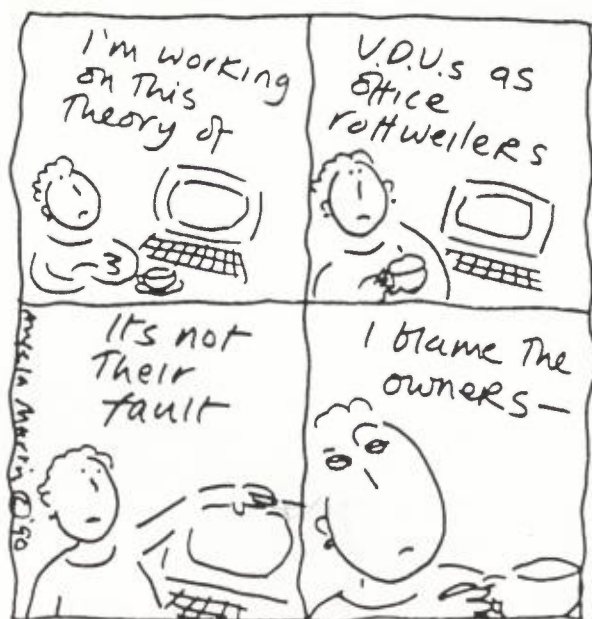


THE DAILY HAZARD



VDU Legislation on the way

The Health and Safety Executive / Commission (HSE/C) plans to launch its Consultative Document on the implementation of the European Community directive on VDU work in mid-1991.

An informal committee of union, employer and HSE representatives hopes to produce a first draft by Easter and send it to the Commission for final polishing.

There will then be a consultation period after which Regulations will be laid before Parliament as a Statutory Instrument to amend the Health and Safety at Work Act. The intention is to complete the process by mid-1992 at the latest.

The timetable is extremely tight and there is a chance that the consultation period will be short, less even than the three months normally allowed, and is basically the only chance to influence the final shape of the legislation.

Until now the government and the employers have resisted any legislation providing protection to VDU workers and they are certain to do everything they can to weaken the Regulations. Improving health and safety standards for the over three million workers who use VDUs regularly will be costly and employers will want to do as little as possible to uprate their equipment. They will certainly be looking for a very limiting definition of who is a VDU worker in order to restrict the scope of the Regulations.

Under the EC directive, employers must carry out an analysis of VDU workstations, abide by minimum standards of equipment

and environment and provide education and training to their workers. They must also arrange for regular breaks from the keyboard. Workers will become entitled to regular eye tests and to "corrective appliances", if necessary.

Already the Government has hinted that they may not allow free eye tests on the National Health Service. Labour Party health and safety spokesperson Tony Lloyd is quite clear about this: "The employers must pay," he says. "No-one must pay to go to work." It is crucial to establish a right to bona-fide eye tests which will genuinely detect any deterioration in eyesight resulting from VDU work.

Even more controversial will be the proposals for rest breaks. Unpublished research commissioned by the HSE at the Centre for Organisational Health and Development at Nottingham University concludes that a 12-15 minute break should be taken every 50-60 minutes of VDU work with the timing under the control of the operator.

The study was intended to monitor optimum productivity conditions rather than health risks but reinforces the long held view of many unions that there should be a break every hour. However the report also recommends that operators should work for at least 50-60 minutes and that there should be a maximum limit of 120 minutes before a break. Though there is a danger that the rest break will be seen as a device for maximising productivity rather than protecting the worker, there is a chance here to establish satisfactory conditions.

The HSE might find it difficult to ignore research which it has commissioned but the employers will strongly oppose being tied down to specific times for rest breaks. This shows the importance of responding to the HSE/C's Consultative Document. It is unknown for a government of either party to reject proposals for legislation put forward by the

OFFICE HAZARDS PACK SPECIAL OFFER

We are offering the set of four London Hazards Centre books dealing with office hazards at a specially reduced price of £12 inc. p&p. (See back page for individual prices). The books are:

- VDU Hazards Handbook: A Workers Guide to the Effects of New Technology
- Sick Building Syndrome: Causes, Effects and Control
- Repetition Strain Injuries: Hidden Harm from Overuse
- Fluorescent Lighting: A Health Hazard Overhead.

Commission. Thus, even though a general election and change of government may intervene during the process, it is unlikely to have any practical effect.

Once the Statutory Instrument is laid before Parliament there is very little likelihood of it being amended. The only opportunity to influence the legislation will come during the consultation period and this chance will come and go in months or even weeks.

There is no point in trade unions waiting for the Consultative Document to be issued. The time to prepare evidence and proposals is NOW so that these can be submitted to the Health and Safety Commission almost as soon as the Consultative Document appears.

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CSC proves its worth

The Construction Safety Campaign (CSC) continued its activities during the Christmas 1990 period and successfully drew media attention to the continuing high number of deaths on construction sites.

- On 29.11.90 Morris McElligott fell six floors down a lift shaft on Canary Wharf and miraculously escaped with bruising!
- On 30.11.90 Edward Compton fell to his death from the Taylor Woodrow site in Fleet St.
- On 6.12.90 William Mayburry fell to his death from a crane cab on a Tarmac site in Horseferry Rd.

Angry CSC members lobbied the Fleet St. site, renaming the City of London the "Murder Mile" because of the high number of fatalities and accidents in the area. Site workers welcomed the demonstration and expressed real concern over the hazards of the industry.

The CSC then lobbied the Health & Safety Executive's Annual Report launch. The HSE again reported the death rate in construction had 'reached a plateau' of around 150 deaths per year but the accident rate was still rising.

On the 19.12.90 the CSC demonstrated outside the City of London Coroners Court where three construction worker inquests were held - all killed in the "Murder Mile". Mr. Burns was killed by a fall on a Bovis site, Jan Leadbetter was killed by a fall on a Bovis site and Mr. Mitchell was killed by a fall while working for Ove Arup. All verdicts were recorded as 'accidental death'.

Jan Leadbetter's sister, Jasmin, attended the court and joined in the demonstration outside. After the verdict of Accidental Death was recorded Jasmin could not contain her sadness or anger. She told a TV crew the evidence at

the hearing showed her brother to have been killed by company negligence yet Jan's death was recorded as an accident. Jasmin has now sworn to pursue justice for the death of her brother and to try and prevent the deaths of other workers by joining the CSC's campaign.

One case that made the news is the deaths of three young men employed by Floyd Construction at Watney Market, Aldgate, East London in the Autumn of 1990 (see DH 29). David Richardson (19), his brother Paul (17) and Steve Hammond (32) were all killed by hydrogen sulphide gas when they entered a sewer to investigate a drainage problem. Eye witnesses said the workers had no protective clothing or special equipment. Trained, experienced sewer workers would operate under a safe system of work and carry out air monitoring. The responsibility for ensuring workers are trained lies squarely with the employer.

The CSC and two local MP's have called for a public inquiry and police investigation into this disaster. This did not look likely to happen until the Coroner at St. Pancras, Dr. Chambers, took what seems to be an unprecedented step of referring the case to the Director of Public Prosecutions in mid January to see if manslaughter charges should be brought. This move seems to back up the suspicion that there were serious breaches of the

Health And Safety At Work Act.

Tony O'Brien, Secretary of the CSC, said "many coroners hear large numbers of construction worker cases and from the evidence must realise these deaths should and could have been prevented by management and that the law has been broken. Now it's up to the DPP to come to the same conclusion and tell the police to investigate this case and all others".

Conservatives to block women's rights?

British Conservative MEP's are trying to block the introduction of a European Community directive planned to give new and stronger rights to pregnant and breast feeding workers. Tory MEP's were virtually alone in voting against the first reading of the directive in the European Parliament last December.

The draft directive is now back with the Council of Ministers, and with support from 11 of the

12 Community countries, has a good chance of passing through all stages of procedure by Summer 1991. It would then be down to Member States to introduce their own legislation to comply with its terms.

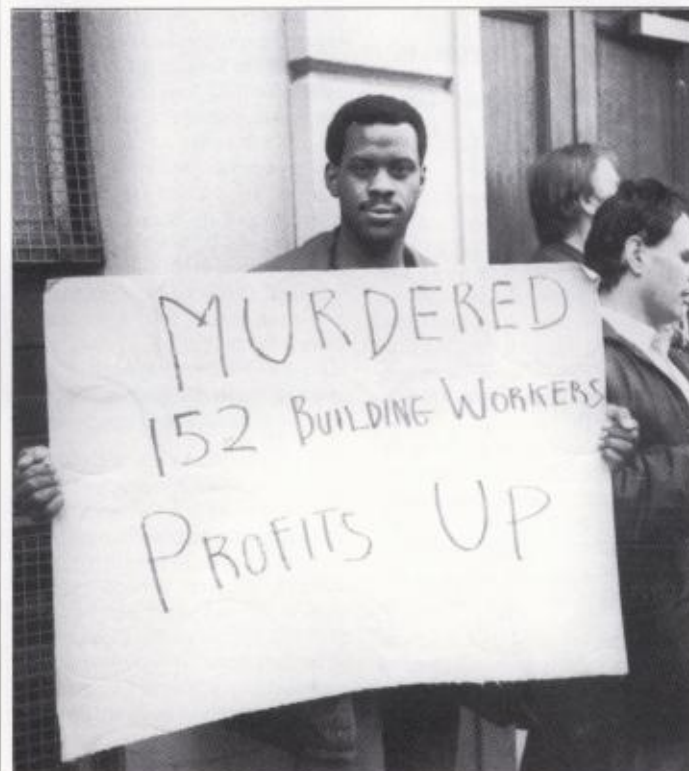
The British government, still the odd one out in Europe, is however threatening to block the directive in the European Court. It is hoping to build a case on the grounds that the directive is being treated as a health and safety issue under the Community Charter of basic social rights for workers and not as an employment matter where individual Member States have a right to refuse to comply. Britain was alone in Europe in refusing to adopt the Community Charter.

Under the draft directive, all workers, including seasonal and part-time workers, would be entitled to an uninterrupted period of 16 weeks leave on full pay, to commence not less than two weeks before the expected date of delivery. Member states can grant additional leave with pay for the entire period at not less than 80 per cent of normal salary. Pregnant and breast feeding workers would be entitled to protection from physical, chemical and biological agents and this could involve moves to alternative work or away from shift or night work. There would be an obligation on employers to eliminate or control hazards. Workers would be entitled to full information on risks to health and fertility at the start of a new job.

Pay and employment rights would be maintained during periods of leave and there would be redress for workers who believed their rights had been infringed.

This would be a clear advance on current United Kingdom legislation, which is stingy in both pay and leave and which does not give any special protection against hazards to pregnant and breast-feeding women at work. But if the Government succeed in bottling the directive up in the European Court, it could be many years before the Member States are obliged to introduce new legislation.

Despite all the hype that attitudes to Europe and to equal opportunities were going to change with the departure of Margaret Thatcher from office, the evidence suggests that it will be the same mixture as before from the "new man" in Downing Street.



HOT WORKING CONDITIONS

Last summer brought temperatures which unexpectedly soared into the 90's. The Centre received many calls for help from workers in a wide range of occupations.

Bus drivers complained of temperatures up to 120°F in their cabs.

Tree loppers were injured when they fainted and fell from trees.

Many callers were shocked to learn the law sets no maximum temperature limit.

It is essential to negotiate now for the prevention of heat hazards this coming summer.

The medical effects of heat

Working in high temperatures can defeat the body's ability to cool itself. Internal body temperature then rises dramatically and dangerously. Effects of heat range from discomfort and dehydration to heat stress, heat stroke, kidney damage and even death.

Discomfort: The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommend 75°F (24°C) as a maximum air temperature for comfortable working. Above 75°F people become less alert and more likely to have accidents. As the body's internal temperature rises people will suffer some of the following reactions.

Dehydration: Excessive loss of body fluid can occur even in moderate heat. Symptoms are headaches, tiredness and cramps. Fluid lost through sweating must be replaced. The employer should supply fresh, cool, drinking water and allow sufficient rest breaks. Manual workers in foundries and other hot environments may also need salt tablets - but the dosage

must be carefully controlled as excess salt is harmful to health. Drinking alcohol increases dehydration.

Heat stress: Symptoms are clammy skin, light headedness, slurred speech, rapid pulse, fatigue, confusion, fainting, nausea, short temper, loss of concentration. Victims should be taken to a cooler area, given water or cool drinks and allowed to remove unnecessary clothing.

Heat stroke: Symptoms are staggering walk, hot skin and raised body temperature (yet the victim may feel chilly), incoherence, mental confusion, convulsions and unconsciousness. Heat stroke can lead to long term illness or death. Victims need immediate medical attention.

Assessing the risk

The health hazard from heat depends on a combination of factors - air temperature alone is not a sufficient guide. These additional factors must be considered in deciding the level of risk:

Air Movement: Air movement is essential in reducing heat stress. Adequate general ventilation is required under the Factories Act 1961 and the Offices, Shops & Railway Premises Act 1963. As heat increases so does the definition of adequate. Fans, air-movers and portable air conditioners can all help to move cool air through the workplace.

Humidity: Humid air slows the evaporation of sweat from the skin. Control sources of humidity by: sealing equipment, extracting steam at source, installing de-humidifiers. Dry air can be humidified as part of an air conditioning system or by portable units (hazard: see Daily Hazard No. 18 Legionnaires Disease).

Radiant Heat: Direct exposure to radiant heat, eg. from hot surfaces, is a major cause of heat stress. Action: Outdoor workers can be protected by temporary shelters and awnings. Indoors, solar gain can be reduced by fitting window blinds, solar control glass or coatings. Heat reflected from hot walls

and machines can be controlled by insulation or relocation of equipment. In hot environments such as foundries workers can have insulated, ventilated refuges.

Exposure limits

Measuring Temperatures: An ordinary dry bulb thermometer does not take account of the above factors. Any measurement designed to assess heat stress should be done with a wet bulb globe thermometer (WBGT) or by an electronic equivalent (simple to use).

The WBGT index is the basis for permissible heat exposure limits such as the American Conference of Government Industrial Hygienists (ACGIH) standard. Permissible heat exposures are calculated in relation to workload.

Workload: The more energetic the work the lower the temperature for continuous work. As the WBGT temperature rises the rest periods are increased. At 30°C someone working with a pick and shovel should spend only 25 per cent of each hour working and 75 per cent resting. The ACGIH standard is for physically fit workers who are acclimatised to the heat. Others will need much stricter protection. All will want greater comfort.

Clothing: The ACGIH standard applies only to workers in cool, loose-fitting clothes. Heavy uniforms or protective clothing add greatly to heat stress and require longer rest periods.

While heat stress measurements and WBGT readings may be essential in some cases, 'science' should never get in the way of common sense. If most people are complaining that it's too hot, it is too hot and immediate action is needed.

The law

Both the Offices Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963 (OSRPA) and the Factories Act 1961 (FA) stipulate a minimum temperature but not a maximum. However both acts demand a 'reasonable' temperature be set and that 'effective' ventilation is provided. The Health and Safety at Work Act requires the employer to provide an environment 'without risks to

health', and adequate welfare facilities.

Both the Factories Act and OSRPA require thermometers to be accessibly displayed in every working area.

Action points

- Safety Reps should try to negotiate a maximum acceptable temperature before the weather gets too hot. Camden NALGO, for example, has negotiated that workers can leave if the temperature rises above 80°F. As an interim measure take the hottest rooms out of service.
- Ensure management has an adequate system for training and informing all employees of heat hazards.
- Management should ensure that first-aiders can recognise symptoms of heat stress and take appropriate action.
- Carry out inspections, recording maximum temperatures in each area, and do a survey of workers. During hot spells check for symptoms of heat stress and monitor accident rates.
- Ensure that all ill-health caused by heat is recorded in the accident book, noting the temperature causing illness.
- Demand management employ an industrial hygienist to do a full survey of heat stress and check ventilation and air conditioning systems for adequacy. Check ventilation systems are not just recycling stale air.
- Demand the right to wear appropriate clothing. The Chartered Institute of Building Service Engineers (CIBSE) point out that clothing has a 'powerful effect on preferred temperature' and that the removal of a jacket or the wearing of shorts can be equivalent to a temperature drop of 2 - 3°C.
- Demand regular breaks of at least 15 minutes every hour and more frequently if doing hard physical work. Also demand the provision of a cool rest room and cold drinks. Pregnant women and those with medical conditions should be given priority for rests and early leave from work. Re-negotiate working hours to avoid heavy work in the hottest part of the day. Set up a job rotation scheme.
- Safety Reps should ensure managements carry out their responsibilities towards non-workers such as schoolchildren, visitors and passengers.





HOW TO SURVIVE OFFICE HEALTH HAZARDS

In 1987/88, 250 workers received major or fatal injuries in office accidents. There were 5,000 injuries reported, a small proportion of the real figure.

The Office Workers' Survival Handbook: Fighting Health Hazards in the Office, the classic book by Marianne Craig, now revised and updated by Eileen Phillips, highlights the seriousness of the situation and the enormous range of health hazards faced by today's office workers.

This is a very readable reference book with useful information and practical advice for office workers wanting to improve their working conditions.

Using examples drawn from the everyday experience of office workers and data provided by the latest research, it covers stress, new technology, dangerous chemicals, physical hazards and health and safety legislation. It includes some useful model

questionnaires and checklists that will help workers and safety representatives approach the problems of office health hazards in a methodical way. It is aimed primarily at women but it is useful to all office workers.

● The book costs £5.95 and is published by Women's Press, 34 Great Sutton street, London EC1V 0DX.

'Use COSHH on paint' says UCATT



A national campaign to eliminate solvents in paints has been launched by the building union UCATT. In February the union published a report of its survey of ill health among council DLO painters, adding yet more evidence to the now overwhelming case against solvent-based paints.

In Denmark, 90 per cent of paint used in building is water-based. Evidence of premature senility among painters led to this, even before the World Health Organisation reported the evidence of cancer among painters in 1989.

UCATT has set out to substitute water-based for solvent-based paints throughout the building industry as required under the COSHH Regulations. DLO workers in Sheffield, Exeter, Southwark and Camden have already negotiated bans through their Safety Committees by using the COSHH Regs. This report should provide ammunition for others to start negotiating.

The campaign's second aim is to place legal responsibility on

architects, designers, and others responsible for specifying building materials. Until this is done, says UCATT, contractors will continue to claim that they have no power to substitute safer products.

● 'Hazards of Solvent Based Paints.' UCATT, 177 Abbeville Road, London SW4 9RL. Tel: 071-622 2442. £5.00, free to members.

Irish action on construction

The London Hazards Centre has been working on two projects with Irish groups and the Construction Safety Campaign about the number of migrant and resident Irish killed and injured on English building sites.

First there is the publication of a booklet by the Connolly Association called "Slaughter On Britain's Building Sites". This gives a brief but gruesomely accurate account of the rise in accidents and deaths in construction in the 80's and presents arguments for improvements at all levels.

● £1.22p from: Connolly Association, 244/6, Gray's Inn Rd., London, WC1.

Secondly the Irish Government has funded a photographic exhibition on life and death in the industry which is for the use of community groups, trade unions, local authorities etc.

The exhibition shows the good side (local authority training and equal opportunities) and the bad side (relatives of victims) of working in construction.

● For further information on how to book the exhibition call the Action Group for Irish Youth (AGIY) on 071 278 1665. The AGIY has also produced an excellent leaflet to link with the exhibition called "Working On The Buildings" which gives information on safety, unions, pay and employment rights.

LONDON HAZARDS CENTRE PUBLICATIONS

- ▲ Sick Building Syndrome: Causes, effects and control. £4.50.
- ▲ Toxic Treatments: Wood preservative hazards at work and at home. £5.95
- ▲ Repetition Strain Injuries: Hidden harm from overuse. £6.00 (£3.00 to trade union and community groups).
- ▲ VDU Hazards Handbook: A worker's guide to the effects of new technology. £5.45.
- ▲ Fluorescent Lighting: A health hazard overhead. £5.00 (£2.00 to trade union and community groups).
- ▲ Health & Safety: A guide for women workers in the cleaning & catering industries. £5.00 (£2.00 to trade union and community groups).

All prices include post and packing. Bulk orders: contact the London Hazards Centre for discount details.

▲ FACT PACK

The factsheets published regularly in Daily Hazard are now available as a set, at a cost of £5.00. There are a total of 11 factsheets covering:

- ▲ photocopier and laser printers
- ▲ legionnaires disease
- ▲ formaldehyde
- ▲ insect infestations and insecticides
- ▲ wood preservatives
- ▲ chemicals policies
- ▲ Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations
- ▲ European Community legislation
- ▲ manufactured mineral fibres
- ▲ asbestos cement
- ▲ cement.

The set is in loose-leaf format and can either be kept together as a set or you can file the factsheets separately.



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