

# THE DAILY HAZARD

## Southwark Tenants win Paints Victory

The London Borough of Southwark was prepared to put the safety of tenants high on the list of priorities while preparing to repaint the corridors and staircases of the Gloucester Grove Estate in Peckham. After a fire on the estate in 1991, when a tenant fell to his death trying to escape from paint fumes, Council representatives were determined to minimise the risks involved in the planned redecoration of Gloucester Grove, home to about 10,000 people. At the behest of the tenants' associations, the London Hazards Centre was called in to provide health and safety advice.

Major technical problems had to be solved before work could start. First was the stripping of several layers of paint of unknown composition, so thick that there was no alternative to removing them. Next was the choice of a suitable anti-graffiti paint that wouldn't present a hazard to the painters or the

residents. Right from the outset the Council decided to use only water-based paints, thus, on the face of it, eliminating all the problems posed by organic solvents. Finally, methods were sought to reduce the risk from toxic decomposition products in the event of a fire. The Council commissioned the Building Research Establishment to investigate the fire hazard and this yielded improvements in dealing with the problem.

When the London Hazards Centre was invited to give advice, we made one over-riding recommendation, that the air concen-



Southwark tenants overcome paint hazards

tration of the paint chemicals should not exceed 10 per cent of the Occupational Exposure Levels (OELs), "10 per cent of COSHH", as it was called. Since it was impossible to move tenants out during painting, we argued that particularly vulnerable people — the elderly, babies and young children, the sick, and pregnant women — should receive special protection. OELs, which are designed for healthy adults, were not good enough and much lower levels were needed. After much consultation, our recommendation was accepted. The main contractor, Mansells, incorporated this condition into the methods statement and arrangements were made for monitoring the air concentration of chemicals.

One operation immediately affected was the paint stripping. Various types of chemical strippers were tried, but all projected quantities of fumes into the atmosphere. It was therefore decided that stripping would be carried out in an enclosure.

Much discussion took place before the final choice of graffiti-resistant lacquer. Even though water-based paints were stipulated, there were still the special hazards of two-pack epoxies, required to fit the specifications of the job. These materials cause dermatitis and are sensitisers — after the initial exposure, subsequent exposure to very small quantities can trigger severe symptoms.

One possibility was for this work also to be carried out in an enclosure. It was decided first to test the air concentration of chemicals during simulated painting to see if the "10 per cent of COSHH" criterion could be met. Two paint companies had tendered for the contract. One was able to meet the criterion on all counts.

The other products turned out to contain a small percentage of organic solvents, a fact not mentioned on the data sheets. The tests indicated that tenants might have been exposed to fumes above the stipulated limit.

This might have seemed the end of the story but some complications arose when further tests yielded conflicting results. But when all the information was put before the tenants' representatives, they voted in favour of the entirely water-based products. Thus it might be argued that one paint manufacturer lost out on a very large contract through refraining to disclose exactly what was in its products.

The Gloucester Grove experience points the way towards improved protection for tenants through setting exposure limits related to the needs of the whole community and through the proper testing and monitoring of products to ensure compliance. In this case the tenants and the Council wanted high safety standards — they set an example to be followed elsewhere.

## RSI Campaign moves forward

A major step forward in the fight against repetitive strain injuries (RSIs) took place on 11 April at the third national RSI Conference in Manchester. One hundred sufferers, safety reps

and advice workers looked at how best to treat and prevent the injury and win compensation. It was agreed to set up a permanent campaigning body (details from Carol Holt, Sheffield Trade Union Safety Committee, Mudford Buildings, 37 Exchange Street, Sheffield S2 5TR). NELASH, the North Lancs. Safety and Health Campaign, offered to organise a fourth national conference next year.

Recent publicity about RSI has focused on office workers, but the condition is a blight in manufacturing industry as well. This was highlighted by the award of a record £59,617 compensation to a former Vauxhall Motors worker at the end of April. Jane Inskip loaded gear wheels into a finishing machine at the Luton plant. The company has lodged an appeal.

### INSIDE

Centre book launch	2
Lindane off the hook	2
HSE roof campaign	2
Factsheet: violence at work	3
Hazards Week diary	4



# LHC's New Book Challenges Blocks to EC Health and Safety Laws

But for the UK Government's consistent obstruction, new legislation from Europe would protect tens of thousands of low-wage workers in the UK and across Europe whose hazardous employment is outside the scope of any regulatory or enforcement agency.

Even in European workplaces covered by health and safety legislation, 8,000 workers die and 10 million are injured every year by accidents or disease. 1992 is declared **European Year of Safety, Hygiene and Health Protection at Work** and many of the health and safety Directives arising from the European Commission will become law in member states by the end of the year. What will this mean for Europe's 150 million workers? Will the promise of higher standards be transposed into national laws? Will those standards be enforced?

## HSE Roof Work Campaign — Improvement or Enforcement?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) launched their inspection blitz on roofwork in London in May. Sir John Cullen, Chair of the Health and Safety Commission, said "In the last three years, 109 workers have lost their lives and there have been nearly 1,500 reported serious accidents in roofwork. Nearly all these deaths and injuries could have

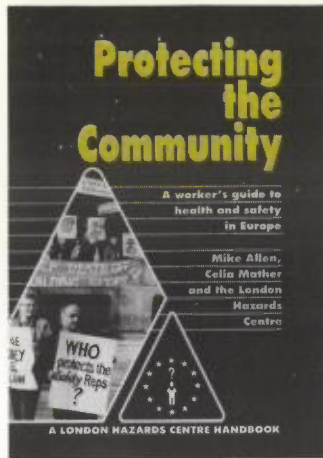
On 18 May, The London Hazards Centre published *Protecting the Community: A worker's guide to health and safety in Europe*, a handbook which includes a forceful preface by Stephen Hughes MEP, and which guides workers and their representatives, and all those concerned about the impact of European legislation, through the maze of Community institutions and procedures. It provides comparisons of standards and practices in different member states and gives a comprehensive account of the most important Directives. It shows how key elements of some Directives have been watered down before becoming law in the UK; it shows how to influence the decision-makers and offers ideas on how to ensure that the European Commission's slogan for the year: 'Europe 1992 — Let's make it a better place to

been prevented by readily available safety equipment. Roofwork is big business and attracts more than its fair share of the get rich quick brigade."

This is backed up by a recent comment of a roofworker reported by the Construction Safety Campaign (CSC). When asked if scaffold or edge protection was provided on every job, the roofer replied:—

"No. My boss tells the client if they want a scaffold it will add so much to the cost of the job. If we do it from ladders it will be cheaper. In most cases the client opts for the cheaper and less safe option. We can't complain because we'd be sacked and jobs are hard to come by now."

Companies are passing the responsibility for decisions on safe operations onto clients by framing them as financial



work' is more than just an idle promise.

A wave of European Community Directives are being translated into national legislation and will come into force at the end of this year. It is no exaggeration to say that these have implications for every workplace, employer and worker in the Community. This is the year for those in the labour and hazard movements to equip themselves with the knowledge they need to campaign on future health and safety policies and practice. The potential benefits of the legislation will only be realised by informed and vigorous activity at the workplace level

*Protecting the Community: A worker's guide to health and safety in Europe* by Mike Allen, Celia Mather and the London Hazards Centre, £9.95, available from the London Hazards Centre.

options. In law, companies are under specific legal duties to provide safe systems of work and employers cannot legally negotiate these with the client. Health and safety laws are being broken as part of the sales pitch.

Recent HSE blitzes have resulted in large numbers of improvement notices, fewer prohibition notices, and very few prosecutions indeed. Tony O'Brien, secretary of the CSC, commented, "A smack on the wrist and no supper is not going to change employers' attitudes. Only when employers are given massive fines and imprisonment for threatening peoples' lives by breaking the law will they stop abusing safety laws."

HSC Roofwork Information Pack, Tel: 071 221 0870

## 'Idiosyncratic' Report Lets Lindane off the Hook

The Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP), the Government-appointed body which oversees pesticide safety, recently published a review of the link between the organochlorine pesticide lindane and the bone marrow disease, aplastic anaemia.\* Despite quoting over 30 research reports of lindane exposure related to the disease, the review concludes that if a causal relationship exists between lindane and aplastic anaemia it is "a very rare idiosyncratic response". However the review does not settle the issue of lindane involvement in aplastic anaemia but demonstrates that current scientific knowledge cannot explain the persistent case reports.

Perhaps inevitably, the review has promoted the idea that lindane is safe — the headline "Pesticide is cleared by inquiry" appeared in *The Independent* on 17 March 1992. This ignores other well attested health effects of the pesticide. It produces irritability, restlessness, anxiety, poor appetite and headaches. In extreme cases, epileptic-type fits can occur. Repeated exposure may damage the liver. There is evidence that it produces birth defects. It is well established that lindane causes liver, lung and other cancers in animals.

Once again the ACP has demonstrated the belief that pesticides must be proven to be dangerous before they are withdrawn. The London Hazards Centre campaigns for the view that pesticides should be shown to be safe before they are used. In our view, that has certainly not been proven for lindane which ought to be banned.

\* Gamma-HCH. A review of the evidence concerning a possible link between exposure to gamma HCH and the subsequent development of blood dyscrasias, particularly aplastic anaemia: MAFF, Ergon House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR



# V I O L E N C E A T W O R K

**The 1988 British Crime Survey showed that nearly a quarter of violent incidents and over a third of threats experienced by individuals were work related.**

A study of bus workers showed that almost a third had been subjected to physical assault and that this was related to the introduction of the single operator bus. A Health and Safety Commission study of five health authorities revealed that over 10 per cent of workers had been injured in attacks in the previous year and nearly 20 per cent had been subject to verbal abuse. Many thousands of workers face the threat of violence every day, arising directly out of their jobs. Those particularly at risk include: anyone working with the public, for example in social security, social services, housing, health, education, transport, hotels and catering. Their work may also involve handling money in shops, banks or post offices. Anyone required to work alone, late at night, or in people's homes is also at risk.

Violence at work, like any other occupational hazard, should not be accepted as part of the job, nor a result of bad luck or personal incompetence — a 'victim centred' approach is inappropriate. It is management's statutory responsibility to identify the nature and extent of the risk, to train and inform workers, and to devise measures which provide a safe workplace and a safe system of work.

This is most likely to happen where there is a trade union which deals with violence at work as an industrial relations issue and which is prepared to negotiate, or if necessary take action, to secure the required preventive measures. Full use should be made of the Safety Reps and Safety Committees Regulations in drawing up, implementing and monitoring agreed policies. Clearly, each workplace needs its own tailor made policy, but there are some key points that should be addressed in every case.

## Definition

First, there should be an agreed definition of what constitutes violence. The HSE definition is: "Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of his or her employment". Many negotiated agreements go beyond this and include sexual and racial harassment, nuisance phone calls or attacks on property.

## Identification and Assessment

Identify those jobs which place workers

at risk. Use records of previous incidents, interview workers, conduct surveys and inspect the workplace. Establish the nature of the risk and the preventive strategy required for each job. If changes in working practice are proposed, assess whether they expose workers to violence. During inspections, check that all security devices are properly installed and in working order.

## Reporting and Recording

Accurate reporting provides information about the nature of the problem and a method of evaluating the effectiveness of preventive measures. The HSE provides a model report form which can be adapted to suit your workplace. Forms should be simple and available. They need to provide such information as the time of day, staffing levels and location of the incident as well as what happened. All incidents should be recorded and copies of all report forms secured by the safety rep. A procedure for monitoring should be set up to enable particular factors or patterns to be identified.

## Prevention

Preventive strategies should cover staffing levels, working practices, protective equipment and alarm systems.

**Staffing levels.** Lone working should be avoided wherever possible. Where there is shown to be a risk, e.g. in home visits, insist on working in pairs. Where lone working cannot be avoided, make arrangements for communication by telephone or through a two-way radio. Institute a system of regular reporting-in by lone workers during their shift. Define the minimum safe level of staffing for all risky operations.

**Working practices.** Avoid cash-handling as much as possible. When cash is transported, ensure that times and routes are varied at random. Ensure the employer provides transport home for staff working late at night. Arrange to meet previously unknown "clients" in public places.

**Protective equipment.** This can cover protective screens and grilles, wide and high counters, installation of video cameras, improvements in lighting and decor, the design of waiting areas, entryphones, digital locks, and many other devices.

**Alarm systems.** Alarms need to be assessed for effectiveness. Can they be reached if a violent situation develops? Will their use provoke further violence? Will there be a rapid response? Alarms will only deter if potentially violent people believe that an efficient system is in place — make sure the existence of alarms is well publicised.

## Procedures

Clear procedures are needed on:

- what action individual workers are expected to take
- what back up and advice is available in handling difficult individuals
- who has specific responsibility to defuse and handle violent situations
- how and where to summon assistance
- the use of alarms and other security measures
- reporting procedures

## Information and Training

Training for workers at risk should be given on induction and regularly thereafter. Training needs to be given on clear procedures to be followed for the prevention and handling of violent situations. Training in self-defence is problematic. It will not reduce the possibility of violence occurring nor necessarily the prospect of avoiding injury. It is not part of a preventive strategy.

## Investigating Incidents and Complaints

Make sure the incident is properly recorded, and reported to the safety committee and the enforcement authority, and to the police if required. Interview the worker and any witnesses, and inspect the scene of the incident. The worker may want the union to provide legal services, so make sure that you inform the appropriate officials and help with the necessary paperwork. Try to negotiate full pay for workers who

need time off as a result of a violent incident at work.

## Taking Action

As with any other employment condition, it may take action to get the management to move. Nurse Anita Ceesay was sacked from her job at the Royal London Whitechapel Hospital after an incident in which she was subjected to violent racial abuse, but her colleagues were swift to support her and she was reinstated after an internal appeal. CPSA members in Bristol and London went on strike for a year when the management unilaterally removed protective screens — a 50 per cent surge in assaults occurred, mostly on women, after the removal of the screens. Violence at work is a trade union, industrial relations issue and where employers refuse to bring in safe systems and conditions of work, it may be that the last resort is to take action.

## Useful Publications

Many unions now have publications and policy on violence at work. Check with your union first.

Official publications: *Violence to Staff, Safe Systems of Work and Working Alone in Safety*, HSE, Baynards House, 1 Chepstow Place, London W2. *Violence to Staff in the Health Services*, and *Violence to Staff in the Education Sector*, HSC, available from HMSO





# 1992 National Hazards Week

## London Events

8 — 9.30pm, Tuesday 16 June — "Europe, health and safety and trade unions", The Selkirk public house, Selkirk Rd., SW17 (nearest tube Tooting Broadway); speakers Anita Pollack MEP and London Hazards Centre

9.30am, Wednesday 17 June — Mass demonstration in support of victims of Repetition Strain Injuries (RSI) outside British Telecom Tower, Cleveland St., London, W1; leafleting and petitions

7 — 8.30pm, Wednesday 17 June — "New laws throughout Europe: will health and safety improve in the UK?"; Waltham Forest TUSU, Old School Complex, Markhouse Rd., Walthamstow, E17; Neil Gerrard MP and Andrea Oates (Labour Research Department)

2 — 5pm, Thursday 18 June — "Threats or opportunities?"; seminar on the new European legislation and on the reality of women working in the microelectronics industry, organised by Women Working

Worldwide; Committee Room 4, Islington Town Hall, Upper St., London, N1 (wheelchair access); speakers Celia Mather and Pat Stewart (Lothian Trade Union & Community Resource Centre); unwaged free, waged £3.00, this includes briefing papers and a report; Tel: 071 278 7019

9.30am — 4.30pm, Saturday 20 June — Construction Safety Campaign Annual General Meeting, Lyndhurst Hall, Warden Rd, Kentish Town, NW5; followed by a social at the same venue from 9pm to late. Contact:

CSC, c/o Isle of Dogs Neighbourhood Centre, Unit D, Millharbour, London, E14. Tel: 071 538 0507

IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR YOUR WORKPLACE OR GROUP TO ORGANISE AN EVENT FOR HAZARDS WEEK

For information on Hazards Week in London, contact: Campaign Against Hazards In London (CAHIL), 071 837 5605

For information on Hazards Week nationally, contact: Hazards Campaign, c/o HASAC, 021 236 0801

## Workers International Memorial Day

Started in the USA and Canada in 1988, Workers International Memorial Day on 28 April is a day to remember the victims of work and to protest at the conditions which cause deaths and injuries. This year North American protests focused on a factory fire in which 25 workers

died and on lobbying support for improvements in safety law.

In London, supporters of the Construction Safety Campaign and the Campaign Against Hazards In London protested outside the Building Employers Confederation at the number of construction workers killed, maimed and injured annually. Tommy Finn of the Construction Safety Campaign, said "The construction industry's safety record in Britain and world-wide is a horrific litany of death, injury

and illness — but it need not be that way. We do not accept, and nor do safety experts accept, that being put at risk should be part of the price of employment. Employers must be forced to fulfil their safety responsibilities and stop exploiting construction workers by putting their lives at risk."

Other events in Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Newcastle and Scotland made the first British Memorial Day a resounding success.

## 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.

## PUBLICATIONS

△ **After the Sprayer:** investigation and treatment of ill health caused by wood preservatives and how to get help. Factsheet. £1.00 (minimum order £2)

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

△ **Basic Health and Safety:** Workers' rights and how to win them. £6.00

▲ With **Protecting the Community:** A worker's guide to health and safety in Europe. £13.00 (£15.95 if purchased separately)

▲ **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+violence at work

△ **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.



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