

THE DAILY HAZARD

NATIONAL HAZARDS WEEK

The second annual National Hazards Campaign Week took place on 15-23 June. Health and safety activists across the country organised events to publicise the need to 'Remember the Dead and Fight for the Living'

Women rally to defend reproductive rights



Jo Richardson tells a rally of trade unionists and women's groups that British women need the protection of the European Communities 'Maternity Directive'.

A fair deal for pregnant workers

In London, Hazards Campaign and women's organisations including the entire National Women's Committee of the National Graphical Association and representatives from the Maternity Alliance, Women's Environmental Network and the Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Information Centre, combined to demonstrate against attempts by the Government to undermine a new European Community Directive giving new rights to pregnant workers.

'Britain is bottom of the league when it comes to protecting the health and safety of working women who are pregnant,' Jo Richardson MP, Labour spokesperson on women's issues, told the rally.

Anita Pollack, MEP for London South West, denounced the Government for 'trying to tear this Directive in half. Once again we are dragging our heels while the rest of Europe is better off.' Demonstrators delivered an open letter to Michael Howard, Secretary of State for Employment, calling on the Government to abandon its efforts to block the Directive.

But just a few days later at the European Council of Ministers meeting on 25 June, the British Government continued its stalling tactics. The UK is alone in opposing European Commission proposals which include

protection from exposure to dangerous substances in order to avoid reproductive hazards. Although the UK cannot veto the proposed law, it is trying to bring parts of it under the procedure by which it would be able to do so.

The right to 'stop the job'

At a press conference at the House of Commons, Tony Lloyd MP, Labour Party spokesperson on health and safety, called for safety reps to be given the right to 'stop the job' if workers were having to work in dangerous conditions.

Lloyd said a future Labour government would make companies give one of their directors specific responsibility for health and safety to force management to take the issue seriously.

John Edmonds, General Secretary of the GMB Union launched a stinging attack upon the Government for 'actively undermining plans to make Britain a safer place for people to work'. He also announced that the GMB will step up its 'Tackling Teno' campaign to draw public attention to the number of workers suffering from repetitive strain injuries and how they can be protected.

● Other Hazards Week activities in London included the Construction Safety Campaign AGM; a dayschool on safety reps' rights organised by the Trade Union Studies Unit at South West London college in conjunction with the TUC; a seminar on the European Community Directive on VDUs organised by City Centre; and the launch of the London Hazards Centre's new publication *Basic Health and Safety*.

FOR LLWYD

Llwyd Nicholls died on 28th April at the age of sixteen.

Readers of our book *Toxic Treatments* will remember Llwyd. He developed aplastic anaemia at the age of thirteen after his home was sprayed with the wood preservative lindane. Aplastic anaemia attacks the production of the blood cells which carry oxygen and fight off infections. For almost five years, through a long series of complex and gruelling attempts at treatment, Llwyd resisted the disease. By Christmas 1990 he was almost permanently in hospital, as a series of infections overcame his body's progressively weaker resistance.

Llwyd's parents, Ellen and Adrian Nicholls, are suing the company which sprayed lindane in their home. Their goal is to call the wood preservatives industry to account and to publicise the hazard. 'Until doctors ask the right questions, no one will make the connections between chemicals and their illness,' says Ellen.

Recently some companies have denounced the chemicals they once defended. But building societies, architects and surveyors are still insisting on the use of lindane and other poisons as a substitute for proper design and materials. And despite the 1986 Pesticides Regulations there is still no significant monitoring of the wood preservatives treatment industry.

The Centre will continue to press for change. And so will Adrian and Ellen Nicholls. As we said in our dedication to *Toxic Treatments*: For Llwyd, and the future.

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Concrete evidence unseats asbestos cowboys

Life for Tony Bird and his colleagues at the Head Office of the Shepherd's Bush Housing Association in Ealing became a little too exciting one day in April when a lump of concrete crashed through an office ceiling.

The lump was part of an asbestos cement roof which was being removed by contractors Four Seasons Roofing. Housing Association staff below were getting on with their jobs. Management had told them that the roof contained 'only a very small percentage' of white asbestos which was 'quite safe'.

Housing Director and MSF member Tony Bird decided that 'quite safe' was less than accurate. He protested to Executive Director Peter Norman, who had set up the work, and contacted Ealing Council's Environmental Health Department. The Environmental Health Department didn't come to see what was going on. And Tony found himself threatened with disciplinary suspension for 'undermining management authority'.

Tony, however, doesn't give up easily. Over the next couple of days he contacted the Hazards Centre, got us to brief him on the Asbestos at Work Regulations, and had a piece of the roof analysed by a reliable firm. The analyst reported that the roof was not five but thirty per cent asbestos - a very different story. By the time of his disciplinary hearing, Tony had persuaded an Environmental Health Officer to pay a visit, and the EHO had instantly evacuated the building for decontamination.

The whole story, as it eventually emerged, was a classic. Four Seasons Roofing are not members of ARCA, the asbestos removal trade association. Their usual asbestos analysts, Asbestos Surveys Ltd, is not on the government sponsored NAMAS list of approved analysts. Asbestos Surveys claimed to have analysed the roof before work started, but no report of the analysis has been produced. No assessment of the likely hazards (under the Asbestos at Work Regulations)

had been lodged with the local authority. Power tools were used to cut bolts in the roof, shaking fibres loose, and fragments were dumped in an open skip in the car park.

Tony Bird was not suspended. On the contrary, Peter Norman has resigned. The Management Committee of the Housing Association commissioned an independent investigation. Ealing Environmental Health Department provided a report for the contractors detailing the shortcomings of their procedure, but at the moment there is no word of any prosecution. Tony's union, MSF, supported him throughout.

● A petition for a complete ban on the import and manufacture of

asbestos is being circulated nationally by Hull Asbestos Action Group until the end of August.

Details from the Centre or HAAG, 123 Cambridge St, Anlaby Road, Hull HU3 2EE (0482-223287)

● Asbestos cement is covered in the LHC Factpack (see back page)

NUT cracks cancerous cleaner

The COSHH Regulations have been in full force for over 18 months. You'd think that it would be impossible for a public sector employer to use a chemical without regard to the regs. But if it hadn't been for Hackney NUT and the Hackney Direct Labour Organisation unions, this is exactly what would have happened in Hackney's schools this spring.

School floors take a lot of wear. They have to be regularly

stripped and re-sealed. The education authority's surveyor proposed to use a product called Arpal Line Up and to do the work during school hours. Line Up contains dichloromethane, a reproductive hazard, narcotic and suspected human carcinogen which readily evaporates to contaminate the air.

Quite apart from the doubtful wisdom of using toxic chemicals near children, Hackney Council has banned the use of carcinogenic chemicals. Hackney's DLO workers, following this agreement, refused to use the stuff.

The surveyor, having ignored one council guideline, decided to go for broke. Instead of looking for a safer alternative, he hired contractors to do the job. As a concession to the hazard he specified increased protective equipment (under COSHH this should be the last resort - see box on opposite page).

By the time the contractors turned up to do the job at Stoke Newington School, the NUT members were ready. They had obtained chemical data from the Hazards Centre, and followed that up by arranging for the Centre to run a training session on COSHH and chemicals. They refused to let the contractors in.

The DLO unions rounded it up by presenting the council with a safer method, roughing the old surface and then cleaning it off with sugar soap - a well tried old system which brings no profits to the chemical industry. By this time the council Safety Officer had admitted that Line Up is a carcinogen, and the surveyor was left with no option but to climb down. Since when the DLO workers have been at it with the sugar soap.

The unions are pursuing formal complaints about the way that potential dangers to the health of staff and pupils at Stoke Newington School were ignored, and particularly:

- disregard of the COSHH Regs and the Health and Safety at Work Act;
- failure to comply with the no carcinogens clause in Hackney's Chemical Policy;
- the giving of misleading information to safety reps;
- the use of contractors in contravention of Council policy.

COSHH and Chemicals Policies are covered in the LHC Factpack see back page.



Tenants of two tower blocks in Watney Market marched on Bethnal Green town hall in April to demand to be moved out of their asbestos riddled homes. Under Tower Hamlets Council's decentralisation policy, the tenants can only be re-housed in Wapping Neighbourhood, which has no available properties. 'If we worked with the same asbestos levels we have to live with,' said Carol Silverman of Gelston Tenants' Association, 'we would have to dress in protective clothing like this all the time.'

PAINTS

Part 2 chemicals and disease

Painters run a high risk of illness. The World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) reported in 1989 that painting as an occupation is carcinogenic. Painters suffer cancers at 20 per cent above the average and lung cancers at 40 per cent above the average. Their children too get cancer more often than is usual. Painters also suffer from dermatitis, bronchitis and asthma, and nervous system illness. There are effects on vital organs (liver, kidneys, heart, etc.) and on the blood. There are reproductive hazards to both men and women.

Painters are exposed by breathing vapour from solvents and other volatile components, mist from spray painting, and dust from powders. Skin exposure is also common.

Thousands of chemicals are used in paints as pigments and fillers, binders and resins, solvents or special-purpose additives. All are toxic and should be subjected to the COSHH procedure. The table lists the health hazards of some of the commonest or most toxic paint ingredients. But don't assume that materials not in the table are safe.

Paint Part 1, published in *Daily Hazard* No. 31, dealt with physical hazards, organising and the law.

Solvents

Most paint is carried in a liquid which is designed to evaporate. Most of the hydrocarbon solvents used for this can harm the central nervous system, causing headaches, tremors, loss of co-ordination and narcosis. Sufficient exposure can cause permanent brain damage: in Denmark, 'Painter's dementia' is an industrial disease recognised for compensation. In a recent survey by the construction union UCATT 186 out of 249 painters reported headaches. Particular solvents cause cancer, miscarriages, birth defects, allergy and dermatitis.

Objections to the use of organic solvents in paints have led to calls for the substitution of water-based for organic solvent-based paints. In Denmark, water-based paints already account for over 90% of all paints used.

The Paint Research Association, in a study funded by the HSE, reported in 1991 that water-based paints are a reliable alternative. A number of local authorities have agreed to change, and this should be extended to outside contractors. Painters should also watch for solvents in thinners and strippers.

Resins and Binders

The most hazardous resins are the 'two-pack' epoxy and urethane materials. They require the mixing on site of epoxy and isocyanate derivatives with a curing agent, often an amine. Epoxys and isocyanates are highly toxic and are also sensitisers, so that subsequent exposure to very small quantities of chemical can trigger severe symptoms.

The most commonly used resins, alkyds and acrylics, are preformed rather than two-pack. They can still cause skin irritation. Also, they may contain small quantities of precursor chemicals left over from manufacture.

Pigments and fillers.

A huge number of metals and metal derivatives are used as paint pigments. Titanium dioxide is now the almost universal white pigment and accounts for about 60 per cent of all pigments in current use. Formerly thought to be relative-

ly safe, it is now known to be a respiratory and skin irritant and is being investigated as a possible carcinogen. Lead-based paint is now rarely used but precautions are required in removing it from older buildings. Organic dyes are

often carcinogens as well as causing dermatitis and respiratory illness. Fillers, such as talc, can result in lung disease.

Additives

Paint additives are used to confer special properties such as

mould-resistance. They do not form more than one to two per cent of the product. But such highly toxic chemicals as formaldehyde or the pesticide tributyltin oxide may be used.

Health Effects of Common and Especially Toxic Paint Ingredients

Ingredient	Health Effects
Solvents	
White Spirit ¹	Central nervous system (CNS) depressant, i.e. causes headaches, nausea, giddiness, drowsiness, unconsciousness, behavioural disorders, encephalopathy, dementia. Nose and respiratory irritant. Dermatitis. Co-carcinogen leading to skin cancers. Miscarriages.
Toluene	CNS depressant. Causes dermatitis. Reproductive hazard: teratogenic (birth defects), embryotoxic (miscarriages).
Xylene	CNS depressant. Causes vomiting, cough, catarrh. Skin and eye irritation. Embryotoxic.
Benzene ²	CNS depressant. Causes anaemia, leukaemia and multiple myeloma. Skin and pulmonary irritant. Reproductive effects.
Methyl Ethyl Ketone (MEK)	CNS depressant. Nausea and vomiting. Eye, skin and respiratory tract irritant. Sensitiser.
Glycol Ethers & Glycol Ether Esters	CNS depressant. Nausea, vomiting, abdominal pains. Lung, liver and kidney damage. Anaemia and depression of bone marrow. Embryotoxic, teratogenic.
Resins and binders	
Isocyanates eg Toluene di-isocyanate	Severe respiratory irritant. Sensitiser producing severe asthma. Skin and eye irritant.
Epichlorohydrin (an epoxy monomer)	Severe eye and respiratory tract irritation. Skin burns leading to sensitisation. CNS depressant. Damage to nose, throat, lungs, liver and blood. Suspected carcinogen.
Glycidyl Ethers (types of epoxy monomer)	Skin and eye irritants. Sensitisers. CNS depressant.
Vinyl resins eg polyvinyl acetate	Skin irritant. Damages lungs, liver and blood. Possible carcinogen.
Pigments and Fillers	
Titanium Dioxide	Skin irritant. Respiratory illness.
Chrome and Chromates	Lung and nasal cancer. Perforation of nasal septum. Skin ulcers and dermatitis.
Iron Oxide	Respiratory illness. Suspected carcinogen.
Lead and Lead Compounds	Fatigue, headaches, muscle pain, CNS depressant. Vital organ damage. Reproductive effects for men and women. Children specially vulnerable.
Aluminium Powder	Lung disease. Possible brain damage.
Talc	Fibrogenic: chronic obstruction of the lungs.

1. A mixture of aliphatic hydrocarbons. The composition varies but the components all have similar properties. Called Stoddard Solvent in the USA.

2. Usually found as an impurity in other solvents such as white spirit, toluene or xylene.

The COSHH Regulations

The law says: Employers must assess the hazard of all workplace chemicals and then, in strict order of priority:

- 1 substitute a safer process or substance,
- 2 or control it by enclosure or ventilation,
- 3 or, only if other steps fail, provide protective clothing.

● There are factsheets on COSHH in LHC's *Basic health and Safety*, and *Factpack*

LONDON HAZARDS SEMINARS

Workers have to enforce COSHH

Over a year after the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations came into full force, health and safety representatives need greater training and stronger workplace organisation to make sure that the law is put into practice. This was the main conclusion of participants at the Centre's seminars on COSHH in May and June.

'Even where employers have made some headway on assessments, little has been done about control or substitution,' Alan Dalton of Hazards Campaign told the seminar. One reason is weak enforcement: there were only 15 prosecutions and 28 convictions, with an average fine of only £604, in the first year.

Alan Russell, Building Works Joint Unions Convenor at the Direct Labour Organisation, London Borough of Hackney, described how the unions' fight for the substitution of solvent-based paints and wood preservatives has led to a reduction from 600 to 200 chemicals used by the council. 'People only listened when we started quoting the COSHH Regulations at them. The first question should be: does this substance or process have to be used at all? Make them prove they really need it,' emphasised Alan.

'One of the biggest problems in offices is people's attitude', said Dave Drury, NALGO Health and Safety Officer at the London Borough of Ealing. 'They think that COSHH is about factories. But the substances used in offices for reprographic processes and cleaning are often hazardous. The most dangerous situation is when contractors are brought in to do a job.'

Discussion revealed a desperate

need for training and information, especially examples of good practice in substitution and control. Above all, it was felt that COSHH will not get implemented just because it is on the statute book, however well trained and aware reps are. Union organisation at the workplace is funda-

mentally important. Community and tenants organisations also have an important role to play in monitoring local authorities and their contractors.

● A full report of the seminars is available for £2.50 including p&p. A COSHH Factsheet is part of the LHC's Factpack (see publications list).

'Our information will change your life,' claims Hazards Centre worker Hugh MacGrillen at the launch of the LHC's 'Basic Health and Safety'. Dave Drury of Ealing NALGO can only agree.



Know your health and safety rights

'Last week our offices were sprayed for an ant infestation while we were sitting at our desks - are management allowed to do this?'

Like many others who contact the Centre, the safety rep who asked this question needed to have basic information on health and safety law easily to hand.

Basic Health and Safety: Workers' rights and how to win them, launched by the Centre in June at the start of National Hazards Week, aims to meet that need.

The 11 factsheets in the handy loose-leaf folder cover: small workplaces; registering the workplace; employers' liability insurance; the working environment; first aid; fire precautions; accidents and sickness; safety reps and safety committees; hazardous substances; contacts and resources.

Basic Health and Safety is intended to be an essential resource for safety reps, shop stewards, advice workers, tutors and anyone else who needs a user-friendly source of health and safety law.

Publications from the London Hazards Centre

- *Basic Health and Safety: Workers' rights and how to win them*. £6.00 set of all 4 office hazards publications below - £12.00
- *Sick Building Syndrome: Causes, effects and control*. £4.50
- *Repetition Strain Injuries: Hidden harm from over-use*. £6.00 (£3.00 to trade union and community groups.)
- *VDU Hazards Handbook: A worker's guide to the effects to new technology*. £5.45.
- *Fluorescent Lighting: A health hazard overhead*. £5.00 (£2.00 to trade union and community groups).
- *Toxic Treatments: Wood preservative hazards at work and at home*. £5.95.
- *Health and Safety for Women Workers in the Cleaning and Catering Industries*. £5.00 (£2.00 to trade union and community groups).
- *Factpack: Set of factsheets from the Daily Hazard*. £5.00. ▲ photocopiers and laser printers ▲ legionnaires disease ▲ formaldehyde ▲ insect infestations and insecticides ▲ wood preservatives ▲ chemicals policies ▲ Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations ▲ European Community law ▲ manufactured mineral fibres ▲ asbestos cement ▲ cement ▲ heat ▲ paint ▲ Electricity Regulations. Prices include postage. Discounts for bulk orders.



USING THE CENTRE

Health and safety training

During the last two months the Centre has provided training for bank workers, housing caretakers, hospital maintenance workers, nurses, homeworkers and a law centre. Our COSHH course for Hackney teachers led to the banning of a toxic chemical in schools - see story on page 2.

The Centre also provides:

- Technical information for compensation claims
 - Inspections and reports
 - Speakers for meetings
 - Media items and briefings
- Contact us to find out what we can do for your workplace.**

Seminars

The Centre will be organising more seminars to provoke discussion on major health and safety issues. Our future programme include **pesticides and new VDU regulations**. We invite you to suggest other subjects.

Videos

Are available for hire: ask for list

Affiliate!

The Centre needs your support to survive. Affiliate, to receive *The Daily Hazard* and other information on our activities. Rates according to your resources. If you're affiliated, encourage someone else to.

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