london hazards

LONDON HAZARDS CENTRE
Advice and Training for Londoners

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SAFER AND HEALTHIER LONDON STREETS

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AFFILIATE AND HELP KEEP US GOING

We are asking you to affiliate to the London Hazards Centre so that we can continue the work we were set up to do in 1985 – provide advice, information and training to make London a safer place in which to live and work.

Arguably the work of the London Hazards Centre is more important than ever as a result of cuts to the HSE budget and scrapping of key pieces of health and safety legislation.

The London Hazards Centre is also a campaigning organisation that takes a lead on issues like safety reps rights, as well as working closely with trade unions and other organisations, for example, to fight against blacklisting.

We need your support. We are asking individuals, trade union branches and regions, along with community organisations – to affiliate to us. The annual affiliation fees set out below remain the lifeblood of the London Hazards Centre.

Affiliation rates

Community groups, tenants and residents associations	£20
Trades Councils, law centres	£30
and advice/resource centres,	
Tenants federations Trade union branches (up to 300 members)	£40
Trade union branches (more than 300 members)	£75
Regional trade union or voluntary organisations	£120
National trade union or voluntary organisations	£240

Subscription rates	
Unwaged individuals	£10
Employed individuals	£20
Commercial organisations	£300

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Telephone: 0207 527 5107.
Website: www.lhc.org.uk

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City Bridge Trust
20 years of investing in Londoners

Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality

Why not volunteer?

The London Hazards Centre, is looking for volunteers to help run and organise some of our activities. Perhaps you have skills and knowledge that could help organise events, produce promotional material, train others or assist in our campaigning work?

If you are interested in volunteering at the London Hazards Centre why not call 0207 527 5107 or email mail@lhc.org.uk

We'd like to hear from you.

Justice denied

ATTACK ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WORKERS INJURED AT WORK

Phil Liptrot from Thompsons Solicitors reported to health and safety campaigners that a major campaign has been launched to challenge the Government's plan to increase the small claims limit.

Phil said that the proposed change will prevent 80% of injured workers from instructing a lawyer to claim compensation for workplace injuries, with a consequential increase in the number of employers prepared to make their workplace even more dangerous. Currently there is a £1,000 limit. Phil explained that claims are in two parts:

- general damages which include pain and suffering
- special damages which include financial loss like loss of wages etc.

At the moment if the general damages are greater than £1,000 then the individual is able to claim their lawyer fees back from the other side. Phil also reported that 99% of cases are greater than £1,000. The Government proposes to increase the limit to £5,000.

Currently 80% of all cases are less than £5,000 which will result in individuals not getting any compensation when they are injured by their job. Even where the total claim would be much greater than £5,000 because of things like loss of wages, they still won't be able to claim because their general damages are below the £5,000 threshold.

General damages are determined from a prescribed list of financial compensation for a particular condition or injury. Individuals will have to make a decision to pay up front (if they can afford to) and then pay the lawyer out of the total if they are successful. It means that some of these 'fat cat' insurers will get even 'fatter' at the expense of worker's health and safety. It was also reported that some asbestosis claims may fall into this category.

You can oppose this proposal to prevent workers getting compensation by signing the online petition at: petition.parliament.uk/petitions/ 173099

100,000 signatures are needed on the petition to initiate a debate in the House of Commons. The deadline to sign by is 23 May 2017.
Sign the petition against it!

Write to your MP urging them to oppose the changes.

Follow @FeedingFatCats on twitter and to find out more at www.feedingfatcats.co.uk.
Source:- National Hazards

Thanks for help with magazine distribution

The London Hazards Centre thanks the RMT, GMB and London and Eastern Region of Unite for their assistance in circulating the magazine.

Want free and confidential advice on health & safety?

Are you worried about a health and safety issue at work or at home? If you are, give the London Hazards Centre a call on our confidential telephone advice line for up-to-date information to help you sort out your problem.

Call 0207 527 5107 on a Monday or Tuesday between 10.30 am – 3:30 pm. If the advisers are busy, please leave a message and they will call you back.

Safer and healthier London streets

In 2015 around nine people died in London while cycling from collisions with other vehicles **(we're awaiting official fig**ures). Nine too many.

But it's important to understand the deeper safety and health implications for those cycling, and not cycling, in London – to see beyond the nine. Statistically, cycling is as safe (per mile travelled) as walking. And in London it's getting safer. Fatal and serious cycling injuries have declined over the last 15 years, despite big rises in the number of people cycling. On top of that, bowing to public pressure - including from London Cycling Campaign - the last Mayor took big steps to improve safety. And the new Mayor is set to do more again. We've yet to see the statistical benefit of the new, popular and properly-protected Cycle Superhighways. But they and other new cycling schemes are boosting the numbers of people cycling even further.

Great news, but comparing rising cycling rates versus falling collisions misses the bigger picture that is health. Nearly 10,000 Londoners die early every year because of pollution. Far more again die early because of inactivity. One third of Londoners do less than 30 minutes moderate physical activity a week (150 minutes is the recommended minimum). Car ownership in London households is strongly correlated with poor health outcomes. That's the big picture – car use, associated inactivity plus pollution and the health outcomes and costs arising from these issues is one of the biggest concerns London faces.

Those cycling and walking are more likely to live longer, healthier lives than those sitting inside cars. Those who cycle regularly generally have the health of someone five to ten years younger. Add on top of health, congestion, pollution and climate change – so what's stopping everyone from ditching the car? In survey after survey, fear of road conditions and danger is named as the primary barrier to cycling. The same is broadly true for people walking. The answer is not in making these activities just statistically safer, but making them 'feel' safer too. This is why London Cycling Campaign's recent campaigns have appealed to so many Londoners. They were explicitly aimed at changing our streets to make cycling not just safe, but feel safe for a much wider range of people than currently cycle.

These campaigns have been phenomenally successful. After previous Mayor Boris Johnson committed to "Love London, Go Dutch", he created London's first Cycling Commissioner and first international-quality cycling infrastructure in the North-South and East-West Cycle Superhighways. Only opened just before Boris Johnson left office, these are hugely successful. Already 70% of peak traffic over Blackfriars Bridge is people cycling; and more people than ever travel along the Embankment because of its cycle tracks. The new Mayor, Sadiq Khan, has committed via our 'Sign for Cycling' campaign to: triple the mileage of protected Cycle Superhighway space; finish the 'Better Junctions' programme; make funding available for 'mini-Holland' schemes in every London borough; and make 'Direct Vision' lorries without blind spots standard.

Additionally, he's appointed a cycling-positive Deputy Mayor for Transport, Commissioner, and new TfL board members; doubled cycling funding for the next five years; backed TfL's new 'Healthy Streets' agenda to improve London's health by encouraging cycling and walking over motor vehicles; announced extensions to existing and moved forward new Cycle Superhighways; and announced action on 'Direct Vision' lorries.

Heavy Goods Vehicles are disproportionately responsible for cycling and pedestrian fatalities. The Mayor proposes that lorries with the most restricted cab vision (the most lethal ones) are banned from London streets by 2020, and by 2024 only 3-star and above lorries (as rated by TfL on driver sightlines) are allowed into the capital. We are pressing the Mayor to go even further to ensure that 5-star best-in-class Direct Vision becomes the norm for urban HGVs by 2024, just as they have already become the norm for refuse trucks and airport vehicles.

London Cycling Campaign works across all aspects of cycling and safer cycling in London, from working to end lorry danger with fleet operators to working with councils, TfL and the Mayor's team to improve Highway schemes for cycling and walking, as well as helping large construction sites and companies ensure major projects don't endanger vulnerable road users. Our volunteers scrutinise local schemes; run free rides, workshops and events; keep politicians on their toes; and add serious weight to our campaigns. In addition our skilled Projects Team provides consultancy expertise on cycling from area bike parking surveys to 'Healthy Streets' audits.

Growth in cycling and walking is essential to London's future as a world class capital – a healthy and safe one where everyone can get around without gridlock. To secure that aim requires a vibrant and growing London Cycling Campaign – you can help by joining us. Let's make sure London's cyclists have a strong voice when it comes to making our streets safer and healthier.

Simon Munk –
London Cycling Campaign

HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING FROM THE LONDON HAZARDS CENTRE

Do you want to know your rights when it comes to health and safety? Working in a safe environment is a basic human right. Learn about your rights and how to enforce them. If you are interested please call **0208 527 5107** or email: **mail@lhc.org.uk** The London Hazards Centre is funded to provide health and safety training.

You will learn about:

- The main UK health and safety laws
- Who is responsible for health and safety at work
- Who enforces health and safety
- Basic risk assessment
- Sources of information and support

The course is ideal for?

- People new to health and safety or those wanting to refresh their knowledge.
- In particular, migrant workers or recent arrivals in the UK will gain important knowledge about their rights.

Gareth Beeton, chair of London Fire Brigade Union interviewed by Jack Twitchen

London's Fire Brigade fights against cuts

How have the budget cuts affected London's fire service?

In 2014 the then Conservative London Mayor Boris Johnson drove through the first set of cuts which were branded as the London Safety Plan. It was part of an integrated risk management plan based on the needs of the individual fire and rescue services. But the amount of finance available to each fire and rescue authority was constrained. Subsequently, Johnson cut the funding substantially and we lost 10 fire stations and 14 fire appliances in that initial round of cuts. There was a massive public outcry and local councils called for a judicial review. Unfortunately the judicial review was lost, despite overwhelming public support.

What worries the FBU about the cuts?

The first concern of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is the safety of London and Londoners, which means our ability to respond in a certain amount of time to emergency calls. Across London there should be a response time of six minutes for the first fire engine and eight minutes for the second to attend a house fire. If you look at the response times in areas such as Camden and Islington and other areas in the south of London near east Greenwich where fire appliances have been removed, you can see what the effect has been. We've had three fatal fires in Islington and one in south London where appliances have been removed and the response times not met. It's all about available resources. More fire engines mean we have a greater ability to meet response times when a number of incidents occur at the same time. As a result, fatal fires have actually gone up by 21% in the last twelve months. But statistics used by the BBC went back 5 years, which included 4 years before the cuts. Camden and Islington were hard hit when Clerkenwell fire station was closed. Kingsland Road fire station in Hackney has gone, Whitechapel fire station lost an engine, Shoreditch and Holloway fire stations have each lost an engine and Southwark has closed. All this in a close-knit area.

The second concern for us is the safety of our crews. The pressure on the crews to get to an incident in good time may lead them to responding in an unsafe manner. They may not have the correct number of people attending the incident which can put their own lives in danger as well as the public.

The third is the ability of the fire brigade service as a whole to be able to cope with major incidences. The resources are just not there. If there were more than two or three major incidences going on at the same time, we believe the London Fire Brigade (LFB) won't be able to cope.

Can things improve under Mayor Sadiq Khan?

We have met Anthony Mayer who was appointed by Sadiq Khan to investigate the LFB cuts, and given him our response to what we feel has resulted from the cuts. We've also had correspondence with Sir Toby Harris who is reviewing all the emergency services across London as well. We haven't met directly with the Mayor although he has attended our regional committee meetings prior to him being in office, so we've been able to put our views across to him. We don't know if there will be any improvement but we are hopeful. We are encouraging him to stick to what he said, which was that there would be no further reductions in funding for the next four years. We were led to believe by the LFB that they will still have to find additional funding and possibly additional cuts. We are really pleased that the two reviews are taking place and we hope that the Mayor will safeguard the fire service and look in a positive way at our ability to cope.

Do you have Labour Party support?

Following our re-afilliation to the Labour Party at our Annual Conference in May, the FBU are very actively supporting Jeremy Corbyn. Both John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn have been longstanding supporters of the FBU.

Does the public support you?

The fire service and the fire brigade as a whole are seen as a very public friendly service and we receive a lot of public support. Londoners have had enough of the cuts – NHS cuts, Police cuts, London Ambulance Service cuts, as well as cuts to the Capital's fire service. The public have said enough is enough and have shown they are very supportive of the FBU's stand against the cuts.

Footnote

The FBU welcomed the outcome of the review by Anthony Mayer in November 2016, which concluded the London Fire Brigade should not have its budget cut any further and recognised response times had slowed in areas where fire stations have been closed. The FBU said "now the problem has been recognised, we need to address it".

Britain's deadly prisons

Health and safety concerns led to unprecedented strike action by around **10,000 prison officers on** 15 November 2016.

The upsurge in the number of prison officers being attacked was the reason for the 24 hour stoppage which was supported by an overwhelming majority of Prison Officers Association (POA) members.

Britain has the biggest prison population in Western Europe at almost 85,500. It has nearly doubled in the last 20 years. Despite this, the Conservative led coalition government in 2012, cut frontline prison officer numbers by 30%, with 500 fewer in 2016 alone. This has left Britain's prisons in a chaotic and dangerous state both for staff and inmates.

In recent months, we have seen breakouts, riots and unrest as the prison system comes under severe strain. Chair of the Parole Board, Nick Hardwick, said in a lecture, back in October 2016: "the number of homicides, self-inflicted deaths, self-harm incidents and assaults are now the worst they have ever been". According to the Prison Reform Trust, "prisoners and staff are less safe than they were five years ago. More prisoners were murdered, killed themselves, self-harmed and were victims of assaults".

The London Hazards Centre interviewed Mike Rolfe, National Chair of the POA, to find out how bad things have become. When asked about the rising levels of violence in prisons he said statistically "there is now a one in three chance of a prison officer being assaulted every year". In the year to June 2016, there were nearly 6,000 assaults on prison staff, an increase of 43%. And what of the prisoners themselves? Mike described the terrible situation that faces vulnerable prisoners. "There is a death every day, with a lot of them resulting from taking 'legal highs' - and suicides have risen to the highest since records began."

One of the most striking things that Mike Rolfe had to say concerned the breakdown in prisoner-staff relationships that affects vulnerable prisoners most of all. "Staff don't have the time to identify vulnerable prisoners and keep them safe". "He who shouts loudest gets listened to, so others behave badly as well"

London's prison population of currently just over 8,000 live in some of the oldest prisons under most overcrowded conditions. Rates of self-harm are at the highest level ever recorded. In London, all that is bad about the present chaotic state of prisons is exacerbated. Gang related violence and drug addiction is a huge problem, along with increasing numbers being radicalised. Shocking images taken last summer that appeared in the press showed filthy toilets and piles of rubbish in the communal areas of Pentonville Prison. Criminal gangs are able to deliver drugs and mobile phones to prisoners by drone due to the shoddy state of the prison's windows. In October 2016 one inmate was killed and two others left in a critical condition after a stabbing.

Mike explained: "Every prison is supposed to carry out risk assessments in order to implement safe systems of work, but often this is not done." And, shockingly: "There is no review of safe systems of working after an incident."

It would seem The Prison Service is failing in its duty under The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations to assess the risks and implement suitable measures to control the risks.

Listening to Mike Rolfe's account of what it is like being a prison officer and reeling-off statistical evidence to illustrate the bloodbath that prisons have become was chilling. Not surprisingly, staff retention is a big problem. "Staff have left for lower paid jobs because they feel ill-equipped, unsupported and at risk of being attacked".

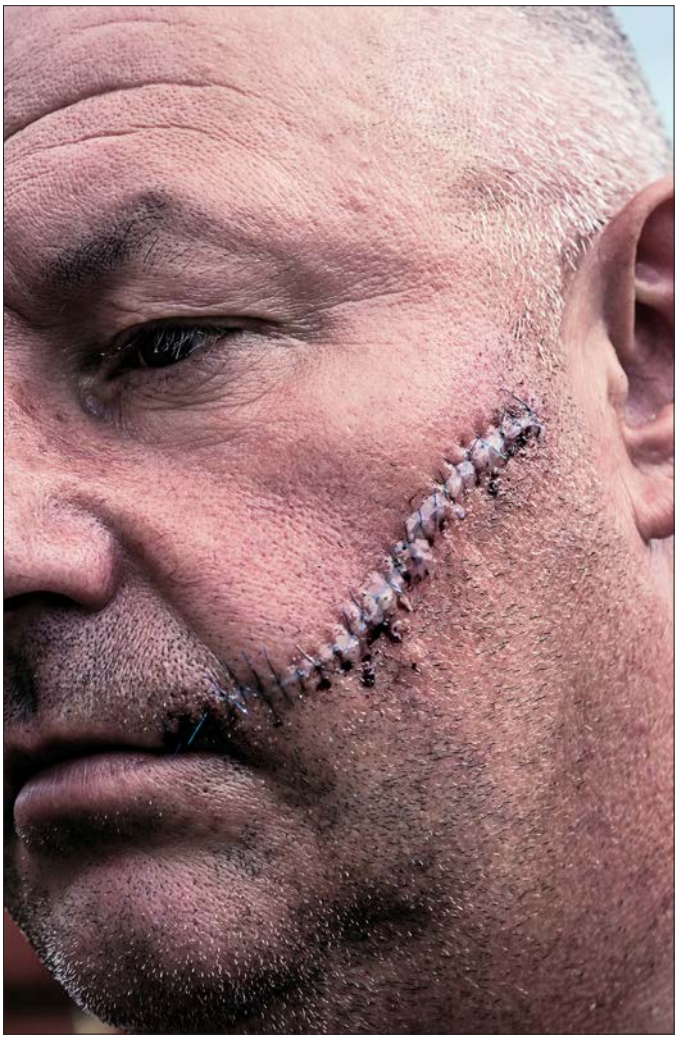
How can the prison system claim to be anything approaching being just, humane and effective when 324 people died in prison last year, vulnerable prisoners are unsupported and 46% of prisoners go on to reoffend within a year of release.

Mike Rolfe said "there has been a massive recruitment drive going on for the last two years, but the overall numbers of prison officers continues to decline". The Government has tacitly acknowledged that they got the staff cuts wrong and swung into reverse when Justice Secretary Liz Truss announced on the 3rd November 2016 that an extra 2,500 frontline staff are to be recruited.

It is clear that the prison service is failing staff and prisoners alike. The opportunities to rehabilitate prisoners are minimal due to staff shortages and cuts in the budgets that provide education and training.

The government's White Paper 'Prison Safety and Reform' (November 2016) begins to address deep-seated problems. But, as Mike Rolfe said: "The government must recognise that prison officers are not just turnkeys. They work with prisoners, support them and act as mentors to help rehabilitation. Recruiting young staff on lower pay without life skills will not win the respect of inmates. The right people need to have a good remuneration package that includes retirement at 60. In short, "the job needs to be seen as a lifelong career and professionalised" if the mayhem that is prison life today is to be transformed and made safer for everyone; professionals like Mike Rolfe need to be listened to.

Paul Street



Prison officer recovering from attack – Courtesy of POA

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY FRIDAY 28 APRIL 2017

The final arrangements to mark International Workers Memorial Day (IWMD) in London are soon to be announced and will be posted on the London Hazards Centre and TUC websites. This year's IWMD will focus on inequalities in occupational health

The purpose of International Workers' Memorial Day has always been to "remember the dead and fight for the living". This is best done by building trade union organisation, and campaigning for stricter enforcement and higher penalties for breaches of health and safety law.

There will be a rally and vigil around the statue of the building worker at Tower Hill (opposite the tube station and on the same side as the Tower of London). This is expected to start around 10.30 am.

Support IWMD in London and fight for strong laws, strong enforcement and strong unions. Find out more once the details of the final arrangements are available on 1st March 2017. Check the London Hazards Centre www.lhc.org.uk and TUC www.tuc.org.uk websites. Speakers to be announced

Support International Workers Memorial Day!

Construction companies pay-out £10 million to HSE

A Freedom of Information **request by law firm Clyde** and Co has revealed the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has charged construction companies nearly £10 million for investigating health and safety breaches over the last 4-years under the 'Fee for Intervention' scheme (FFI).

Firms are charged £129 per hour for the amount of time an HSE inspector spends on identifying and dealing with that material breach. Guidance issued by the HSE states material breaches could be anything from failure to provide guards or effective safety devices to prevent access to dangerous parts of machinery, to leaving materials containing asbestos in a poor or damaged condition resulting in the potential to release asbestos fibres.

This is particularly bad news for companies involved in refurbishment work as according to the HSE nearly half of sites visited had "unacceptable conditions and dangerous practices". As a result over 1,000 notifications of contravention were issued due to a material breach of HSE law and charged for the cost of inspection.

Whilst this is good news on the one hand, construction workers continue to be seriously injured and killed on site. Last year 43 construction workers were killed on the job, eight more than the previous year. Charging construction companies £129 an hour for a visit from the HSE may be a disincentive for breaking health and safety laws, but a small one when you consider their vast profits. There needs to bit strict enforcement of health and safety law and criminal sanctions for companies that put at risk the lives of workers – including jailing directors.

Part-source:
Construction News

London Asbestos Support Awareness Group (LASAG)

Phil Lewis, Vice-Chair of the London Hazards Trust, provides details of the new service available to people suffering with an asbestos related disease.

A study by Mesothelioma UK into the benefits of local asbestos support groups showed how important they are for meeting the needs of patients, providing them with help, support and companionship – and organising social activities so that they can still enjoy themselves and not always feel like a patient.

Feedback from the study indicated that most people who attended support groups felt it had changed and added to the quality of their lives. They felt empowered to do more than they first thought they would be able to and through various activities, were able to take back control of their lives. Meeting informally meant that they could also address simple medical issues that enabled them to avoid hospital attendance.

Although there are many support groups outside of London there has only been one Mesothelioma support group in London based at Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital.

The London Hazards Centre (LHC) is a registered charity established in 1985 to campaign on health and safety issues important to Londoners. The LHC has campaigned over many years on asbestos safety issues and hosts the annual Action Mesothelioma Day in London to raise awareness of asbestos related diseases.

Following discussions with other support groups around the country - the LHC, in conjunction with three specialist firms of lawyers - decided to set up the London Asbestos Support Awareness Group (LASAG) to meet gaps in provision across London and the south east.

Advice and support

LASAG employs two advisers who were previously specialist lung cancer nurses that have spent their careers working with Mesothelioma sufferers and their families. They are experienced in providing practical advice and are knowledgeable about benefits and compensation schemes. They help patients with paperwork and provide assistance and guidance.

Our advisors can help by visiting patients at home and can be contacted on a Freephone telephone number. Their services are free. LASAG can also help put you in touch with local support groups so you can meet and talk with other people suffering from asbestos-related illness.

Help with compensation

The new service can put you in touch with organisations that can help you. If you need legal advice we can assist you in getting help from lawyers who are experts in dealing with asbestos disease claims. Our panel of lawyers only act for individuals, not companies that may have caused the illness.

If you need help call LASAG on Freephone 0808 278 2515

Workplace carcinogens timebomb

Over 350,000 new cancers occur in the UK each year.

Factors influencing cancer risk include personal habits like smoking, genes inherited from parents, personal characteristics such as sex and age, and exposures to carcinogens in the general environment or at work. The number of cancers occurring from workplace exposure has been underestimated in the past by both employers and employees. The 'British Cancer Burden' (BCB) study found that about 8,000 cancer deaths and over 13,000 new cancers in Britain each year are linked to past exposure to carcinogens in the workplace. This equates to around 5% of all cancer deaths in Britain and 8% of male cancers. After asbestos which causes over 4,000 cancers each year, the main work-related risk factors found included:

- night shift-work – linked to just under 2,000 female breast cancer cases
- mineral oils from metal and printing industries – linked to around 1,730 cases of bladder, lung and non-melanoma skin cancers
- sun exposure – linked to around 1,540 skin cancer cases
- silica exposure – linked to 910 cancer cases
- diesel engine exhaust in the workplace – linked to 800 cases

The construction industry was identified as a high priority sector for reducing work-related cancer risks with just under half of the total occupation-related deaths in men being among construction workers who may come in contact with asbestos and other important carcinogens such as silica and diesel engine exhaust. In fact there were 9 types of cancer and 16 carcinogens of concern for construction workers. Over 4,000 work-related cancers were estimated for the manufacturing sector; with similar numbers in the service industries. Many are caused by night-shift working amongst women, and other cancers caused by large numbers of service workers experiencing relatively low levels of exposure. Sun exposure is a major issue for outdoor workers with just under 1,800 new skin cancers each year, and at least 1 death per week from melanoma - the most serious type of skin cancer.

These figures are likely to be underestimates of the true risk as more work-related exposures continue to be identified. Further research by the British team also shows that, unless measures are taken to reduce exposure, these work-related cancers will continue to occur at this rate every year.

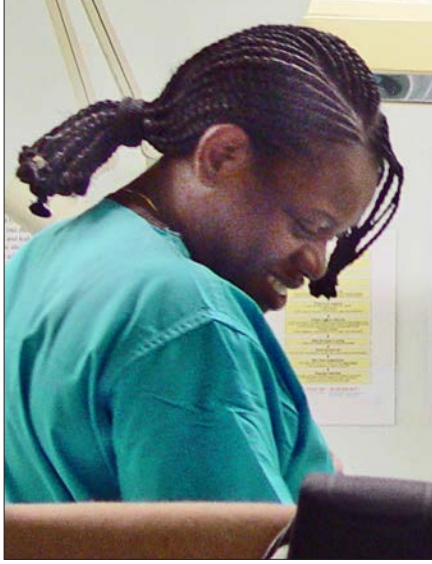
So how much does this cost society? Based on the figures from the British study, economists from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recently estimated the costs of new cases of work-related cancer in Britain in 2010 to be about £12.3 billion. Lung cancer is the biggest cost at £6.8 billion, Mesothelioma £3.0 billion and breast cancer £1.1 billion. But the vast majority (98%) of the costs of work-related cancer (£12.0 billion) is borne by the human cost to individuals – the effect of the cancer on quality of life or loss of life if death occurs. By comparison, employers bear just £461 million. Work-related cancers often occur after workers have retired because of the time it takes to develop after exposure. As a result employers do not incur costs from sickness absence and sick pay.

What's being done to reduce work-related cancers? The HSE has made extensive use of the BCB study to assist their long term research into the causes of cancers, which has helped identify the practical interventions that can be made, and include this information in their guidance.

Importantly, the Institution for Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) has used the findings together with those from other projects in their very active 'No time to lose' campaigns which raise awareness of significant health issues from occupational-cancer facing employees and provide free practical, original materials and tool kits to help effective prevention programmes.

In Europe, the British team together with others have extended their methods to look at the cost-benefit to health compared to costs to industry of introducing binding occupational exposure limits (OEL) for 25 work place carcinogens. Decisions for 13 of the 25 carcinogens, including, silica, chromium VI and hardwood dust are currently being considered by the European Parliament with a decision expected in February this year, which will for the first time provide a level playing field across 28 member states. Current OELs vary considerably across the EU. The majority of the 13 proposed new OELs under immediate consideration are lower than those in the UK and will therefore require legislation.

The BCB study has raised awareness of occupational cancer and highlighted exposure to carcinogens that are still a risk to

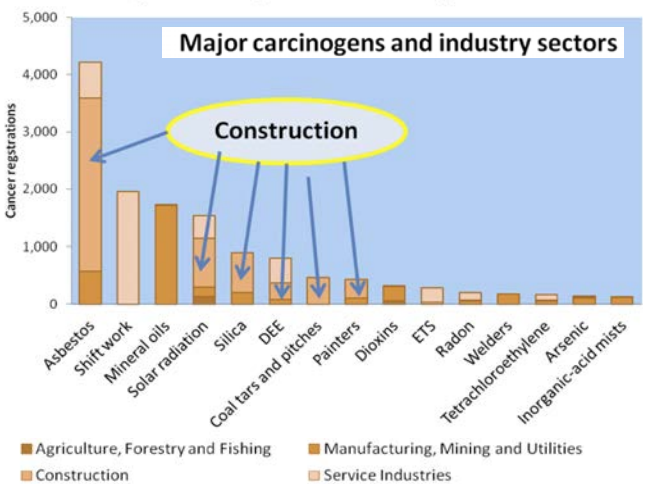


workers today. London has a very large workforce many of whom are still employed in the industries where exposure to carcinogens that could cause cancer still occurs. In particular there is a considerable 'floating' population of workers in many of our city industry sectors, for example the construction industry, and there are large numbers who are self-employed or employed in very small companies. Raising awareness of occupational cancer and how to reduce this in this complex workforce is a challenge Londoners must urgently address.

Note: Occupational cancer kills more workers than any other workplace disease and all accidents – and it is entirely preventable. The Management of Health and safety at Work Regulations set out what employers must do to comply with the Health and safety at Work Act in respect of carrying out risk assessments and control measures to protect workers.

Dr Lesley Rushton

IOSH (2016) Institution for Occupational Safety and Health No Time to Lose Campaign http://www.notimetolose.org.uk/



CROSSRAIL workers' rights on Europe's largest construction project

If major companies on the Crossrail Project like Laing O'Rourke were really interested in meeting their health and safety obligations, they would stop the intimidation, bullying and surveillance of workers who raise health and safety concerns.

Instead, they are refusing to recognise democratically elected shop stewards and health & safety representatives, flouting in the process laws and regulations covering these positions.

You would think that health and safety would get top-billing on the Crossrail project following the death of Rene Tkacik in March 2014. At the time of the inquest into Rene's death Crossrail had this to say about heath and safety: "Safety has always been, and continues to be, the number one value for Crossrail and is critical to the delivery of the project".

Fast-forward 20 months and what evidence is there to show that Crosssrail is working with the trade unions on site to encourage health and safety and resolve disputes under the industry-wide collective agreement? In the run-up to Christmas main contractor Laing O'Rourke refused to recognise democrtatically elected shop stewards and failed to observe terms in negotiated agreements. On the 25 November 2016 workers walked out to protest over the treatment of their elected shop stewards. They blocked London's Oxford Street and occupied the company's Crossrail offices.

The London Hazards Centre interviewed two of the main activists amongst the electricians involved in the dispute who described management on site as "belligerent and combative". They added that "health and safety was terrible from day one … a blatant disregard for the Confined Space Regulations, no monitoring of hand arm vibration and risk assessment so loose as to be laughable". One of the contractors on site - Crown House – in an effort to undermine efforts by Unite to organise the workforce, reinvigorated a toothless and compliant 'Employees Representative Forum' (ERF). This was done after a shop steward was elected. Around 60 workers have picketed the Tottenham Court Road offices of Crossrail contractor Laing O'Rourke. Feelings are running high on Crossrail. Workers are angry that health and safety is dealt with superficially to mask the real situation.

Speaking to activists fighting to establish trade union rights on Crossrail revealed just how bad things are. They described how union meetings had to be held off site and how management stopped agency workers attending. Around 40% of electricians are agency workers. The activists went on to explain how "after they had elected a shop steward he was transferred off the job in a week". Unite Regional Officer Guy Langston said "our members are furious that basic trade union freedom are being attacked … what we are seeing here is a subtle form of blacklisting".

The origins of this particular dispute go back to August-September 2016 when electricians on key sections of the project voted for the introduction of a second tier bonus payment in line with the industry agreement. The activists we interviewed said "Crossrail doesn't want to pay and does not want workers in the Union". Currently just over 85% of electricians are in the Union. Guy Langston said "the hidden agenda here is the second tier payment the Union has submitted for the mechanical and electrical workforce of Laing O'Rourke, non-recognition of our reps can be seen as a ploy to hinder the progression of this claim".

None of this is new. From the very beginning in 2009, Crossrail has been dogged by intimidation. A report commissioned by tunnelling contactors in 2013 that was leaked by a whistleblower revealed a culture of spying and fear, with workers too scared to report health and safety issues.

Information obtained last year from a Freedom of Information request by UCATT revealed a series of emails between tunnelling consortium ATC and Crossrail in which workers were described as being "exhausted physically and mentally … with two miles walking to the toilet". One email referred to it taking 20-minutes for workers to access the Fisher Street site because there was only one turnstile. In early December 2016 the HSE announced they are to prosecute three Crossrail contractors – BAM Nuttall, Ferrovial Agroman UK and Kier Infrastructure over the death of Rene Tkacik and serious injuries to two other workers.

With Christmas just weeks away the electricians' dispute was effectively put on hold so that workers didn't lose pay at this critical time. The activists we spoke to were very clear about how they see things shaping-up in the New Year …"building solidarity and sticking together to defend trade union rights … and establishing a second tier payment for workers on the job"
Paul Street

Footnote: Crossrail contractors commenced talks with Unite in the second week of January over introducing a second tier payment of £2.00 an hour.