

# THE DAILY HAZARD

## HOSPITAL HAZARDS...ON THE OUTSIDE

### RAIN polluted in Hillingdon

Local residents' groups are campaigning against a new incinerator operated by a private company at Hillingdon Hospital, West London.



This is supposed to have been incinerated at 1000 degrees!

In April, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution (HMIP) served an improvement notice on the

incinerator run by Basic Energy, a subsidiary of Blue Circle. Among HMIP's reasons were that atmospheric emissions were not measured, there were prolonged and frequent discharges from the emergency dump stack and there were not enough facilities for the safe handling of clinical waste. Independent laboratory tests showed unacceptable levels of the corrosive gas hydrogen chloride and significant amounts of highly toxic dioxins.

But before the company had met the improvement notice, HMIP gave them permission to burn radioactive waste from several nearby hospitals and Brunel University. The incinerator only received an operating licence from the London Waste Regulation Authority (LWRA) in July, nine months after it commenced operations! The incinerator was out of action for a while,

apparently to bring the standard of its operations up to the requirements of this licence, but is now in use again.

Residents were astonished that a plant which had not been operating properly, which had been issued with an improvement notice and which did not appear to be up to licensing standards, was issued with an operating licence and allowed to take on radioactive waste.

Local groups including the Hillingdon Village Residents' Association and Residents Against Incinerator Nuisance (RAIN) allege that since the plant started operating again:

- the incinerator is burning over 300 tonnes of waste per week from all over the country — well over the licence figure
- bags of clinical waste are being stored in the open awaiting incineration (and the attention of local cats and rats)
- ash in open skips contains intact, unburnt dressings

● plumes of malodorous smoke are frequently emitted and descend to ground level

● monitoring equipment is either absent or out of order

● waste is being delivered outside licensing hours.

RAIN has reported this to the LWRA and has run a vigorous campaign demanding that the status quo is restored, i.e. only waste generated within Hillingdon Area Health Authority to be burnt at the Hospital.

John Aldred, RAIN spokesperson commented, 'It appears that HMIP and the LWRA have been negligent and misled with regard to this development. Neither of these authorities want the spotlight to fall upon them and we find it difficult to obtain answers to our questions.'

RAIN has had equally little satisfaction from the management of Hillingdon Hospital, now an opted out trust, or from Basic Energy or Blue Circle. As local resident Vera Cook pointed out, 'It's all to do with money and nothing to do with health.'

## HOSPITAL HAZARDS ... ON THE INSIDE

### Mercury raises pressure at Whittington

When Whittington Hospital safety rep Jeff College was called in to sort out management's health and safety problems, he never expected he would end up on a disciplinary charge.

In May about 10-15 millilitres of highly toxic mercury were spilt in the hospital, rolling down a staircase and spreading over several levels of the hospital.

Metallic mercury is a liquid which evaporates at room temperature, and because it divides into infinite numbers of tiny globules, spillages can cover an enormous surface area from which evaporation takes place. It seeps into crevices and gaps thus making a clean-up difficult and adding to the evapora-

tion problem. In unventilated areas, spillages can quickly create dangerous concentrations of mercury in air many times greater than the occupational exposure level. Mercury is well known for damaging the liver and brain. It is essential to have a safe system of work so that a mercury spill is dealt with immediately by properly trained, equipped and protected workers.

Management at the Whittington simply told cleaners to 'mop it up', without making any assessment of the risk. The cleaning staff knew this was a hazardous, and pretty impossible job, and came to their COHSE safety rep, Jeff, for advice. Jeff identified the substance as mercury, and asked for the area to be closed off until it was safe. He contacted the Fire Brigade who came with proper safety equipment and cleaned up as thoroughly as possible.



Local MP Jeremy Corbyn joined the demonstration to condemn health service cuts, which, he said, 'undermine basic rights of representation at work'.

While dealing with this crisis Jeff was overheard making a slightly derogatory remark about management's handling of the situation. Jeff was told he was on a disciplinary charge and management refused at first to recognise that, as a trade union safety rep, he was entitled to be represented by his COHSE union official. Not surprisingly, at his hearing management was completely unable to make the disciplinary charge stick.

The hospital management's

transparent attempt to divert attention away from their own organisational shortcomings angered workers at the hospital. They held a demonstration to defend and encourage 'whistle-blowing' on health and safety standards. Whistles were provided!

COHSE's National Health and Safety Officer, Sarah Copsey told us 'This case is typical of health service management's very low level of awareness of the Control Of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations, and their general ignorance in respect of health and safety duties'.

#### INSIDE

Wood sprayer wins £90,000 2

Hackney residents fight asbestos depot 2

Factsheet: Fire in the workplace 3

RSI book published in Braille 4



## Massive pesticide settlement won

Lawyer Alan Care of Leigh, Day & Co has secured an out-of-court settlement of £90,000 from Rentokil Limited in a pesticide law suit. He says this is the first pesticide/dioxin cancer claim to be settled worldwide and will open the door to other related claims globally.

George Yates, the claimant in this case, worked for Rentokil from 1978 to 1988 spraying the pesticides lindane and pentachlorophenol (PCP) as wood preservatives. George developed soft tissue sarcoma, a type of cancer, and had extensive medical treatment, including the removal of a malignant tumour. His condition is now stable.

Alan Care had expert support from Dr Alastair Hay of the Chemical Pathology Department at Leeds University and cancer specialist Associate Professor Lennart Hardell of Sweden. They both agreed that Mr Yates' sarcoma was caused by dioxin impurities in the PCP or by the chemical itself.

It is a sad footnote to his story that while working for Rentokil Mr Yates sprayed the home of the Nichols family. Llwyd Nichols died earlier this year of aplastic anaemia at the age of 16. Rentokil paid the Nichols family £20,000 in an out-of-court settlement relating to the pesticide treatment of their home and their son's illness.

'These are only two of the thirty plus pesticide cases on my books at the moment,' Alan Care told the London Hazards Centre. 'Not all of them are against Rentokil. I expect most to be settled out of court, but one, Gaskill v Rentokil, is likely to go to court and will be a test case that could rock the preservation industry even further.'

Louise Christian, a barrister from Christian Fisher & Co, said 'This settlement is good news. I am representing over thirty members of the construction union, UCATT, in pesticide-related claims. There is a confusion now though, as we have the

recent government inquiry into lindane giving it a clean bill of health yet we have these out-of-court settlements.'

The London Hazards Centre, and many other groups, have criticised the Government's attitude to the licensing and use of these dangerous pesticides. Both PCP and lindane have been banned or restricted in many countries. The British Government has recently announced it is to review the use of PCP.

Alan Care says 'The British Government's position on dioxin, pesticides and wood preservatives and their effects on public health becomes less tenable day by day. In Germany the Federal Prosecutor is bringing prosecutions for endangering public health against German wood treatment companies, and in Sweden both of these pesticides have been banned for many years. The UK's position is in marked contrast. I consider the result of this case to be a watershed.'

## New cockroach treatment approved

The Advisory Committee on Pesticides and the Ministry of Agriculture have now given approval for the commercial use of the growth regulating hormone hydroprene as a treatment against cockroaches. It is likely that formulations will come on the market soon.

Hydroprene acts by preventing cockroaches from reaching sexual maturity; while they live their normal lifespans, they cannot produce offspring. Spectacular results are claimed in test data with complete eradication of cockroach infestations by three treatments at 120 day intervals.

The chemical is claimed to have a very low mammalian toxicity though there are reports of adverse effects in the literature which were apparently not considered by the authorities. Currently, hydroprene appears to offer real advantages over conventional pesticides which are toxic to humans and which do not achieve complete eradication.

# Hackney Marsh is a waste of space

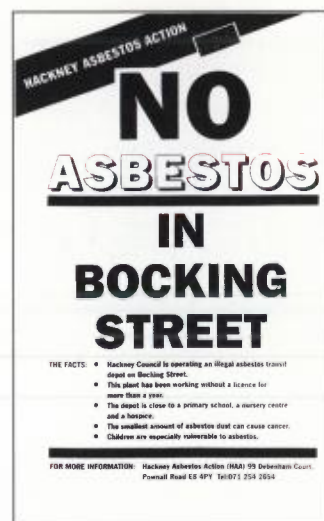
Residents near Bocking Street in Hackney got a shock recently when a letter from the London Waste Regulation Authority (LWRA) informed them that the Council wanted a licence to use a small depot nearby for the transfer of up to 60 tonnes of asbestos waste per week. It turned out that there was a mistake in the licence application and the Council only wanted to transfer 60 tonnes per year. All the same, this is a substantial increase on current operations.

The Bocking Street depot is only a few hundred yards from a hospice, an under-fives centre and a primary school. Local children say they have no difficulty getting into the depot to play. At a hurriedly organised, but well attended public meeting, residents learned that it had been used as an asbestos transfer station for over a year without a licence, quite possibly in breach of the law.

Undoubtedly the individual who most attracted the residents' ire was Cllr. Brian Marsh, chair of the Environmental Services Committee in Hackney and simultaneously chair of the LWRA. At the public meeting he dismissed residents' fears for their safety; when asked about the risk, he shrugged and said, 'If there's an accident, then there's an accident.'

Residents organised themselves into Hackney Asbestos Action (HAA) in order to campaign for the closure of the station. Posters and T-shirts have been produced and leafleting of the area carried out. Plans are in hand to lobby councillors and to obtain media publicity. Good links have also been made with the council's Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) workers. Campaigners are clear that they do not want to dump the problem on someone else. Diana Russell of HAA says, 'It is a real disgrace that this station has been open for a year without the Council letting us know. We want it moved to a site where no-one will be at risk.'

The LWRA has taken the step of holding a public enquiry into the licence application. This will be



held on 22nd September and members of the public and their representatives can give evidence. The application will be held under the old Control of Pollution Act (CPA), soon to be superseded by the Environmental Protection Act (EPA); the CPA entitles residents to object to the licence only on grounds of danger to public health and there is no instance of the LWRA refusing a licence on this basis. It is thought that things might improve under the EPA but that remains to be seen.

But this will not deter Hackney Asbestos Action. Whatever the weakness of the law, they will campaign against the evident indifference of the Council to their well-being.

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Hackney Asbestos Action, c/o 99 Debenham Court, Pownall Road, London E8 4PY. Tel: 071-254 2654



# FIRE IN THE WORKPLACE

Every year, fires and explosions cause about 2% of all reported major workplace injuries. In common with other types of 'accidents', fire injuries are predictable and preventable if basic precautions and procedures are taken. The major factor in fatal fires in modern industrial and commercial buildings is inadequate management of fire safety, rather than inadequate building design or failure of fire-fighting equipment.

Fire safety should be an integral part of day-to-day management. The simple provision of fire protection equipment and periodic visits from the enforcing authorities or insurers are not enough.

This factsheet covers the legislation and principles of organisation to prevent workplace fires. More detailed guidance can be obtained from the fire authority.

## The law

The Law divides into two main parts.

1. **New buildings and major alterations to existing buildings** are covered by the Building Regulations 1985 which are the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, and enforced by the building control officer for the local authority, who consults the fire authority. The Regulations require means of escape in case of a fire, and measures to limit the spread of a fire.

2. **Existing places of work** (offices, shops, railway premises, factories) are covered by the Health And Safety at Work Act (HSWA) 1974, and the Fire Precautions Act (FPA) 1971, as amended by the Fire Safety and Places of Sport Act 1987. These premises are controlled by the fire authority which has the power to issue improvement and prohibition notices. Crown premises are dealt with by the Fire Service Inspectorate of the Home Office.

## Fire certificates

If more than twenty people work in the same building, even if they have different employers, there must be a fire certificate from the fire authority. If more than ten people work in rooms above or below ground level, even in different businesses, the building must have a fire certificate. This certificate is a complex and detailed legal document that specifies the required fire protection measures for those premises. It covers:

- escape routes
- location of equipment (extinguishers, blankets, hose reels)
- fire safety signs
- testing and maintenance of equipment
- fire drills
- training
- limit on number of occupants

## Exemptions

When a fire certificate is applied for, the fire authority, after inspecting the premises, may decide to give an exemption certificate, for example, if everyone works on the ground floor, with several exits. The exemption notice will state the maximum number of people who can be in the building.

## Premises not requiring a certificate

Section 9a of the FPA requires all employers to provide adequate means of escape and fire fighting equipment, and the HSWA requires training and information for employees. So duties are similar to certificated premises. The FPA code of practice outlines what employers should do.

## Management of fire safety

Investigations of fire disasters have revealed such management failings as:

- no overall responsibility for fire safety
- no management or staff training
- long delays in raising the alarm and summoning the Fire Brigade
- no organised, methodical evacuation plan
- locked fire exits

## Formulating policy

Meeting the minimum legal requirements to get a fire certificate is one thing, but management must implement the requirements in full. The risk of fire needs to be identified, the consequences understood, and a thorough policy put into practice.

Things to consider are:

- designating responsibility
- clear and well documented procedures
- training
- drills
- inspections
- maintenance and testing contracts
- liaison with the Fire Brigade
- record keeping
- COSHH
- electricity regulations
- smoking policies
- good housekeeping
- correct use of electrical equipment and appliances

## Designating responsibility

As with other aspects of occupational health and safety, nobody thinks they're the person responsible for fire safety. It is essential that there is a designated manager who:

- is aware of responsibilities

- consults with workers and trade union safety reps
- delegates duties to supervisors and ensures compliance
- has time allocated to the job
- has knowledge and access to specialist advice
- has support from senior management to develop and implement policies

## Procedures

There need to be pre-planned written procedures for raising the alarm, calling the Fire Brigade and getting safely out of the building, aimed at:

- the person who discovers the fire
- people who hear the alarm, but have no special duties
- people who have special duties in case of fire

**Raising the alarm:** anyone must have the right to operate the fire alarm immediately if they suspect or know there's a fire. Management must make it clear they will support anyone doing this even if it's a false alarm or a very small, contained fire. Details about the nature and location of the fire can be given after the alarm is sounded. Do not underestimate the rate at which fire spreads, time is crucial. There must be means for warning every occupant of the building; consider cleaners, contractors etc. and the circumstances which arise outside normal working hours.

**Calling the Brigade:** the Fire Brigade must be summoned immediately. There must be a procedure in place to make sure this is done by responsible manager/s. It must be made clear that nobody should put themselves at risk to get to a phone — the fire service can be called from outside the building. In smaller places, the duty might have to be delegated to the person who discovers the fire. Whatever the arrangements, they must be made clear in the written procedure. Relay alarm signals to a monitoring centre may fail or be delayed.

**Extinguishing the fire:** procedures must not require anyone to attempt to tackle a fire.

**Action on hearing the alarm:** nobody should stop to pick up belongings or finish what they're doing. All doors should be closed on the way out. Everyone must know the escape routes and know to wait at the assembly point for a roll call. Re-entry must be clearly prohibited until the Brigade say it's safe.

## Fire drills and training for workers

Management's duty to train is not satisfied by carrying out periodic drills.

Section 2 HSWA imposes a duty on employers to train and give instruction to staff. Section 6 FPA empowers the fire authority to impose requirements for instruction and training and for keeping records of what has been done.

The guidance says that everyone at work should be instructed by a competent person at least once, but preferably twice every year. New employees must be given basic instructions on their first day, and given detailed instruction as soon as possible. Don't forget night shift, security and cleaning workers.

Training should include:

- action to be taken on discovering a fire
- action to be taken on hearing a fire alarm
- raising the alarm, location and use of alarm points
- calling the Fire Brigade
- location and use of fire fighting equipment
- knowledge of escape routes, particularly stairways not in normal use
- method of operating escape door devices, such as panic bars
- appreciation of the importance of fire doors and the need to close all doors during a fire
- stopping machines and processes and isolating the power supply where appropriate
- evacuation of the building to a place of safety. Where members of the public are present this includes reassuring them, escorting them to exits etc.
- muster and roll call procedure

## Drills

Management should:

- record times
- record who has had drills and instruction
- review effectiveness and make improvements
- use alternative routes in drills, by designating an imaginary area of fire.

## Inspection, testing and maintenance

There should be a tailor-made inspection plan for the premises. For example

**Daily:** alarm equipment indicators, emergency lighting, fire exits.

**Weekly:** escape routes, final exit doors, test alarm, test sprinklers.

**Monthly:** test emergency lighting, signs, extinguishers, hose reels.

**Quarterly:** full inspections, maintenance of alarm and sprinkler systems.

**Annually:** maintenance of appliances



## Hazards Centre's RSI book published in Braille

Workers with visual impairment, who frequently find themselves excluded from jobs for which they are qualified and experienced, may be confined to particular employment sectors. Increasingly, they are likely to do jobs which involve the use of computers. Poor job and

workstation design have resulted in some of these workers developing repetition strain injuries (RSI).

The National League for the Blind and Disabled, in recognition of this problem, has produced a Braille edition of the London Hazards Centre publication: *Repetition Strain Injuries — Hidden harm from overuse*, which informs and advises workers on how to tackle the problem.

*Repetition Strain Injuries — Hidden harm from overuse* Braille edition £5.00 is available from:

Mick Barrett, General Secretary, National League of the Blind and Disabled, 2 Tenterden Road, London N17 Tel: 081 808 6030

## HSE health and safety week

The Health and Safety Executive have launched their own health and safety week to be held on 23-27 November 1992. Trade unions and employers are being encouraged to run safety events. A free pack of basic health and safety information is available, including information on the new regulations based on EC directives which will come into force in January 1993. The pack is available from the HSE Public Enquiry Point: Tel 0742 892345.

### Thanks to our appeal donors

As promised, we are printing a list of those who have donated to our appeal since March 1992.

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 TGWU 1/294 Potters Bar Branch  
 TGWU 1/369 Branch  
 TGWU Region No.1 various branches  
 TGWU Regional No.1  
 Trade Union News  
 UCW London PHQ (amalgamated)

## CSC to lobby Parliament

The Construction Safety Campaign (CSC) is to hold a national lobby of Parliament on safety in the construction industry on Wednesday 25 November 1992. Tony O'Brien, the Secretary of the CSC, said 'Employment in the industry has plummeted recently but the number of people being killed seems to be constant. We must make this an opportunity for construction workers to protest and demand changes in the law from their MP's'.

## 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 + fire in the workplace

▲ **Daily Hazard** complete run: £25

\*Price to community/tenants/union groups.

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

## DIY property inspection guide published

Tenants Resource Information Centre (TRIS) have produced a new guide, *How to Inspect a House or Flat: A DIY Guide to property inspection for tenants*. The book offers a practical approach with checklists, highlights some common pitfalls of inspection and is useful for building campaigns and developing evidence for legal cases.

£2.50 to tenants, £5.00 for individuals, voluntary agencies and solicitors, £7.50 for statutory authorities and housing associations.

Available from: TRIS, 1st floor, 1 Pink Lane, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 5DW



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