

# THE DAILY HAZARD

## Council workers win pesticides ban

Trade union members in Hackney Council's Building Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) have negotiated bans on the use of six deadly pesticides. They are Dieldrin, Pentachlorophenol (PCP), Tributyl Tin Oxide (TBTO), Copper Chrome Arsenate (CCA) and Gamma HCH (Lindane) — all used for wood preservation — plus the weedkiller Paraquat. The ban was agreed in July 1991 by Hackney Councillors following recommendations by council officers and trade union representatives. The decision is the culminating achievement of negotiations stretching back to 1987.

### HOW IT ALL BEGAN

The story started in 1987 when council carpenters noticed that most of the wood they were working with, both structural timber and internal joinery, gave off a chemical odour. At the end of the working day carpenters' and labourers' skin and clothes smelled of chemicals. Fumes, dust and wood shavings irritated workers' throats, eyes and skin and they developed headaches and nausea. They asked their Trade Union Safety Representative and Convenor to investigate. Combining data sheets with information from the London Hazards Centre, the safety reps found the chemicals to be central nervous system poisons, reproductive hazards, skin and respiratory irritants and cancer agents. They can be absorbed through the skin, breathed into the lungs as vapour and dust, and taken into the blood stream through cuts and splinters.

Management justified the chemicals as a preventive measure — just in case the timber suffered wet or dry rot, or insect attack. But as they researched further, the reps concluded that pre-treatment and remedial treatment of timber were usually unnecessary. What was needed

in fact was good building design and maintenance. Preventing water getting to the timber was the way to stop the rot. The health of tenants, workers and their families was being put at risk for the profits of the chemical industry.

### NEGOTIATING A POLICY

Management prevaricated. Eventually the carpenters forced the issue by refusing to work on interior doors that had been treated with PCP. Other workers turned away lorries of timber still dripping with uncured CCA.

Trade Union Reps decided on a long-term strategy, using the forthcoming Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations to press for a policy on the use of all chemicals. Negotiations were initially obstructed by officers, notably architects who didn't like builders telling them their job. Councillors and Directors, however, shared the workers' concerns. It was agreed to set up a working party to look into the whole question of the use of chemicals, comprising council officers, union reps and tenants reps.

The working party backed the union view that Council should

adopt a policy on its duties under COSHH.

The policy statement lays down that no carcinogens, teratogens or mutagens shall be used by council employees or contractors unless it is impossible to find an alternative method. In default of an alternative method there must be a written safe system of work. Any necessary personal protective equipment is to be readily available and properly maintained and used. These conditions applied to contractors and their employees as well as to the council and its workers.

### IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY

A vast number of substances fell within the policy and a prioritised programme was set up to work through them. Eggshell paint was banned because of its high solvent content and the consequent risk of nervous system damage and cancer. The use of manufactured mineral fibres as cavity wall insulation was banned on new build projects because of the cancer risk. Sub-

stitutes were found in the form of water based paints and fire proof, CFC free, polystyrene batts.

The timber preservation chemicals proved difficult. Council architects argued stubbornly that the building regulations required pre-treatment. But they found the ground cut away under their feet as more and more of their fellow 'professionals' set up to make a living out of chemical-free timber design. Finally this summer they lost the argument.

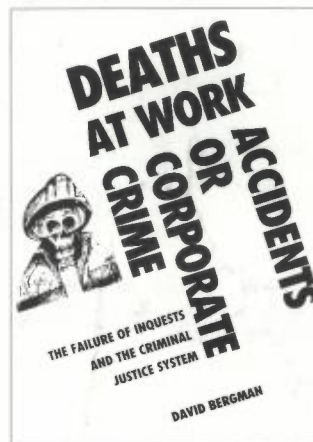
Alan Russell, DLO Convenor, said 'at times it was an uphill struggle but it was worth it. Workers now have an effective system whereby they can challenge the use of dangerous substances and materials, substitute safer materials or work methods and not have to risk their health to keep a job.'

For further information see the LHC's book, *Toxic Treatments Wood Preservative Hazards At Work & In The Home* (£5.95 from the Centre), plus Factsheets on Chemicals Policies and COSHH in LHC's 'FactPack' (£5 from the Centre).

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◀ This LHC-backed pamphlet grabbed media and public attention — photo story on page 2.



# Time to get together

There is no general Labour Movement forum in London in which interested people can gather to discuss health and safety issues.

The South East Region of the TUC does not have a health and safety subcommittee. To the extent there is co-operation among the unions outside individual workplaces, it is likely to be driven by their merger objectives as much as by hazards faced in common. And there are a range of other bodies and individuals active on hazards who are in a position to contribute to the evolution of health and safety policy: trades councils, trade union resource centres, occupational health projects, specialist campaigns, voluntary organisations, doctors, lawyers.

At the same time, there are a number of factors for which a co-ordinated approach would pay dividends. There are obvious advantages in the exchange of information on hazards particularly in areas where employment conditions are changing rapidly. Health and safety law is growing in scope and complexity all the time and needs to be evaluated for the purposes of both education and organising campaigns. The

weakness of the enforcement agencies is increasingly apparent and a broad campaign is needed for improvements in the

law and for strengthening the agencies. There is also a need for a broad-based body which would take on the job of organis-

## Dead workers' families fight back



Andrew Ward

Jasmin Zimnowodski (second left) and Irene Black (right), sisters of Jan Leadbetter whose death at the Bovis site at The Old Bailey led to a fine of just £1,000, joined with solicitor Louise Christian (left) and Peter Lenehan of UCATT at the launch of Death at Work. Nine bereaved relatives representing a newly formed support group shared a

platform with Tony Lloyd, Labour spokesperson on health and safety.

**Deaths at Work — Accidents or Corporate Crime?** By David Bergman for the London Hazards Centre and Inquest. £4.00 incl p&p: orders with cheque to WEA Publications, 9 Upper Berkeley St, London W1H 8BY.

ing events in London such as National Hazards Week. This is the conclusion we have reached at the Hazards Centre as a result of organising this event over the past couple of years. It has shown us that there is a critical mass of hazards activists working in a wide variety of organisations across London who are looking for opportunities to combine their efforts.

For all these reasons this seems the moment to take the initiative. This Autumn the Centre will initiate discussions with a wide range of individuals and organisations with an interest in health and safety in London on the prospects of setting up a formal group. At the moment there are no cut and dried ideas of what role such a forum might play or how it might be organised and financed. What is common ground is to build on what has already been achieved in information exchange and education and in campaigning. The Centre hopes to facilitate the next steps forward of the hazards movement in London.

# Safety squeezed in Tube

Since the Kings Cross fire in November 1987, London Underground Limited (LUL) has embarked on a massive programme to enhance safety in general and fire safety in particular. Such, at any rate, is the claim of the Railways Inspectorate, the department of the Health and Safety Executive Inspectorate responsible for enforcing safety on the railways.

In fact, on no less than 650 occasions in 1989, the fire brigade was called out to deal with incidents on the Tube. There were a further 2500 incidents dealt with by LUL staff (Railway Inspectorate figures). Monthly figures for 1991 show that this level is being maintained. LUL figures for the year to August 1991 give a total of 5,800 fire alarm incidents, of which 1,200 turned out to be actual fires.

Already this year there have been two major incidents which resulted in hundreds of passengers being trapped underground for hours. LUL was sharply criticised for the failure of its emergency procedures in the official report on one of

these, the incident on the Central Line in February.

LUL prepares for such occasions with simulated evacuation exercises, in which a train filled with LUL managers and executives is stopped in a tunnel, and the 'passengers' are left to find their own way out. The results, not surprisingly, have been described as a fiasco. Since guards were abolished, there is an emergency procedure for evacuation if a driver is cut off by fire from passengers at the rear. In that case, a passenger is supposed to take charge and lead his band to safety!

Fire, however, is far from the only hazard on the Underground.

As both track and rolling stock become increasingly ancient and maintenance spending is trimmed, speed restrictions are having to be introduced over wider and wider sections of the network. Dust has always been a major problem and levels now are slightly higher than 15 years ago. On the whole underground section of the Northern Line, from Highgate or Hampstead to Colliers Wood, quartz levels exceed the Occupational Exposure Limit (OEL) by anything up to four times the permitted maximum. The average level is almost twice the OEL. Exposure to quartz is a major cause of silicosis. LUL claims that matters will improve with the replacement of quartz brake blocks but has nothing to say on the years of exposure of both workers and passengers.

On the Victoria Line, noise insulating material in drivers' cabs has had to be removed since it was discovered that it contained asbestos. This has raised noise

levels above the action level of 90 db(A), so drivers now have to wear ear defenders while LUL ponders over a suitable replacement material.

At the same time, union safety reps are becoming massively frustrated by the complex bureaucracy of the safety committees and the dilatory responses of the management. Staff at Kings Cross station recently produced a report detailing major hazards which have been brought to the attention of the management without any action being taken.

Not only is the Tube infrequent and uncomfortable, it is becoming increasingly dangerous as well. Safety is moving up the agenda of the trade unions and the transport campaign bodies — the interests of workers and consumers are well nigh identical here — and it is clear that a massive public campaign is needed to shift the complacency of the official bodies.

# INSPECTIONS

## a planned attack on hazards

**Safety inspections are an essential tool for workers in ensuring a healthy working environment.**

**Trade union safety representatives have powerful legal rights, under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations, to investigate and eliminate conditions which cause industrial injury and disease. This factsheet provides a practical guide to getting genuine improvements from workplace inspections.**

### Plan a programme

Once you get inspections started it's important to keep up a regular, systematic programme at least every three months. Create an inspection log book and keep it up to date with inspections, results and ideas. Some trade unions provide inspection forms.

### Preparing

Decide:

- how often they should be carried out
- who carries them out. Managers have no right to be included.
- what you are looking for in a given inspection

checking, eg lighting, chemicals, machinery.

You will need access to and an understanding of the relevant health and safety law, regulations and codes of practice. You also need all previous inspection records, accident books, RIDDOR forms, COSHH assessments, maintenance records and any relevant information on shifts and hours of work.

### Carrying out the inspection

A 'walk through survey' is a matter of common sense. Look, listen and sniff. Most importantly, talk to the workers: they will know the problems and they can also tell you how the workplace changes from day to day.

As you identify hazards, make one list for machine and process hazards, and another list for substances and chemicals, including trade names. Make a list of each problem, possible cause, and who's affected, and mark it on the safety map.

### Researching the hazards

It's the employer's job to find solutions, not yours. But you can negotiate more effectively if you understand the hazards and possibly solutions.

### Information from employers and manufacturers

Safety reps have the right to request necessary information from employers, and the employer is responsible for getting it from the manufacturer or supplier. Manufacturers safety data sheets are often vague and misleading and ignore long term effects. Manufacturers sometimes withhold information on grounds of trade secrecy. This is not acceptable: they can supply you with enough information to assess the hazard without enabling you to reproduce the product.

### Information from trade unions and others

For leaflets, factsheets and handbooks, go to your union, your local hazards centre or

trade union resource centre, and the Health and Safety Executive. Your local public reference library may have data sources and text books.

### Additional surveys

Health surveys are a useful way of investigating hazards in more detail. Use a small questionnaire to ask members if they suffer from tension, headaches, sore or tired eyes, stiff shoulders or neck, backache, skin rashes, sore throat or cough, bad chest, digestive problems, nausea or any other health complaints that may be caused by work.

The most sensitive instrument available is the human body! If you decide other measurements will help identify a hazard, it's not hard to measure dust, noise, fumes or lighting using simple equipment. Contact your union and hazards centre to see what equipment is available, and which hygienists they recommend. But beware of getting drawn into time-wasting arguments about precise measurement of an obvious hazard.

You can even invite the HSE in to carry out workplace inspections. However, unless conditions are life threatening, or you have really exhausted negotiations and know your employer is breaking the law — don't bother.

### Achieving solutions

Use the safety committee to negotiate with management. You should have clear demands, in writing giving your evidence and quoting the legal duties on management. Detail each problem, and tell management you expect their proposals within a specified time limit. If you feel that management are being deliberately obstructive you should invoke the grievance procedure.

It's important to get information to union members, so that they understand the hazards and support their reps in negotiation. Time inspections to fall before union meetings so reps can report back straight

away and discuss action. Educate about hazards using shop organisation and meetings. Distribute useful literature: there are many leaflets available from unions and hazards centres; some HSE leaflets are useful, but you should check them carefully. You may decide to produce something yourself.

Use the trade union regional officer, health and safety officer, or research or legal department. Keep them informed every step of the way: information on hazards should be a two way process, so the union gets a clearer picture of hazards facing their members.

A hazard may be quickly remedied or it may require a planned process. In the latter case you may have to decide which hazard to tackle first: but make sure a temporary solution is applied straight away. Don't let the temporary solution become a permanent working system.

You may want to bring in "experts" such as ergonomists to improve job and equipment design, or hygienists to recommend control measures. Make sure they consult and report to the union as much as to management. Make sure the equipment they recommend is capable of doing the job, and that management don't simply go for the cheapest option.

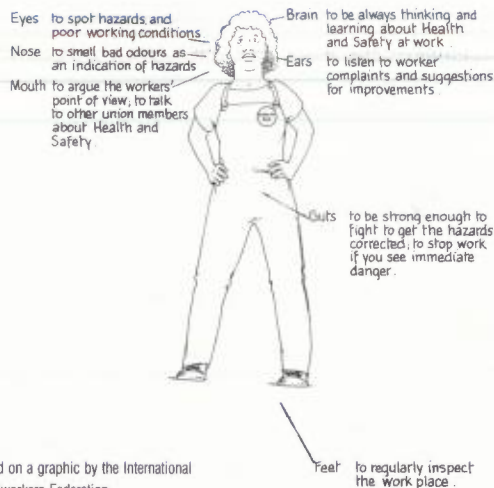
### Following up

When a solution has been introduced, go and check that it works. Look out for new hazards introduced by resulting changes in work methods.

### Conclusion

Inspections are preventive — the aim is to stop risks being created, as well as identifying and removing existing hazards. This requires co-operation between workers, unions, reps and management that takes a lot of time and effort to achieve — but when improvements are made, everyone can see the benefits, and the union is strengthened as a result.

#### Your monitoring equipment.



Based on a graphic by the International Metalworkers Federation

### Useful information:

#### From the Centre:

*Basic Health and Safety: Workers' Rights and How to Win Them.* £6 (bulk discounts). Covers your general rights.

*FactPack.* £5. Factsheets on specific hazards.

#### Plus:

*Safety Representatives and Safety Committees.* HSC. £2 from HMSO. Contains Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations and related codes of practice and guidance notes.

*Hazards Bulletin.* National information bulletin for safety reps. Box 199, Sheffield S1 1FQ. Packed with useful articles and factsheets.

- what form the reports should take
- how you negotiate solutions
- how you check the results

### Compile initial information

Make a health and safety map of your workplace — just a rough drawing will do. It should show the different work areas and processes; how many workers are in each area and where; and positions of machines, ventilation systems, staircases, storage, fire escapes and extinguishers, lifts and hoists, any vehicle routes and so on. Prepare a checklist for each major aspect that you are

# Hazards Movement shows its strength

The fifth National Hazards conference was hosted this year in Edinburgh by the Lothian Trade Union and Community Resource Centre.

Over four hundred delegates attended a variety of health and safety workshops, and there was particularly strong emphasis on Europe, with around 120 delegates participating in seminars on building links with other European workers and on European Legislation — how it

operates and what the implications are for workers in the UK. The Centre ran three workshops, on sick building syndrome, Europe and on lung diseases.

Tony Lloyd MP, Labour Party spokesperson on health and safety, addressed delegates on Labour's commitment to making improvements in occupational health, and was encouraged by delegates to step this up. The conference particularly wanted

to see a commitment to a Working Environment Fund, based on mandatory contributions from employers; to the right for trade union safety reps to stop the dangerous jobs; and to radical reform of the compensation system.

Speakers from successful campaigns included Ronnie McDonald of the Offshore Industries Liaison Committee, and Tony O'Brien of the Construction Safety Campaign.

## Framework fudge

The Health and Safety Commission has finally published its Consultative Document on the UK implementation of the minimum requirements of the European Communities Framework Directive. Called 'Proposals for Health and Safety (General Provisions) Regulations and Approved Code of Practice', it's up for comment till February 21st. 1992.

The HSC describes these Regs as 'the most important addition to general health and safety law since the Health and Safety at Work Act.' They are crucial, dealing with consultation of

workers, rights to refuse dangerous work and duties on employers.

At this stage there are plenty of loopholes, where key articles of the Directive are reinterpreted and clauses omitted to make the Regs acceptable to British industry. Employers will certainly be trying to further dilute the final Regs, as it will cost them money to implement them. Make sure you have your say: get your comments and enquiries to your own union and to: Ms S Jones, HSE, Room 237, Baynard's House, 1 Chepstow Place, London W2 4TF.

## Home working

### Fact Pack

Produced by the Londonwide Homeworking Group, this new pack draws on the knowledge of a national network who are trying to provide help to homeworkers. The Health and Safety Section is written by the London Hazards Centre. Free to homeworkers, £4.50 to others, from Greenwich Homeworkers Project, 17 Bowater Road, London SE18 5FT.

## National Survey

The National Group on Homeworking has launched a nationwide grass-roots survey of homeworkers' conditions. The last major survey was conducted for the Department of the Environment in 1981 and its report denied that homeworkers face any significant hazards. The National Group members, including the London Hazards Centre, know from their own daily experience that this is far from the truth.

The Group has drawn up a survey questionnaire, with a health and safety section drafted by the London Hazards Centre. We need local community groups and trade unionists to distribute the questionnaire. If you are interested please contact Roslyn Perkins at the Centre.



## CENTRE NEWS

### Using the Centre

The Centre can run health and safety training for unions in your workplace or at the Centre. We have trained bank workers, housing caretakers, hospital maintenance workers, nurses, homeworkers and law centre workers.

#### 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 organises seminars to provoke discussion on major health and safety issues. Our future programme will include VDU regulations and European safety law. We invite you to suggest other subjects.

#### 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.

#### Information Bulletin

The Centre is launching an information bulletin, Hazards Networker, listing new information on health and safety. Contact us for details.

## PUBLICATIONS

- ▲ **Basic Health and Safety: Workers' rights and how to win them.** £6.00†
  - ▲ **Office Pack:** 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.** £3\* / £6.00†
  - ▲ **VDU Hazards Handbook: A worker's guide.** £5.45†
  - ▲ **Fluorescent Lighting: A health hazard overhead.** £2\* / £5†
  - ▲ **Toxic Treatments: Wood preservative hazards.** £5.95.
  - ▲ **Health and Safety for Women in Cleaning and Catering.** £2\* / £5.00
  - ▲ **Asbestos Factpack** (People's Asbestos Action Campaign). £3\* / £5.
  - ▲ **Strategies for COSHH: seminar briefing and report.** £2.50.
  - ▲ **Factpack:** Set of factsheets from the Daily Hazard. £5.00.
  - ▲ **Individual Factsheet.** £1. Minimum order £2.  
+ photocopiers and laser printers + legionnaires disease + formaldehyde + cement + insect infestations and insecticide + wood preservatives + chemicals policies + COSHH Regulations + European Community law + manufactured mineral fibres + asbestos cement + heat + paint + Electricity Regulations + inspections.
  - ▲ **Daily Hazard nos 1-30.** Set: £25
  - ▲ **Hazards Networker.** Documentation bulletin. Sub £10\*/£20/£50 (companies)
- \* Price to community/tenants/union groups.  
Prices include postage. Discounts for 10 or more copies.

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