

THE DAILY HAZARD

Journalists adopt RSI action programme

Over one hundred journalists attended the National Union of Journalists' conference on repetition strain injuries (RSI) on 10 October 1992.

The Hazards Centre provided a speaker, and ran workshops on the new VDU Regulations. RSI has reached epidemic proportions in the industry as management has introduced new technology and working patterns without regard for workers' health. Many journalists themselves are unaware of just how disabling a disease RSI can be and the conference alerted journalists to the scale of the problem.

Delegates concentrated on negotiating strategies to prevent RSI. An action programme was agreed including the following:

Elect:

▲ at least one safety rep. If you have more than one you could

set up an office safety committee with management. Make sure reps get full facilities to enable them to enforce health and safety law, by taking up their rights to information, inspection,



The introduction of new technology at the Financial Times led to an outbreak of RSI

consultation and representation.

Negotiate:

▲ a new technology agreement which at least meets the minimum standards set out in the new VDU Regulations. Agreements should cover workstation ergonomics; staffing levels, hours and screen breaks; eye tests; and work offscreen for

workers with RSI symptoms and for pregnant women.

▲ a security of employment agreement. Set up good RSI reporting systems; workers suffering symptoms should not be victimised; should receive proper medical advice; redeployment to suitable work or time off with full pay. There should be no pressure to return to work until fully fit and the right to return should be guaranteed.

Monitor:

▲ management's compliance with the new Regulations. Raise any deficiency with them immediately in writing. You can call in an inspector from the Health and Safety Executive or local authority Environmental Health Department if management are failing to comply with the law.

For detailed information on RSI and its prevention read: *Repetition Strain Injuries: Hidden Harm from Overuse*, £3.00 (trade union and community groups); £6.00 (others), available from the London Hazards Centre.

Your health — their wealth

The Government's White Paper *Health of the Nation* sets out key proposals for health promotion from April 1993. It emphasises the need to reduce accidents, heart disease, mental health problems and cancers.

The improvement of hazardous working conditions should form an integral part of the strategy for prevention. However, the Paper concentrates on lifestyle factors such as smoking, alcohol, diet and exercise, and virtually ignores work-related ill-health and workplace accidents.

The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) was invited to comment on the Paper, and pointed out that the reduction of workplace risks would make an

important contribution to the nation's health. Although the extent of work-related ill-health is grossly underestimated, the HSC continues to focus on advising employers and running 'high-profile media campaigns'.

Here are some points the HSC didn't mention to the Department of Health.

Accidents: In 1988 and 1989 22% of all accident admissions followed workplace accidents.

Heart disease: Over a quarter of all heart and circulatory disease is work-related.

Mental Health: Many of the factors affecting cardiovascular health also affect mental health. Stress/depression was found to be the third most common work-

related health problem in the UK.

Cancers: At least 6% of all cancers could be work-related. In Denmark there are 250 government-recognised carcinogens. The latest list from the HSC includes just 16 entries.

There are ample opportunities for really effective occupational health promotion. The Labour Party is apparently waking up to this situation, and has been asking Health Secretary Virginia Bottomley some awkward questions in the House of Commons on medical students' training in occupational health, the cost of occupational ill-health and the role of health promotion departments. Labour now wants to develop an occupational health

policy through wide-ranging consultations, and aims to produce a draft next summer.

Frontbench health spokesperson, Ian McCartney, told the *Daily Hazard*: 'Without a doubt the Government's concentration on lifestyle issues and individual responsibility for health lets employers off the hook and sweeps rotten working conditions under the carpet. It's a national scandal that about 90% of workers still have no access to occupational health services or any information about occupational hazards.'

INSIDE

European roundup	2
Factsheet: Safety data sheets	3
CAHIL calls for action	4

1993 brings safety reps' six-pack

The so called 'six pack' of new EC-inspired regulations will come fully into force on 1 January 1993. Made under the umbrella of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, they amend and extend current legislation. The six sets of regulations provide important new ammunition for safety representatives fighting for improvements in workers' health.

As we go to press, only one set of regulations has actually been published, however the HSE expects employers to comply with the new laws from 1 January 1993. David Eaves, Deputy Director of the HSE, insists that there is no lead-in time for compliance with the new regulations and that where the law is being flouted, inspectors will take firm enforcement action.



MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK (MHSW) REGULATIONS

Employers duties include:

- ▲ making a written assessment of all health and safety risks to their employees and identifying measures needed to minimise them
- ▲ making health and safety arrangements 'for the effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review of protective and protective measures'
- ▲ appointment of 'competent staff' to apply protective and preventive measures
- ▲ establishing clear procedures for 'serious and imminent danger' at work
- ▲ provision of 'comprehensive and relevant' health and safety information to workers
- ▲ provision of health and safety training for workers on recruitment, and on exposure to new or increased risks. Periodic refresher training must be given.

New trade union rights

The MHSW Regs also provide a

very useful extension to the Safety Reps and Safety Committees Regs, requiring employers to consult with trade union safety reps 'in good time' about:

- ▲ changes at work
- ▲ arrangements for appointment of the 'competent person'
- ▲ health and safety information to be given to employees
- ▲ planning and organisation of health and safety training
- ▲ planning of introduction of new technologies And to provide such facilities and assistance as reps may need.

WORKPLACE (HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE) REGULATIONS

These regulations will replace many of the welfare arrangements in the Office Shops and Railway Premises Act and the Factories Act and will be universal for all work premises. The standards will be similar to existing ones for space, toilets, environment, facilities, house-keeping and cleanliness, that is, vague and dependent on negotiation.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) AT WORK REGULATIONS

Where risks cannot be ade-

Protect yourself — read *Protecting the Community*

Although much European legislation has been watered down in the process of transposition into UK law, there remain some useful improvements which safety reps, in particular, should learn about to ensure full implementation in their workplaces.

To understand the European maze, how legislation is brought about, and how you can ensure that improvements take place in your workplace, the London Hazards Centre has published *Protecting the Community: A worker's guide to health and safety in Europe**. Since its publication in June 1992, the book has received widespread critical acclaim:

"The London Hazards Centre has produced the most comprehensive, well constructed, and challenging analysis of an area which is at the head of the European Community's social dimension. As no point in its demanding length does the quality of either the thought or the writing wane. All those interested in the potential for change in the European experiment must read this book."

European Labour Forum

* *Protecting the Community* is available from the London Hazards Centre priced £9.95.

quately controlled by other methods PPE should be supplied free by the employer. It must be fitted to each individual's needs, be appropriate for the job and be properly maintained. Workers must be consulted and trained.

PROVISION AND USE OF WORK EQUIPMENT REGULATIONS 1992

The regulations clearly set out general standards for the safe use and maintenance of equipment, whereas previous legislation on equipment was rather piecemeal. They emphasise assessment, information, training and consultation, as well as suitability of equipment and precautions (guards, stop controls), from hand tools through to complete plant.

MANUAL HANDLING REGULATIONS

These require employers to avoid hazardous manual handling operations where possible. Each operation should be assessed ergonomically, ie the weight, shape, method, force etc. A written record is generally required. Where risks of injury are identified, employers must reduce them to the lowest level reasonably practicable, through mechanical handling, new work

methods, information and training.

VDU REGULATIONS — HEALTH AND SAFETY (DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT) REGULATIONS

These require employers to identify and assess risks to health and to take steps to eliminate them. There are detailed requirements for ergonomic design of the workstation, screen, keyboard, desk, chair, lighting and software. Employers must plan the operator's day so there are regular screen breaks. Free eye tests will be given to VDU users on request. Information, instruction and training must be given. The HSE has published a free guide: *New Health and Safety at Work Regulations*. Contact: HSE, Broad Lane, Sheffield, S3 7HQ. Tel: 0742-892345 Fax: 0742-892333

Euro videos

Trade Films have produced four short videos *Health and Safety — The European Challenge*. The *Introduction* (13 mins) sets out the issues. *A Framework for Safety* (23 mins) examines the impact of the Framework Directive. *A Common Position* (20 mins) explains the Community's legislative process, focusing on the Manual Handling Directive as an example. *In Accordance With National Law* (20 mins) looks at the problem of transposing Community Directives into national law, comparing the British and French responses to the Directive on Noise at Work.

These informative tapes are accompanied by booklets giving more background information and discussion points. Available from: Trade Films (EHAS), 36, Bottle Bank, Gateshead, NE8 2AR

STOP PRESS

There are still a few places left on our training course on EUROPE AND HEALTH AND SAFETY on Thursday 10 December 1992. To be fully equipped for January 1993, read the book and come on the training course.

SAFETY DATA SHEETS

Safety data sheets are documentation supplied with substances in the workplace which should provide all the necessary information to use those substances safely, and form the basis of a COSHH (Control Of Substances Hazardous to Health) assessment. A data sheet should come with every product brought into the workplace.

Data sheets vary a lot in quality. Some companies take a lot of care in their preparation but many do not. The information is often incomplete, out of date or just plain wrong. There is a systematic tendency to underplay the hazards.

This factsheet provides a checklist for safety representatives to assess whether safety data sheets are adequate and to demand extra information when required. Clearly, an element of judgement is required in deciding how much information is sufficient; less data is needed for commonly available chemicals known to be safe than for materials whose properties are not so well documented. But if there is an element of doubt, demand that full information is supplied. Never accept data sheets as the only source of information — be ready to check out the information they contain with your union or with the organisations in the Hazards Movement.

The law

Section 6 of the Health and Safety at Work Act (HSW Act), and COSHH, require manufacturers and suppliers of substances to provide this information to users, in most cases employers. Employers have a duty to acquire such information for the purpose of risk assessment under COSHH and Regulation 2 of the new Management of Health and Safety at Work (MHSW) Regulations; to make it available to both to individual workers [MHSW Regulation 8]; and to union safety representatives [MHSW Regulation 17 and Schedule]. Under the Schedule, employers will be obliged to consult with safety representatives on the information to be provided to employees. Representatives will therefore be able to propose improvements in information if they do not think it is adequate.

The law is much less helpful on what information should actually go into a safety data sheet. The

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides general guidance [*Substances for use at work: the provision of information HS(G)27(revised)*] but this falls short of specifying the information manufacturers and suppliers must provide.

In response to European legislation, the HSE has recently issued the draft Chemicals (Hazards Information and Packaging) (CHIP) Regulations which are expected to become law in the middle of 1993. Suppliers will be obliged to provide enough information about chemicals classified as dangerous to enable users to take the right precautions. The headings under which information must be provided will be prescribed but the detail of the information will not be specified.

The information

General information:

- The safety data sheet should specify the manufacturer's or supplier's address; the telephone number and the emergency telephone number for contact at night or weekends, and the name of the technical person to be contacted.

The product:

- Every component of the product and its proportion must be mentioned. The component present in the smallest proportion may be the most toxic. Where components or proportions cannot be separately identified, this must be stated. There is no right of commercial confidentiality which permits this information to be withheld.

- The proper chemical name, any synonyms and the chemical formula of each component must be specified. If this information is missing, the user will not be able to identify the chemicals involved. Every chemical is assigned a unique number, the CAS Registry No., which enables it to be identified, and this must be provided. The Hazchem Code, which relates to the movement of chemicals by road in the UK, and the United Nations Number, for transport of chemicals internationally by road, rail and air, should be given.

- Where they exist, the Maximum Exposure Limits (MELs) or the Occupational Exposure Standards (OESs) for each component must be stated. A list of OELs is published annually by the HSE in a document called EH40. OELs are the maximum

allowable concentrations to which workers can be exposed under the COSHH Regs. Any other regulations which apply should be mentioned.

- The formulation (e.g. crystalline, oily, etc.), colour and odour of the product should be given with data on the physical properties (boiling point, melting point, density, etc.).
- Permitted uses should be stated plus information on any incompatible substances for mixing or storage. Permitted and forbidden methods of application should also be specified. Data on flammable properties should include the flash point, the upper and lower explosive limits and the auto-ignition temperature.

The hazards:

- The general nature of the risk (e.g. corrosive, radioactive) should be stated.
- Both short- and long-term effects of a) ingestion, b) inhalation, c) skin contact, d) eye contact should be presented. The first detectable signs of over-exposure should be specified. Reference should be made to any known carcinogenic or mutagenic properties and to reproductive hazards. The nature and extent of the tests performed should be mentioned. Where they are known, measures of toxicity such as the LD₅₀ value (amount of substance needed to kill half of a test group of animals) should be presented.
- A description of inherent fire and explosion hazards should be given, with information on any toxic by-products which can be formed.

Handling and use:

- Precise advice should be given on the necessary conditions for the safe use of the substance without risk to health.
- Appropriate control measures (enclosure, remote handling, local exhaust ventilation, etc.) should be specified. The effectiveness of the control measures should be outlined.

Personal protection:

- Personal protective equipment for all areas of the body should be specified for all the recommended uses of a substance. This should specify the material from which gloves should be manufactured to ensure they are impermeable and state the types of boots, overalls, goggles and respirators, which will conform to British Standards. Guidance should be given on the use of barrier creams. Advice

should be provided on procedures for cleaning protective clothing and equipment.

Storage:

- Information on storage should include the maximum safe lifetime of the product and container; special materials or design features for storage rooms and containers; maximum quantities to be stored; maximum stacking heights; possible chemical changes; incompatible chemicals; fire separation distances; temperature and ventilation requirements; protection against the weather; sensitivity to shock; and security measures.

Disposal:

- It should be specified whether the substance is a special waste under the Environmental Protection Act. Information should be provided on the preferred method of final disposal (removal to landfill, incineration, etc.) with any special precautions required. Possible environmental effects should be specified along with data on persistence and biodegradability.
- Procedures for emptying and cleaning containers together with appropriate safety measures should be provided.

Emergencies:

- Emergency procedures need to be specified for spillage and fire. In the event of spillage, the consequences should be spelt out, precautionary action, including evacuation, should be defined, and procedures for containment and clean-up laid down with advice on the protective equipment required.
- For fires, special hazards from combustion and decomposition should be defined, the correct type of extinguisher should be specified with warnings against the use of unsuitable or incompatible extinguishing agents, and particular information and advice for the Fire Brigade should be provided.

First aid:

- General instructions on first aid should be given for the effects of inhalation, ingestion, eye contact and skin contact. These instructions should be capable of being carried out at the site of exposure.
- If a specific antidote is provided with the product, instructions should be given for its use and any training required. Relevant information for doctors or ambulance personnel should be supplied.

CAHIL wants more action

After a successful first year, the Campaign Against Hazards In London (CAHIL) is seeking to broaden its activities by encouraging more safety reps and activists to get involved.

The Campaign brings together active safety reps and workers from a range of industries: those working on health and safety professionally including academics, advice workers, solicitors, doctors, occupational hygienists, environmental health officers, trade union health and

safety officers; students, voluntary workers and community activists.

CAHIL selects hazards topics which have widespread impact, and organises informative meetings and publicity events to draw attention to the problems and strategies for resolving them.

During its first year CAHIL held several very successful meetings on repetition strain injuries, hazards in the construc-

tion industry, enforcement of health and safety law by Environmental Health Officers, and the hazards faced by London's transport workers. The Campaign was also involved in a range of activities such as Workers International Memorial Day, National Hazards Week, and the International Hazards Conference in Sheffield.

CAHIL is actively building a support base from as many people as possible in the London area

including safety reps and activists who will be able to help make London a less dangerous place to work and live. CAHIL also wants to involve groups who are concerned about community pollution issues such as asbestos on housing estates and toxic land redevelopment.

CAHIL wants you to get involved in forthcoming activities, such as the 1993 Workers International Memorial Day to be held in London on 28 April 1993.

NEXT CAHIL MEETING: 6.30PM 13 JANUARY 1993, 1ST FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM, 308 GRAY'S INN ROAD, LONDON WC1. SPECIAL TOPIC: ENFORCEMENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY LAW

London Conference on Homeworking WINNING RIGHTS FOR HOMEWORKERS

**Is Europe the way forward?
3 March 1993 at Camden Town Hall**

Speakers on European and UK law, health and safety and abolition of wages councils.

Contact: Roslyn Perkins, London Hazards Centre Tel: 071-837 5605 or Sophie Mangera, Greenwich Homeworkers Tel: 081-854 8012

HAZLIT online

The London Hazards Centre has always invested a lot in its information resources. The Centre has a small but valuable library and catalogues incoming material on its computerised documents database. Earlier this year, the Centre began publishing *Hazards Networker*, a regular listing of documents, articles, books coming into the library. We have now gone one step further and made the database, under the name of *HAZLIT*, available 'on-line'.

This means that those who have got the required equipment (personal computer, communications software and modem) and who have a subscription to the Poptel/Geonet or Manchester Host (MH) electronic mail (e-mail) systems can have access to our literature database without coming into our library. E-mail systems allow you to send information to and receive information from other computer users through the public telecommunications network.

HAZLIT contains information on about 4,000 documents. We always try to include information on where to get hold of the document, though we can also supply copies of articles and shorter documents, subject to copyright rules and a flat rate charge of £1 per document. Until the end of December 1992, access to *HAZLIT* is free.

We are very keen for health and safety activists to contribute to *HAZLIT*. If you have read a document or article that you feel would be particularly useful to others, send a copy to us with your comments. We will feed it into the system. We also need volunteer translators to summarise non-English documents.

Contact us for further information about database content and subject terms. Contact the Manchester Host or Poptel/Geonet for questions about access, subscriptions etc. Manchester Host, 30 Naples Street, Manchester M4 4DB. Tel: 061-839 4212. Poptel, 25 Downham Road, London N1 5AA. Tel: 071-249 2948.

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
- ▲ **Daily Hazard** complete run: £25

*Price to community/tenants/union groups.

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



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