

THE DAILY HAZARD

Cuts kill tube workers says union

Fatal work accidents on London Underground shot up dramatically in 1990. Six workers employed by London Underground Limited (LUL) or their contractors were killed last year, compared to three deaths over the previous six years.

Three London Underground workers and one contractor were killed in an incident at Chorleywood in May 1990. This was the first time railway line work had been done by non LUL workers and it resulted in four deaths. Representatives from the Railway, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT), one of the tube workers' unions, believe this shows the dangers of cost cutting which arise from privatisation. They quote the conclusion of the internal report on the deaths as saying there was 'inadequate workplanning, management control and provision of safety motivation'.

The fatalities figures would have been higher if it had not been for good fortune and worker's alertness. Tubewatch, a worker based campaign group, report that LUL changed the method of isolating sections of track during maintenance. As a result a train was sent down a Victoria Line tunnel between Northumberland Park and Seven Sisters, before the tunnel was cleared of over twenty workers. Only quick action by a worker who alerted the driver saved their lives.

FIRE AND MAINTENANCE

According to RMT the maintenance programme for the underground is way behind schedule. The maintenance of the track is

now three to five years behind and because of cut backs this will get worse.

Figures for the underground system from LUL and the Capital Transport campaign show that on average, over the last seven months, there has been one fire incident every day so serious that London Fire Brigade has had to deal with it. Over the same period LUL workers themselves dealt with an average of two less serious fire incidents per day before the arrival of the Fire Brigade.

The overall figures show seven-teen fire reports every day. Although the great majority needed no action these figures reflect the heightened vigilance



of workers and passengers on the underground after the Kings Cross disaster. More recent incidents, like the train fire at Bethnal Green which left thousands of passengers stranded in tunnels for hours, again raise serious questions about tube fire precautions and safety.

JOB CUTS

RMT estimate that 100 staff are leaving their jobs each month. LUL have announced they want 1,000 more to go and RMT has information showing LUL want to cut a further 800 jobs. A large number of people leaving worked on the tunnel cleaning gangs: as LUL has not recruited any replacements for over four months RMT fears this is likely to increase further the risk of fires in the tunnels. Alan Norman, Divisional Organiser for RMT told the Daily Hazard, 'The cuts make a mockery of the Fennell Report on Kings Cross which recommends adequate staffing levels to ensure safety'.

Recently published guidelines on train evacuation procedures in the tunnels instruct drivers of one-person-operated trains to look for "responsible passengers" to help in emergencies. This would mean untrained members of the public taking on LUL responsibilities. Drivers are also concerned that they become more liable for prosecution if there is another disaster. More positively, LUL has encour-

aged the election of Safety Representatives from its workforce and has been releasing them to attend TUC Health and Safety courses. The structure of safety committees has widened to include representatives from all unions.

These are encouraging moves but without full investment in plant and maintenance, workers and the public will suffer. Tubewatch comments, "The predicted cost to life and limb of workers due to financial cuts has now become a reality. LUL workers must now organise and campaign for improved safety provisions."

Transport campaign contacts:
Capital 4th Floor, 42/44 De Beauvoir Crescent, N1 5SB 071-249-4166
Tubewatch: PO Box 22, 136 Kingsland High Street, E8

NEW PUBLICATION JUNE 1991

BASIC HEALTH AND SAFETY: WORKER'S RIGHTS AND HOW TO WIN THEM

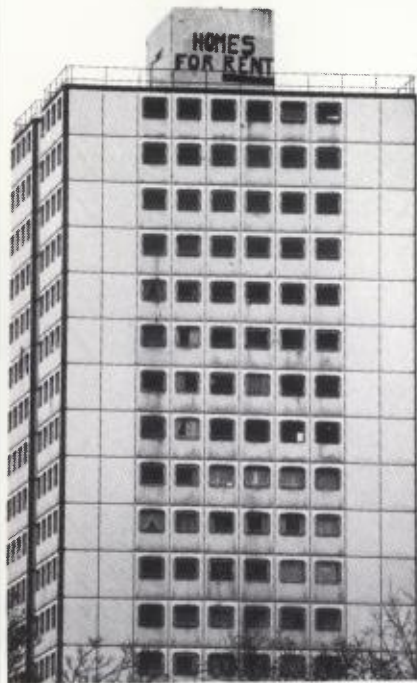
Price £6.00 Reductions for bulk orders

This unique new publication contains 11 sections of key health and safety information. It is an essential reference for shop stewards, safety representatives, advice workers and safety managers who need rapid access to facts.

Sections cover: ● Introduction to health and safety ● Health and safety in the small workplace ● Registering the workplace ● Employer's Liability ● Health, safety and welfare ● First Aid ● Fire Precautions ● Accidents and sickness - recording and reporting ● Safety representatives and safety committees ● Control of substances hazardous to health ● Contacts

INSIDE

Asbestos in tower blocks	2
Paints factsheet PART 1	3



Westminster Council faces prosecution on asbestos work in tower blocks

Westminster Council has been severely criticised by the HSE for failing to properly supervise asbestos sealing work on the Elgin and Walerton Housing Estate, despite previous prohibition and improvement notices.

The HSE inspector is currently considering a prosecution, according to Westminster Short-life Group, whose tenants have lived in the tower blocks for the last five years. The group commissioned their own independent tests which showed severe contamination after the work was completed. They are now refusing the contractor access to their flats for fear of a further botch job. The two tower blocks

on the estate, Hermes and Chantry Point, have one of the worst forms of asbestos contamination ever seen in residential blocks. Sprayed brown asbestos from the structural beams has been redistributing itself through the building over the years, moving through ducts and panels and no doubt being dislodged when storms sway the block. When wipe tests were done in cupboards by Walerton and Elgin Community Homes (WECH) who hope to take over the blocks as a community housing scheme, they found many samples contaminated with asbestos. An independent consultant employed by them pronounced the flats a health hazard under the Public Health Act.

Letters in the possession of the London Hazards Centre show that Westminster knew of the problem in 1983. The then Westminster Scientific Adviser reported after inspection that removal of the asbestos was necessary. Even the most compromise solutions pointed out that the flats were not really suitable for children. Nevertheless Westminster continued to use the flats to house existing tenants plus for five further years, 'short life tenants', and for the last year, homeless families. These families were not even warned not to drill the asbestos walls.

After yet more independent and damning reports commissioned by WECH the council has finally agreed to empty the block by July but plans to brick the blocks up, indefinitely postponing the long term cost of removing the asbestos.

WECH want to 'buy' the blocks at negative valuation - ie. get paid by the Council to take them - and use the payment to remove the asbestos and provide community housing. But Westminster is resisting providing sufficient funds and WECH is waiting for the decision of the District Valuer on the amount due for repairs. There may be many more tower blocks with sprayed asbestos in Britain; could this be the tip of a new iceberg?

'SUMMER ON THE ESTATE'

The Kingshold Estate, Hackney is the subject of six programmes to be shown by London Weekend Television in June. The issue of asbestos on the estate runs heavily through the series as it follows the build up of a new campaign which London Hazards Centre has been supporting (see Daily Hazard 28, October 1990). Provisional transmission time, 10.30 pm. every Sunday from June 9th.

Dangerous substances ditched by the Danes

As a result of the International Hazards conference, held in Copenhagen last September, the Centre has established essential links with several hazards activists in European countries.

Denmark's health and safety standards are particularly impressive, and the Centre is now working with the Danish occupational health service to find safer alternatives for hazardous substances commonly used in the U.K.

The COSHH Regs impose a duty on employers to assess all substances for risks to workers' health and to prevent exposure to hazardous substances by substituting less or non hazardous substances or processes. This is fraught with difficulty, since substituting substances thought to be less hazardous can result in new problems. Substances which do the same job often have similar properties and hazards, and there may not be enough information to evaluate new substances or processes for long term health effects.

One example is substituting manufactured mineral fibres for asbestos. This may reduce the health risks from deadly asbestos, but there is increasingly clear evidence that MMMFs can cause cancers, as well as respiratory diseases and skin problems. Toxicologist Lena Hoglund, from the Danish occupational health service, visited the Centre in March to discuss substitution, and had a few success stories to tell.

600 registered printers in Denmark (3.5% of the total) have been compensated for brain dam-

age due to exposure to organic solvents. Exposure occurred mainly during the cleaning of printing equipment. Printers investigating alternative cleaners looked at vegetable oils, and found that soya bean oil is very good for some purposes, but too thick for others. Working with researchers at the Copenhagen technical college, they found that soya oil was just as effective as the solvents and even better in some cases, but it did have to be used in a different way and in much smaller quantities. The printers then worked with a Danish company to develop a better alternative made from soya oil and coconut oil, called NatuRen. It has been tested in 27 printing works over the past 18 months, with very good results.

Laboratory workers in Denmark learnt from the printers that there were alternatives to organic solvents, and did some research on substituting olive oil and coconut oil for xylene. After working with an oil mill they got the formulation right and other labs are now trying it out.

Danish painters have had great success in getting recognition of the carcinogenic and neurotoxic effects of paints. They have succeeded in banning the use of many solvent based paints in most processes. However there are also health hazards from the water based paints, so there is still a great deal of work going on to make further progress, not only in construction painting but in a wide range of manufacturing processes.

The Danish experience shows that the elimination of hazardous substances is possible, but may not only involve changing the chemicals, but also changing the process or developing a whole new method of working. This requires a lot more research and information, and strong trade union organisation using COSHH to the fullest extent.

There are a number of new publications on substitution (in English!) available from Denmark - for further details contact the Centre.

PAINTS

Part 1 physical hazards, organising, the law.

Twenty million tonnes of paint are used world-wide each year, about half on buildings and most of the rest on manufactured goods. Upwards of 100,000 people are employed as painters in the UK and a large number of people use paints in DIY. Painting as an occupation has been classified as carcinogenic by the World Health Organisation.

Part 1 of this two-part factsheet deals with physical hazards to the users of paint and with organising and using the law for protection.

Part 2 will cover chemical hazards.

Paint consists of finely divided pigment particles and a binder (resin) usually suspended in a volatile solvent but occasionally as a powder. Other materials may be added to impart special characteristics.



Fires and explosions

Using solvent-based paints releases vapours such as acetone, cyclohexane, ethyl acetate, hexane, methyl ethyl ketone (MEK) and white spirit. Between certain concentrations (the 'explosion limits') the solvent/air mixture is explosive: the explosion limits for toluene, for example, are 1.3% to 7%. The solvent also has to be above its flash point temperature: almost all solvent flash points are below room temperature, in fact many are below freezing point. Given these two conditions, flames, sparks, or hot surfaces can cause explosions. At a higher temperature (auto-ignition temperature) the vapour can catch fire spontaneously.

Effective ventilation is therefore essential. Ventilation should dilute or remove flammable vapour to a concentration of less than a quarter of the lower explosion limit. For electrical equipment, external surfaces must be kept below auto-ignition temperature, and sparks must be prevented or vapour kept out of the equipment.

Electrostatic wet paint spraying is a special fire hazard because it creates high electrical potentials. Spark discharges to earth may occur, igniting flammable materials. Electrostatic spraying should only take place in purpose-designed compartments with appropriate ventilation and anti-static floors. An automatic sprinkler system should be installed, supplemented by dry powder fire extinguishers. Conveyors, jigs, paint and solvent supply systems and the

electrostatic generator should all be designed to prevent sparking. Conducting objects in the spraying compartment must be earthed. All workers, including those doing cleaning and maintenance, must be fully trained.

Storage

Large quantities of paints should be stored in metal tanks or drums. Both should be kept well clear of perimeter boundaries, process operations and buildings. Tanks should be situated in the open and their vent pipes fitted with flame arresters. They must have a valve beneath to allow complete drainage, and they must therefore always be supported far enough above ground to permit this. The supports should be of materials with a fire resistance of 2 hours. All metal parts should be earthed.

Drums should be stored in the open in a fenced-off area or in a detached non-combustible building. Stacks should be as small as possible with clear spaces on all sides. Flammable materials should not be stored with other goods. Easy access and suitable hydrants must be provided for the fire brigade, with virtually unlimited supplies of water. Smoking, naked flames and electrical appliances should be forbidden near the storage area and rubbish should not be allowed to accumulate. 'No Smoking' signs should be prominently displayed.

Smaller quantities of paint should be stored and carried in safety cans. The quantity in use should be kept to a minimum. Containers should be securely closed and kept in fire-resisting enclosures when not in use. Emptied containers should be closed and placed in a metal bin until disposal.

Application methods

Paint can be applied by brush, roller, dipping or various kinds of spraying. The main hazard of brushes and rollers is exposure to solvent fumes.

Spraying can be carried out by airless, compressed air or electrostatic methods. In

addition to the fire risk, hazards arise from lack of ventilation, inadequate separation from other processes, injection of paint into the skin, and the use of especially toxic materials such as twin-pack isocyanate or epoxy-based paints.

Airless spraying requires the least solvent but effective ventilation is still necessary because toxic or flammable concentrations of vapour build up rapidly. Spraying should be conducted in booths or other enclosed spaces sealed to prevent the escape of fumes into other work areas. Booths should be provided with a water-wash system to trap paint and solvent fumes from the air being extracted. They should be sited against external walls to minimise the length of ducts to the atmosphere.

Workers required to enter tanks or confined spaces must be provided with breathing apparatus in addition to mechanical ventilation. An air-flow detector should be fitted to the inlet or exhaust and linked to an alarm.

Regular cleaning of spray-spaces is essential to avoid the accumulation of residues. There must be an adequate work method for clearing blocked spray guns: workers have lost fingers as a result of paint injections.

Organising and using the law

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, employers have a duty to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of their employees. They are obliged to provide information on the hazards of the materials they use and on the safety measures required. Safety representatives of recognised unions are entitled to carry out inspections of the workplace and should do so at least every three months. The law is enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or the local authority Environmental Health Department, depending on the type of premises.

Paints are covered by the Control of Substances

Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations 1988, except for lead-based paints, covered by the Control of Lead at Work Regulations 1980. The COSHH Regulations require employers to assess the hazards of materials and processes. For paints, this requires collection of toxicity data and air tests on processes. After the assessment, the employer is obliged first to substitute, or if this is not possible, to control, or if this is not possible, finally to protect against dangerous substances.

At present, there is a growing trend to substitute solvent-based by water-based paints. Control measures largely involve the provision of local or general ventilation. Protective equipment - goggles, gloves, boots, overalls, masks, breathing apparatus, etc. - must be sufficient to deal with the hazard, but should only be used when substitution or control measures are not possible. Safety measures must be introduced by consultation and negotiation with workers' representatives and not by unilateral decision of the employer.

Under the Lead Regulations, regular blood tests are required and workers with a blood lead level greater than 70 mg per 100 ml must be withdrawn from work with lead.

Storage of liquids with flash points below 32 °C, i.e. most paint solvents, is governed by the Highly Flammable Liquids and Liquefied Petroleum Gases Regulations 1972, which are enforced by the HSE. Storage, labelling and transport of petroleum spirit, a common ingredient of paints, is controlled by the Petroleum (Consolidation) Act 1928, which is enforced by local authorities.

Transport of dangerous substances in general comes under the Classification, Packaging and Labelling of Dangerous Substances Regulations 1984 and the Road Transport (Carriage of Dangerous Substances in Packages, etc.) Regulations 1986.



NEW PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE IN JUNE

BASIC HEALTH AND SAFETY: WORKERS' RIGHTS AND HOW TO WIN THEM

Price £6.00 Reductions for bulk orders, see front page for further details

CORPORATE MANSLAUGHTER, INQUESTS AND DEATHS AT WORK

Price £3.00

In conjunction with the organisation Inquest, the LHC is publishing a booklet on manslaughter, inquests and workplace fatalities. It exposes how a combination of three institutional failures - the lack of police scrutiny, inadequate Health and Safety Executive investigation and a cursory enquiry at the coroner's inquest - allows reckless and negligent directors and managers to gain immunity from any form of criminal prosecution. The booklet suggests a reform of investigative and prosecuting practice and changes in the criminal law. The booklet is useful to bereaved families, safety reps, trade unions and advice centres and gives advice on what they can do to ensure proper criminal accountability.

Available from LHC and Inquest: Ground Floor, Alexandra National House, 330 Seven Sisters Road, N4 2PJ 081-802-7430

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

Set of factsheets from the Daily Hazard £5.00.

To date there are a total of 15 factsheets covering;

- ▲ 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. ▲ heat ▲ paint ▲ Electricity regulations

Videos available for hire: ask for list

Youth rights

Hazards Centre worker Fiona Murie (above) explains workers' rights to health and safety at Hackney Trade Union Young People's Fair in March. Fiona was being interviewed by local young people learning media skills.

Elsewhere, drama sessions based on the Match Girls' strike of 1888 showed how workers have struggled and organised to obtain, improve and enforce those rights. The Hackney Trade Union Support Unit organised this successful event and has also held health and safety training and translated hazards information into Turkish and Kurdish for local people. Despite all the Unit's good work, Hackney Council has now cut its funding from five to one and a half posts.

RSI

The Second National Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) Conference was held in Nottingham on 16th March. Organised by the Nottingham RSI Support Group with assistance from the London Hazards Centre, it attracted more than 150 sufferers, trade union representatives, doctors, solicitors and others.

In the main sessions, Dr. James Turner of the Robens Institute covered the ergonomic aspects of RSI and Dr. Richard Pearson of St. Bartholemew's Hospital and the Musicians' and Keyboard Clinic dealt with medical treatment. Dr. Pearson, who is very confident that RSI can be cured, accepts NHS patients at Barts Hospital. The Conference is likely to become an annual event and contribute to building the powerful campaign which is needed on the issue.

CENTRE NEWS

LONDON HAZARDS CENTRE SERVICES

The Centre provides:

- ▲ Health and safety training
- ▲ Speakers for meetings
- ▲ Articles for bulletins
- ▲ Technical information for compensation claims
- ▲ Inspections and reports

Rates by negotiation, contact us for further information.

GRANTS COMMITTEE CUTS CENTRE AGAIN

For the fourth year in succession, the London Boroughs Grants Committee has cut the Centre's grant. This time the cut is ten per cent. As we go to press, the Committee has failed to set a budget, so we don't know when the grant will come through. Until the money is released, we are living on our reserves.

Please lobby your London local councillors to ensure that the LBGS sets an adequate budget immediately.

HAZARDS CAMPAIGN WEEK JUNE 15-21

Events include workshops, meetings and a demonstration at the Department of Energy on the abuse of pregnant workers. Contact London Hazards Centre for details

London Hazards Centre
Headland House
308 Grays Inn Rd,
London WC1X 8DS
071-837 5605



Funded by



London Hazards Centre Trust is funded by