association

**Chris Whitehouse** Appropriate Health Resources and Technology Action Group (AHRTAG)

**Sandra Bryant** APEX, ASTMS Head Office London Group

**Fred Higgs** TGWU Region 1 (London and Home Counties)

They join the council members representing the working groups:

**Trade Union Group:**

**Reg Green** TGWU Agricultural Workers

**Women's Group:**

**Sheila Rosser** ASTMS Division 15

**Information Group:**

**Keith Holtom** Camden Trades Council Support Unit

## MENSTRUATION

### Women's Health and Hazards Group

The London Hazards Centre has been contacted by a number of women whose menstrual cycles have been disrupted, and who think that their jobs are to blame for their irregular, painful, heavy or absent periods.

Some of these women work with VDUs, but many chemicals, physical agents such as diagnostic X-rays, stress and generally poor working conditions are also known to cause menstrual disorders. We hope the Group will find ways of determining the extent of the problem.

The Women's Health and Hazards Group hasn't met before: **all women are welcome at the first meeting on Tuesday 17 June at 6.00pm.** Contact Alex, Maggie or Roslyn on 01-261 9558.



For more information about the London Hazards Centre – particularly if you want to know how you can help overcome our funding crisis – contact us:

**London Hazards Centre at the Polytechnic of the South Bank**  
103 Borough Road, London SE1  
Tel: 01-261 9558