

# THE DAILY HAZARD

## CBI and HSE Stitch Up VDU Regs

**Draft regulations on VDU work have been published by the Health and Safety Commission (HSC). The draft [official title, Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations] is now open for consultation and the regulations are intended to come into force on 1st January 1993. The regulations are based on a European Community (EC) Directive and cover:**

- definitions of display screen equipment, workstations and users
- assessment and reduction of risks
- minimum standards for workstations
- rest breaks
- protection of users' eyes and eyesight
- information and training for users.

The draft regulations substantially water down the original EC proposals. They apply to 'employees' not 'workers' and could therefore exclude many freelancers, temps, etc. The definition of a VDU 'user' is drawn so tightly that it may well exclude two-thirds of workers who habitually use a VDU. The assessment of risk is coupled to a dismissive attitude to the hazards of VDU work. The minimum standards for workstations apply to new equipment from 1993 but employers have

until 1996 to bring existing equipment up to par. But even then, only workstations used by 'users' would come under the scope of the regulations. The specific requirements for compliance are in a code of practice which is not legally enforceable. There are no specific recommendations given for rest breaks — it seems that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has decided not to publish some research it commissioned which does make specific proposals. While there is grudging acceptance of the right to eye and eyesight protection and the free provision of corrective appliances, the recommendation is that tests should be conducted only every 10 years. Workers will have the right to a test but will have to claim it — there is no duty on employers to make automatic provision.

For the first time ever, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has publicly dissented from the proposals. In the consultative document the TUC comments that 'the proposed regulations do not fully implement both the letter and the spirit of the Directive.'

On the working party which produced the draft, the CBI (Confederation of British Industry) and HSE ganged up on the TUC

representatives to push through substantial modifications of the EC Directive. The draft as published is different and worse than the final version seen by the TUC. CBI and HSE members of the working party paid joint visits to eyesight screening companies without informing or inviting their TUC colleagues. Simon Sapper, national health and safety officer of the National Communications Union, and one of the TUC representatives, reports that there was a 'coincidence of views' between the HSE and CBI on major points at issue. There is a suggestion that the Department of Employment imposed its political line on the nominally independent HSE. Senior HSC/E officials have made it increasingly clear that they are not prepared to get into arguments with the Government.

Jones Memorial Workshops, Units 3 and 5-9, Grain Industrial Estate, Harlow St., Liverpool L8 4UH; tel 051 709 1354.


It is vitally important that trade unions and other bodies submit amendments to the draft. The VDU regulations offer potential for improvements in working conditions and will set the ground-rules for collective bargaining for the foreseeable future. But they will work out in favour of the employers unless major changes are obtained between now and the end of the year. Simon Sapper considers that the key areas for amendment are the assessment of workstations, the rest breaks, and eye and eyesight tests. It is also crucial to obtain a definition of a VDU worker that will cover all regular users.

Some 15 per cent of the electorate use VDUs for at least part of their work and parliamentary candidates should be questioned on how they intend to protect the health and safety of this large portion of their constituents. Traditionally, regulations have gone through the House of Commons on the nod. This time it should be different. The new Government should send the proposals back to the HSC and insist they implement the directive properly. If the government refuses to do that, a serious bid must be made to amend the regulations on their way through Parliament.

Details: Manchester Hazards, 23 New Mount Street, Manchester M4 4DE (061-953 4037)

Manchester Hazards Centre  
NE Lancs Action on Safety & Health (NELASH)  
TURS! Group

**THIRD NATIONAL  
RSI CONFERENCE**



**STOP THE EPIDEMIC!**

**SAT APRIL 11 1992**  
TRADE UNION EDUCATION DEPT,  
MANCHESTER COLLEGE,  
LOWER HARDMAN ST, MANCHESTER  
10am - 4.30pm

The consultation period runs until 21st May. Anyone is entitled to make comments on the draft and these should be sent to Mr. N. Watson, HSE, HPD A4, Room 520, Baynards House, 1 Chepstow Place, London W2 4TF; tel 071 243 6116. Copies of the consultative document can be obtained from the Sir Robert

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# A tale of two boroughs

**How ill does a child living in an overcrowded, cockroach-infested flat have to be before his condition is considered reason to move his family to fit accommodation? In Tower Hamlets, the home of six year old Nozmul, the answer seems to be that even if a child is dying of leukaemia in housing conditions likely to worsen his illness, he is not necessarily a priority for rehousing.**

The London Hazards Centre is assisting the solicitors fighting on behalf of Nozmul and his family by providing information which shows that not only is the cockroach infestation itself dangerous for a child with a damaged immune system (by increasing the risk of infection), but the Council's attempts to treat the infestation by repeated spraying of an individual flat with synthetic pyrethroid insecticides is both ineffective and hazardous.

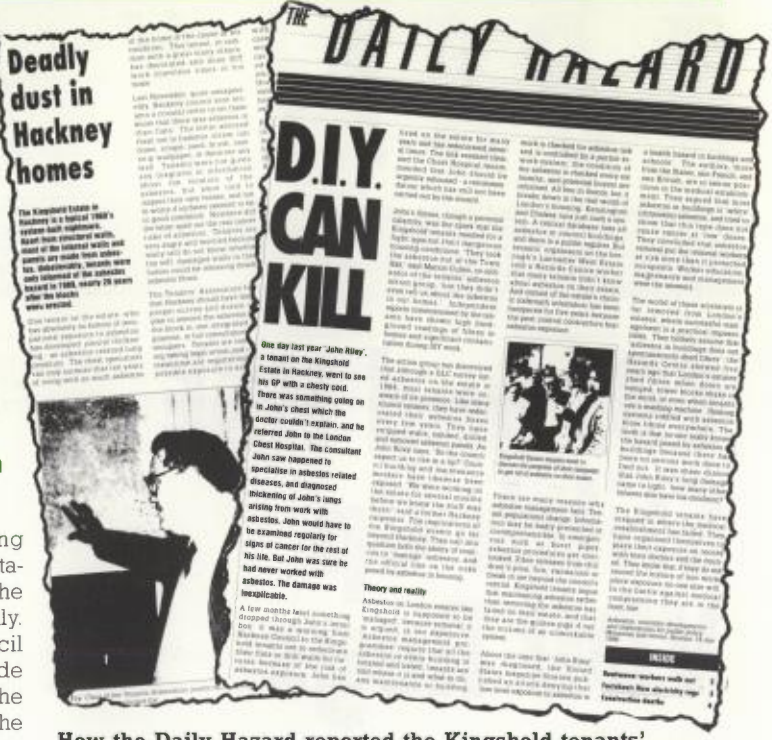
The only way to completely eliminate cockroaches in an infested block is to eradicate the conditions which cause the infestation and to treat the whole block. The inevitable result of treating individual flats will be to expose families unnecessarily to repeated doses of toxic chemicals and the certainty of the cockroaches' return.

As you read this, the County

Court will be considering whether the cockroach infestation is a 'nuisance' requiring the Council to rehouse the family. Meanwhile, as the Council resists every appeal to provide decent accommodation for the family, Nozmul often wakes in the night with cockroaches crawling all over him. His parents are desperate to find alternative accommodation so that the last months of his life can be spent in a home fit for human habitation.

A few miles away in Hackney, tenants' action over a similar problem has led to a very different result. The Kingshold Estate, Hackney is to be knocked down and the asbestos and cockroach riddled system build replaced with low rise traditional houses in streets.

The credit has to go to the campaigning work of the tenants



**How the Daily Hazard reported the Kingshold tenants' battle in March and October 1990.**

association and in particular their asbestos action group which has raised the profile of the estate to national level over the last year. Negotiations between the tenants, council and the DOE are at advanced stage and the ultimate decision for total demolition looks almost definite.

The DOE told us that they recognised the severity of the health problems faced by tenants on the estate and acknowledged the work of the asbestos action campaign in

helping to highlight and clarify the issue. The work, according to Hackney Council will begin as a rolling programme this year as soon as final approval is given by the DOE. The funding of the work and new housing is still under discussion: the DOE recognise that there may be a need to put in more resources than the usual matching kind but the balance is not yet decided. It is likely to be a mixture of local authority, DOE, Housing Association and private finance. Tenants are involved in all stages of the discussion.

# Ealing gets low marks for safety

**Last August saw the publication of a damning report by the government's National Audit Office pointing out the widespread disrepair of Britain's schools and the consequent risks to teachers' and pupils' health and safety. This problem has been highlighted by the recent closure of six Ealing schools for emergency safety repairs.**

The trade union side of Ealing's Joint Safety Committee had the problems of disrepair brought to their attention last September by NUT and NASUWT Safety Representatives at Islip First &

Middle Schools and Barantyne Middle School. Damaged roofs were letting water into the electrical system and making the floor slippery, and water had damaged asbestos in the school.

The problems were investigated and found to be serious enough to close the schools, in one case for two months.

In October 1991 Wood End Middle School was closed for three weeks when apart from a leaking roof it was found that the outer brick wall of the building was falling away affecting the structural safety of the building.

February 1992 brought the closure of Derwent Water First & Middle School for an expected two weeks. The boiler and heating system is suspected of having gassed 25 members of staff and over 20 children with exhaust fumes. Workers were sent to investigate only to be exposed to asbestos when they took the cover from the boiler. The Health & Safety Executive are still investigating the incident.

'If this is the situation in Ealing —

what's it like elsewhere?' asked Chris Anderson, NASUWT representative and Chair of the Joint Safety Committee. 'Safety Reps in schools have got their work cut out for them and must be vigilant.'

Parents have been shocked by these revelations and together with the local trade unions have formed the Ealing Schools Safety Campaign.

'We're lucky we've got good safety reps,' commented David Drury, Secretary of the Joint Safety Committee, 'and a safety committee structure to deal with these problems. Most of these problems were potentially life threatening and I'm sure we've not uncovered them all.'

● Contact: Melanie Griffiths, Ealing Schools Safety Campaign, c/o Northolt High School, Eastcote Lane, Northolt, Middlesex



# INFORMATION — Where to look for it

Information is a basic tool for organising against hazards in both workplace and community.

## Know your information rights

### At The Workplace

Trade union health and safety representatives (and other workers) can use their rights under various regulations to get:

**Information from inspections,** including results of measurements, and enforcement action (HSWA section 28(8)).

**Accident records:** Use these to identify patterns of hazards.

### Sources of advice/networks

Get plugged into the networks of resource agencies and campaign groups.

**Hazards network:** a list of groups and centres is published in every issue of Hazards Bulletin (details below).

**Tenants:** Tenants Resource and Information Service (TRIS), c/o Newcastle Tenants Federation, 21 High Bridge, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 1EW (091-232 1371).

### Libraries

HSE Libraries exist at the 3 public inquiry points and are open to everyone.

Try your local central reference library. Librarians can be very helpful once they know what you want. Some, including Camden and Islington have indicated that they want to service trade unionists. Many libraries have special services for local businesses. Go and talk to them about serving trade unions as well!

### Published information

#### Unofficial

*Hazards Networker:* the London Hazards Centre bulletin listing new publications. *Hazards Bulletin* — the best magazine for safety reps. PO Box 199, Sheffield S1 1FQ.

A list of trade union publications is available from Hazards Bulletin. Important publishers are: London Hazards Centre, TUC, LRD (addresses above)

#### Official

The HSE publishes a lot of free leaflets, of variable quality, available from Public Inquiry Points. It also publishes (through HMSO) guidance booklets costing a few pounds each. The guidance on specific industries drawn up by the specialist Industry Groups (eg construction, printing, education, health) is often detailed, practical and useful. HMSO also distributes European Community, ILO and WHO publications.

**Medical Records:** The Access to Medical Reports Act 1988 gives limited access to medical reports prepared 'for employment purposes'. For substances, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) give workers and their GPs access to medical surveillance records.

**Hazards Assessments:** Employers have to assess hazards as part of the workplace health and safety policy and for substances (COSHH, lead regs, asbestos at work regs, ionising radiations regs) and noise (Noise regs). In the pipeline are manual handling, protective equipment and others.

**Plant and machinery:** Designers, manufacturers and importers have to supply adequate information (HSWA

**Community Pollution Campaigns:** Communities Against Toxics (CATs), 129 Eddison Way, Hemlington, Cleveland TS8 9ES (0642-595740)

**TU Resource Centres:** Many trade union resource centres have specialist health and safety workers and good libraries. Find your nearest one through the local trades council or main trade unions.

**Trade unions:** About half the UK trade unions have national health and safety officers and/or researchers. Labour

Some public libraries specialise in relevant subjects. In London: Westminster Health Information Library: aimed at medical students but open to everyone. Marylebone Library, Marylebone Road, NW1 (071-798 1039). Redbridge Libraries has a special health and safety collection, with all HSE publications but little unofficial material. Central Reference Library, Clements Road, Ilford, Essex (081-478 7145). The Combes Medical Library at Ealing

List of HSE publications: 'Publications in Series' every 6 months free from Public Inquiry Points; special subject lists published from time to time.

HMSO mail order: PO Box 276, London SW8 5DT. General inquiries: 071-873 0011.

#### Videos

Many videos ignore trade unions. Look at a video before you buy or use it. Labour / community sources: Team Video, 222 Kensal Road, London W10 5BN  
Northern Newsreel, 36 Bottle Bank, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear NE8 2AR (091-477 3604)  
Concord Films Council Ltd, 201 Felixstowe Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP3 9BJ (0473-715754)

#### Databases

There are numerous health and safety databases. Some are bibliographic (catalogues of documents); some

section 6 as amended by Consumer Protection Act 1987).

**Workplace libraries:** Large employers should be pressured to provide well-stocked health and safety libraries.

### In The Community

**Local authorities:** The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 gives you access to council documents and meetings. For detailed guidance: Community Rights Project, 157 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8XF (071-928 0080).

**Pollution:** Enforcement authorities (councils, waste and water authorities, the Pollution Inspectorate) must keep free-access public registers of authorisations and enforcements.

Research Department has a health and safety researcher who services affiliates: 78 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HF (071-928 3649)

**HSE Public Inquiry Points:**  
London: 071-221 0870  
Sheffield: 0742-752539  
Merseyside: 051-951 4381

### Electronic mail

By hooking up an ordinary microcomputer

Hospital is funded by the local authority and open to users of Ealing libraries. Ask the Central Reference Library, 103 Ealing Broadway Centre, W5 5JY (081-567 3656).

The national British Library Science Reference & Information Service (BL-SRIS) has a big public reference collection. 25 Southampton Buildings, WC2 (071-323 7494).

TUC Library. Any trade union member can use this — but phone or write first.

contain hazards data (eg standards for chemicals, radiation, noise); just coming on the scene are full-text (complete texts of regulations, standards and other documents). Access methods:

**'On-line'** via commercial hosts: the old, costly method requiring an information expert to do the search for you. BL-SRIS (see libraries) will do a search for a reasonable fee.

**E-mail:** Geonet provides 'gateway' access to several scientific and news databases. The GeoNet 'Manchester Host' project is developing access to databases from labour and similar organisations. Manchester Host, 30 Naples St. Manchester M4 4DB (061-839 4212).

**CD-ROM:** Many databases are now on compact disk (CD-ROM). This is easy to use and once you have paid for the disk you don't have to worry about further costs. You can add a CD-ROM drive to any decent microcomputer for about £400, and prices are dropping. Subscriptions to disks can be expensive:

**Enforcement registers:** Under the Environment and Safety Information Act 1988 the HSE and local authorities must keep public registers of improvement notices and prohibition notices served, but only where public safety is involved.

### Improving rights

Campaigns are pressing for an end to secrecy in government pesticides approvals, the publication of companies' environmental and enforcement records in annual reports, information in community languages and other improvements. Campaign for Freedom of Information, 88 Old St, London EC1V 9AR (071-253 2445).

to a phone line using a device called a modem (costing about £200) you can be in touch with activists all over the world. An increasing number of unions and anti-pollution campaigns are using e-mail, through the two 'alternative' networks GeoNet and GreenNet. It's cheap, quick and democratic. Poptel (Geonet), 25 Downham Road, London N1 (071-249 2948)  
GreenNet, 23 Beviden St. London N1 6BH (071-608 3040)

Congress House, Great Russell St., W1 (071-636 4030).

Some libraries in universities, polytechnics and colleges will arrange reference use if you write to them. Others charge. Polytechnic of the South Bank has a special arrangement for COHSE members — contact the COHSE national office librarian (07373-53322). London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine used to house the TUC Centenary Institute of Occupational Health. Keppel St, W1 (071-636 8636).

Silver Platter's OSH-ROM costs £680 a year. Cheaper is CCINFODisk from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (US\$250-300 per disk, choice of 6 disks but no HSE databases). Prices may drop as CD-ROM takes off. CCOHS: 250 Main Street East, Hamilton, Ontario L8N 1H6, Canada. Silver Platter: 10 Barley Mow Passage, Chiswick, London W4 4PH.

**London Hazards Centre:** LHC will run searches on its own databases and others: for current details, check Hazards Networker or contact the Centre.

### Languages

There is virtually no official information in other languages than English. HASAC (West Midlands Health and Safety Advice Centre) has translated materials into Indian sub-continent languages. Another important contact is BEMOHI (Black and Ethnic Minorities Occupational Health Initiative), 37 Exchange St. Sheffield S2 5TR.



# New Groups will fight hazards

A new London campaigning group has come together to fight workplace and community hazards. The Campaign Against Hazards In London (CAHIL) aims to link up trade unionists, tenants associations, support groups, environmentalists, lawyers, politicians and everyone else with an active interest in combating hazards, to raise the public profile of hazards issues in London.

CAHIL is organising a public meeting on a different hazards issue every two months. The January meeting on European health and safety laws was well attended and produced a lively discussion on what European-based law will mean and how workers and communities can use it.

**The next meeting will be on Wednesday March 25th, 6.30pm at the Centre, and the subject will be Repetition Strain Injuries, with speakers organised by the RSI Association.**

● CAHIL Contact: Alan Woodward, Secretary, c/o 308 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8DS.

## Remember The Dead — Fight For The Living

CAHIL is also organising public action for two events — **Workers' Memorial Day** on April 28th, and **National Hazards Week**, June 15th — 20th.

For the last six years or so, April 28th has been a day of mourning for people killed at work in Canada and the USA. Hazards Campaign groups are working to put Worker's Memorial Day on the calendar in the UK. In London, the Construction Safety Campaign and the recently formed Bereaved Relatives Action Group will be taking the lead.

The day's events will publicise the unnecessary suffering that continues unabated in the construction industry — an industry which kills three building workers in 'accidents' every week, and one member of the public (often children) every month. CAHIL will also call for chronic bronchitis and emphysema to be recognised as prescribed industrial diseases among construction workers.

**National Hazards Week** events in London will include public conferences on women in the micro-electronics industry (organised by Women Working Worldwide), on pesticides, and on the construction industry (organised by the CSC).

For National Hazards Week, the main theme for CAHIL is Repetition Strain Injuries, with a day of events on Wednesday June 20th. The campaign will be organising a demonstration and a press conference to publicise the hazards and their prevention.

## BRAG — Bereaved Relatives Action Group

BRAG has been set up by and for people whose relatives have been killed by occupational 'accidents' or diseases. It aims to provide advice and support with inquests, prosecutions, and civil claims for compensation.

BRAG will campaign for changes in the law to force employers to organise properly for safety, for more HSE prosecutions with tougher penalties, for extended rights for trade union safety reps, and for workers' rights to refuse dangerous work.

● BRAG Contact: Ann Elvin, Co-ordinator, 8 Chalfont House, Keetons Road, Rotherhithe, London SE16 (071-252 1621)

# Using the Centre

## Health and safety training

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, law centre workers and others. We also run training courses for voluntary organisations via London Voluntary Service Council.

## 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.

# Funding news

The emergency appeal in the last Daily Hazard brought in about £2,000 - a start, but not enough! The appeal is enclosed again with this issue: if you haven't made a donation yet, please consider it seriously.

For next year (starting in April), we don't know yet whether the London Boroughs Grant Committee will renew our main grant. On the plus side, the Centre has just received two charitable trust grants which start in April, totalling £15,000 a year for the next three years.



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## PUBLICATIONS

### Just out:

△ **After the Sprayer:** Step by step guide on what to do about illness caused by wood preservatives in your workplace or home, and how to clean up. Includes contact addresses for medical treatment, support groups and legal action. This factsheet supplements our book Toxic Treatments. Factsheet. £1.00

△ **Hazards Networker.** Documentation bulletin. Subscription £10/£20/£50 (commercial)

△ **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 Factsheets.** £1. Minimum order £2.+photocopiers and laser printers+legionnaires disease+formaldehyde+cement+insect infestations and insecticides+wood preservatives+chemicals policies+COSHH Regulations+European Community law+manufactured mineral fibres+asbestos cement+heat+paint+Electricity Regulations+inspections+information finding+wood preservatives

△ **Daily Hazard** complete run: £25

\* **Price to community/tenants/union groups.**

**Prices include postage. Discounts for 10 or more copies. Minimum order £2.00.**

## 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.

## Hazards Networker — Information Bulletin

The Centre has launched an information bulletin, Hazards Networker, listing new information on health and safety. Low rates for community, labour and public sector organisations. Contact us for details or a sample copy.

## Information searches

Subscribers to our new bulletin, Hazards Networker, can request searches on our database and via our electronic mail facilities. See Hazards Networker for details.