

THE DAILY HAZARD

WHAT A LOAD OF RUBBISH

This is the reaction of Crow Lane Residents' Association in Romford to the activities of the local waste disposal company Ahern. Residents complain of excessive noise early in the morning, of high levels of dust and fumes in the air and of the proliferation of rats near the Ahern site, used as a transfer station for disposal of asbestos, industrial debris and rotting food.

On 15th November last year, no less than 32 fire appliances were called to the site when fumes were observed coming from a skip-load of aluminium chloride.

Attempts to douse the skip with water produced an enormous cloud of fumes and steam, necessitating the temporary closure of the Romford-Liverpool St railway line. Despite being one of the biggest asbestos removal firms in London, Ahern was struck off the approval list of the Local Authorities Accident Prevention and Safety Services in March 1988. They have also picked up a £1,000 fine from Barking magistrates for spilling asbestos waste on the highway.

The Residents' Association was formed about a year ago. As treasurer Pat Rumble says, "As residents, we had reached saturation point. We had to shake the local Council and elected political representatives into taking notice of our plight."

They have lobbied Havering Council and the local political parties, gaining a lot of media coverage along the way. And not without effect: Labour Party councillor Tony Rew says, "It is just amazing what this company is getting away with - no wonder the local people want them to move out."

The residents are trying to restrict Ahern's operations so much that the firm will pack up. Havering Council has been persuaded to take some action. Proceedings were started over early morning noise: measurements showed levels up to 87 dB(A) for lorries starting up at 5 am. adjacent to houses. The magistrates did place some restrictions on start-up times though not nearly enough to satisfy the local people.

More recently, the Council contested an application by Ahern to traffic magistrates to have their operating license extended to an adjacent site. The Residents' Association mobilised in strength to present their view

in court and were rewarded when the magistrate denied the company's application.

But Ahern have decided to dig in and have appealed against all the rulings. In the interim they are running their operation as they please. This is a real problem for the local people who have hardly any money for court actions. Residents' Association chair George Turner says, "We are 20 per cent of the way to getting them out. All of us want them to leave. But we are reliant on the Council now these appeals have gone in - it is very frustrating."

When the Daily Hazard approached Ahern for their point of view, we were told very firmly by a company representative that

she had no comment. Crow Lane is a designated green belt area and the local people are outraged by the growing pollution of their community. Vice-chair David Rumble sums up, "For many years we trusted and depended on local politicians and Havering Council to look after our health and safety. It has become obvious that these official bodies have turned a blind eye to the increasing industrialisation of Crow Lane. It is due to this fact that the Residents' Association was formed."

As they celebrate their first anniversary, the local people appreciate that there are many battles to come before they rid themselves of the blight in their midst.

New Act fights toxic flytipping

One of the by-products of the boom in the building industry in London is the flytipping of rubble all over the city. In addition, toxic waste is being dumped in our streets. The London Waste Regulation Authority (LWRA) reckons 15-20 per cent of material currently

being flytipped is toxic, asbestos and cyanide being particular problems. New legislation has just come in to try and bring flytipping under control and to step up fines for offenders.

The LWRA expects to use the Act to crack down on flytippers as soon as the relevant regulations come into force towards the end of the year. So if you see flytipping going on, call the LWRA's action line on 928 9988.



Lorries loaded and ready to leave the site. Waste spills over the top of an unsheeted container: will it end up in the road outside the site?

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Hospital unions clear up asbestos mess

Recent events at a London hospital have shown that asbestos in buildings is still a serious problem, even in supposedly "enlightened" authorities, and that good trade union organisation on health and safety issues is the only way to make sure the problem is dealt with effectively.

The fire at University College Hospital (UCH) in Central London on 19 July made local and national news. What was not publicised so widely was the cause of the fire. Asbestos removal contractors, Forest Insulation of Loughton, Essex were carrying out smoke tests in the hospital basement when a smoke canister exploded and started the fire! The blaze was the most dramatic incident in a catalogue of failures and blunders during the attempts to remove the asbestos.

When the fire brigade were called out to the fire they were not told about the asbestos risk and had to improvise quickly to put out the fire without endangering themselves.

Union reps at UCH told the London Asbestos Action Campaign (LAAC) that the hospital management had prepared and implemented plans for the removal of the asbestos lagging in the basement with hardly any communication with local reps, or indeed, local management.

NUPE reps had argued that the building should be cleared while the work went on, but management insisted that the work would not leak into surrounding areas - hence the numerous

smoke and "reassurance" air fibre level tests carried out. Both forms of testing repeatedly failed to prove that the surrounding areas were safe. Leaks occurred all over the building.

Concerned shop stewards were quickly able to provide staff in the hospital with information after the fire, when people became very concerned about the safety of the removal programme. To counter NUPE's argument that staff should refuse to work in the area management were forced to hold twenty meetings in almost as many hours, and to make binding concessions on the safety standards that would be required.

Local health and safety reps were finally involved and over

the next few days forced the contractors to seal and reseal suspected leaks until there could be no chance of asbestos contaminating other areas.

The UCH debacle only goes to prove what activists have been arguing for years - asbestos removal cannot be left to managers and contractors. The local experience and common sense of workers in an area is essential in planning and supervising removal work. The UCH unions have now set up a Health and Safety Committee to deal with the numerous other health and safety problems in their hospital.

Contributed by London Asbestos Action Campaign.



Union representatives meet to set up a health and safety committee after the asbestos action.

Asbestos Fact Pack

LAAC's Asbestos Fact Pack is a comprehensive and up to date manual on the hazards of asbestos and how to organise against them detailed checklists for monitoring work with asbestos to make sure it is done safely. £3.00 from London Asbestos Action Campaign, 308 Grays Inn Road, WC1X 8DS.

New health and safety resource in Camden

London's first occupational health project is now underway following the steering group's success in securing three years funding. The money will enable general practitioners participating in the project to appoint occupational health workers to work with them to improve the detection of ill health caused by hazardous working conditions and to promote the safe working environment.

The Camden Occupational Health Project (COHP) will offer information, advice, and support to people living or working in Camden, on work hazards and ways of combatting them. The placing of project workers in the GP's surgery allows for occupational histories and circumstances to be taken into account when GPs make their diagnoses.

A consultant in occupational medicine at the Royal Free Hospital will be evaluating results of the Camden Occupational Health Project's work and it is hoped that not only will a truer picture of workplace health be drawn, but that it will provide impetus and support to the establishment of similar projects elsewhere in London.

C A S E S T U D Y

Trade union action on eggshell paints

Painters' unions in the ILEA's direct labour organisation have achieved a ban on the use of a particularly hazardous paint. Painting schools often involves working in passages, toilets, and other confined areas. During the summer of 1988 shop stewards received many complaints of fumes, and some workers suffered so badly from nausea and runny eyes that they had to take time off sick.

The Hazards Centre provided safety reps with information on the hazards of the solvent-based eggshell paints they were using. Fumes from organic solvents irritate the lungs and throat, pass into the blood stream, and affect the central nervous system. Skin contact can cause dermatitis. The unions sent out a circular warning members of the dangers and advising them to leave any area where they were feeling discomfort. After further negotiations a procedure was set up which allowed only the department's Operations Manager to release stocks of the paints, and then only with union consultation.



Not satisfied with this situation, the Joint Shop Stewards Committee continued to push for a complete ban on the use of solvent-based eggshell paints in the DLO. An alternative acrylic latex product which has a water base has been found and the ban is in force. Peter Turner of UCATT commented, "There is now no reason why the solvent-based eggshell paint cannot be banned by other local authorities or indeed by the private sector."

The International Agency for Research into Cancer (IARC) has found that there is evidence to show that painters, particularly in construction and allied industries, run a high risk of contracting cancer. Its survey of all the current scientific literature on the cancer risks of painting has shown increased cancer of the lungs, bladder, stomach, lymph glands, larynx, urinary tract, oesophagus, prostate gland, liver and kidney.

None of this information is new. The paint industry no longer denies that chemicals known to cause cancer are used in products even when there are safer alternatives. It seems that yet again it is up to workers to find out about the hazards they are exposed to and to take steps to have them removed.

INSECT INFESTATIONS - 2:

INSECTICIDES

In Part 1 of this factsheet we looked at how to take action about insect pests in workplaces and housing. In this part we give more information about the insecticides to which workers and tenants are exposed by attempts to exterminate these pests.



WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PESTICIDES?

There is no such thing as a totally non-toxic pesticide. It has been estimated that a complete assessment of hazards is only possible for about five per cent of pesticides. 'Government Approval' is no guarantee of safety.

Exposure limits for airborne contamination are drawn up on the basis of eight hour workplace exposures, not the longer exposures people get at home. They frequently turn out to be set too high. They are also based on the assumption that those exposed are healthy men of working age: children, older people and pregnant women may be more vulnerable, depending on the chemical, as may sufferers from asthma, allergies or eczema, weak livers or weak hearts or anyone otherwise not in perfect health.

Information about the pesticide's behaviour may be derived from outdoor use: its indoor behaviour may be different, for example it may disperse more slowly. In a school in the USA, contamination after a treatment with dichlorvos and the carbamate propoxur took 14 days to sink to acceptable levels: the manufacturers had said it would take three hours.

From October 1989 the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations will provide the right to information for employees or other persons on the premises. Health and safety representatives already have the right to information affecting health, under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations. Get the Manufacturer's Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) and have it checked.

Look for the safest method of application. Air spraying is the most dangerous, surface spraying and dusting the next, baits the least.

THE SOLVENT HAZARD

If the pesticide is in liquid form, it will contain at least one other hazardous chemical in the form of a solvent. First, the active ingredient will have been dissolved in a powerful solvent such as xylene or toluene to form an emulsion concentrate. Then, before application, the concentrate is diluted in a carrier, which may be water (aqueous solution) or may be another solvent such as kerosene or white spirit. Aqueous solutions are less dangerous but there is still a solvent hazard.

THE PESTICIDES

The pesticides most often used fall into several groups: organophosphates, carbamates, organochlorines, synthetic pyrethroids and synthetic hormones.

Organophosphates including fenitrothion, actellic (pirimiphos methyl), vapona (dichlorvos).

Organophosphorus insecticides can permanently damage the nervous system. They block the production of an enzyme, cholinesterase, whose job is to 'switch off' nerves after an impulse has been passed through them. Thus they poison by overloading the nervous system. People with low cholinesterase levels are more vulnerable: this may be due to the later stages of pregnancy, liver damage, or an inherited deficiency. Very young children also produce less cholinesterase.

Symptoms of organophosphate poisoning include: vomiting, diarrhoea, cold sweating, stomach cramps, tingling, shooting pains, salivation, headaches, numbness, insomnia, blurred or double vision, fatigue, confusion, anxiety, and irritability.

Organophosphates are absorbed through the skin and are as dangerous by this route as they are by swallowing or inhalation. Dilution for spraying, and use as a powder, can further increase the amount absorbed through the skin.

The usual test for organophosphate poisoning is to measure cholinesterase levels in the blood. But there are cases on record in which such tests did not reveal organophosphate poisoning.

Vapona (Dichlorvos). Extremely poisonous. Has caused asthma and neurological damage resembling multiple sclerosis. Easily absorbed through the skin. Very volatile, and therefore easily breathed in. A specified substance under the Poisonous Substances in Agriculture Regulations 1984*.

Fenitrothion. Very poisonous by mouth or skin. The Centre knows of several cases where office workers have been poisoned. A woman gave birth prematurely after her flat was sprayed. A link has been suggested with a rare children's disease, Reyes Syndrome.

Nuvanol (Iodofenphos). 'Only' moderately toxic.

Actellic. 'Only' slightly toxic. May be irritant. Evidence of reproductive hazard. Camden Council have recently stopped using actellic because of the possible hazard.

Carbamates.

Including Ficam (bendiocarb), and carbaryl. Carbamates produce similar effects to organophosphates, though the immediate effects of carbamate poisoning only last a few hours and the body quickly gets rid of the chemical. But the World Health Organisation has pointed out that little is known about the long term effects of carbamates on humans, and said that 'Users should be encouraged to be aware of the necessity to establish safe re-entry periods according to local conditions' - in other words, people should not be present during application.

Carbaryl may be able to cause birth defects and cancer. **Bendiocarb** is very poisonous.

Organochlorines Include lindane (Gamma HCH).

Organochlorines accumulate in the body fat. Immediate effects include headache and nausea. Long-term effects include lethargy, poor memory, personality changes, epilepsy, anaemia, and probably cancer.

Synthetic Pyrethroids

Include permethrin, cypermethrin, alphacypermethrin, deltamethrin, phenothrin, tetramethrin. Widely promoted and seen as the 'safe' insecticide. In fact they vary widely in toxicity. Valued by pest controllers because of their quick 'knockdown'.

Deltamethrin is as poisonous as fenitrothion, and irritates eyes and skin. A specified substance under the Poisonous Substances in Agriculture Regulations 1984.*



Cypermethrin is almost equally toxic, can irritate eye and skin and may cause permanent allergy and eye damage. Some evidence that it causes cancer. Spraying of cypermethrin with workers present at a DSS office caused severe rashes, and breathing problems.

Permethrin. Moderately to very toxic. Can irritate skin and cause conjunctivitis. Some evidence that it may cause cancer.

Pyrethrins

Products include Drione and 4-Cide. These are extracted from plants, which doesn't mean they're harmless. They are fairly poisonous and can cause allergic skin reactions and dermatitis. Large amounts have caused liver damage and low-weight offspring in test animals.

Synergisers

Pyrethrins and pyrethroids are often mixed with another chemical 'synergiser' to intensify the effect. This is commonly piperonyl butoxide, which causes cancer in animals and may trigger other potential carcinogens.

Synthetic Hormones

Methoprene (marketed as Pharaoh) imitates the hormone which controls growth in pharaoh's ants. It seems to be virtually harmless to laboratory animals. It is mixed in baits (consisting of liver, swiss roll and runny honey!) and the ants take it back to the nest where it destroys their breeding cycle. Methoprene has been acknowledged for several years as the most effective and least dangerous way of controlling pharaoh's ants.

Hydroprene is an imitation hormone for use on cockroaches. It is used on the young cockroaches (nymphs) which then grow into sterile adults. Since it doesn't kill adults directly, a conventional pesticide is used with it on the first treatment to kill off the current generation of fertile adults. So although it is claimed to be the most effective treatment discovered so far, it doesn't completely eliminate the problem of pesticides. Hydroprene has been used successfully in the USA for at least two years. At the time of writing it isn't approved yet for use in this country: a manufacturer submitted it for approval in mid-1988.

Borax

Traditional inorganic poison for ants and cockroaches. Relatively low toxicity by all routes. Powder is mixed with sugar as bait: it then looks like sugar so strict care must be taken to keep it away from foodstuffs and children and to clean up unused deposits.

NOTE

* Poisonous Substances in Agriculture Regulations 1984. Where a substance is specified under these regulations, it is illegal (among other things) to re-enter a greenhouse for 12 hours after its use. If it is dangerous in a greenhouse, it must be dangerous in any other indoor space, such as an office or a home.

WOOD PRESERVATIVES:

EVIDENCE MOUNTS AND CONCERN GROWS

A survey by the Furniture, Timber and Allied Trades Union (FTAT) has confirmed that workers in the industry are suffering from the effects of working with wood preservatives and treated timber. Safety reps at 24 of the 39 plants who responded to the union questionnaire reported ill health among the members.

Rashes, eye irritation, dizziness, nausea, headaches and breathlessness, were the most common symptoms. Among individual cases that have come to light is one member described as "not fit to drive home", and another hospitalised after PCP contaminated sawdust got into their eye.

It looks as though the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) will not be taking action to combat the use of these toxic treatments, even though a report* from its own occupational hygienists shows that sprayers working for timber treatment firms are regularly exposed to heavy doses of some of the most toxic wood treatment chemicals.

The study describes an instance of sprayers receiving high exposures of lindane (gamma HCH) when the chemical penetrated 'accepted protective clothing'. Lindane is readily absorbed by the skin and damages the brain and nervous system. Despite this information its toxicity is still 'under review' by the HSE.

Fortunately others are not as complacent as the HSE. Reviews of the Hazards Centre's book *Toxic Treatments* in the specialist press show that the issue is being taken up from many different points of view.

Health and Safety Advisors

"This is an interesting and provocative book which should find a place in every environmental health department and for discussion on training courses." *Occupational Safety & Health, July 1989*

Conservationists

"The book is full of sound advice and otherwise not easily obtained information. The authors have a positive approach and make recommendations for a code of practice for safety in remedial treatment. This useful book should be read by every specifier before embarking on another project involving timber treatment." *Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Newsletter, Vol 10 No 2 1989*

Doctors

"Toxic Treatments is an excellent and eye-opening book, which deserves to be sent to every GP in the land. Although written for a non-medical audience it is well researched and well argued." *General Practitioner 12 May*

Surveyors

"Publication of the excellent Toxic Treatments by the London Hazards Centre brings together much of the published and unpublished information regarding the toxicity of many chemicals apparently still being used by the industry. All chartered surveyors involved in this type of work need to buy the book and take action." *Letter to Chartered Surveyor Weekly 6 Jul '89*

*Remedial (in-situ) timber treatment: A study of operator and post-treatment exposure, by G McCutcheon and G Reynolds, presented to BWPA Convention, July 1989.



Satinath Sarangi

A message from Bhopal

In June a delegation representing the survivors of the Bhopal pesticide factory disaster visited Britain. We print here part of their inspiring letter to all the people they met.

Dear Friends,

... We hope you will continue to be with us as we struggle on against Union Carbide and the Government of India. In the places we visited we were aghast to see 'silent Bhopals' happening and potential Bhopals looming, and we admire the courage and sanity that you have demonstrated so far against all odds in your struggle for better health and safety. It is starkly clear to all of us that the problems, yours and ours, are the same and that our dreams and our future lie in struggle. We who have said 'yes' to life must carry on to strike a mortal blow to the death dealing forces.

The Bhopal delegation - Chander Singh Nimgule, Bilkis Bano, Sunil Kumar Rajput, Satinath Sarangi June 1989

★ HAZARDS CAMPAIGN CONFERENCE ★

Saturday 23 September

places still available

Workshops and discussion on campaigning and organising on:

- ★ Construction Safety
- ★ Trade union and community links on pesticides, waste disposal and major industrial hazards
- ★ Repetition Strain Injuries
- ★ Occupational Health Projects
- ★ Europe 1992
- ★ Black Workers and Hazards

At Manchester Polytechnic, fee £15 (inclusive of lunch and papers) ★ Ring Manchester Hazards Centre for more details 061-953 4037



CENTRE NEWS

STAFF CHANGES

Rory O'Neill left the Centre in July to work for Sheffield Occupational Health Project. Judith Staines, our financial administrator, is also leaving. Her successor Pat Connolly has been appointed and will start in September. Rory and Judith have both put a great deal into the Centre and we will miss them. Roslyn Perkins has returned from maternity leave.

FUNDING CUTS

Hazards Centre has suffered another cut of 15 per cent in its grant from the London Boroughs Grant Scheme. This comes on top of the 15 per cent cut of last year. The cumulative effect will damage the service we provide unless we receive funds from other sources.

You can help us:

Donations are welcome from local union branches, community groups and individuals no matter how great or small.

Affiliation brings a year's supply of this newsletter and news of other publications and activities.

Pay for work if you have funds. Any work that is paid for helps to ensure that we can continue to work for those without financial resources.



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