

THE DAILY HAZARD

Asbestos: workers and tenants at risk

Enfield guilty of risking workers lives

On 25 July, Enfield Council was found guilty of exposing two sub-contracted employees to deadly asbestos dust. The Council was fined £12,500 plus almost £11,500 in costs after the Court determined that the Council violated two important regulations requiring employers to protect non-employees from exposure to asbestos and risks to their health and safety. 'No one ever mentioned any asbestos. No one told us to use precautions or gave us any safety instructions,' said one of the exposed workers who had been given the job of drilling holes in the amosite (brown asbestos)-laden walls of the Enfield Civic Centre in December 1993.

Less than a year before the incident, Enfield council had no legally acceptable policy and plan for managing asbestos. It was only in March 1993 after the expiry of an enforcement notice that a plan was produced. HSE inspector Rosalind Roberts says she considered prosecuting the Council and the Chief Executive personally at the time, but the Council quickly produced an implementation plan and the HSE 'trusted them to implement it.'

Then, on 3rd December, Civic Centre workers walked in to find a snow storm of dust containing asbestos on their desks and papers. Following an HSE investigation, the Council shut down the Civic Centre air conditioning system, evacuated part of the building and brought in a licensed contractor to clean-up the asbestos dust. The HSE says 'they just don't know' if anyone else in addition to these two workers was exposed to asbestos dust at dangerous levels.

Although Civic Centre employees feel that the Council

now has a good safety policy, they have doubts as to whether the Council will implement it fully. 'We're concerned that the same thing could happen again,' said Paul Bishop, UNISON Enfield Branch Secretary. Bishop says that their demand for comprehensive asbestos labelling was agreed by the Council years ago, but it still hasn't happened. UNISON is aware of another incident of a contractor drilling and releasing asbestos in an Enfield Council sheltered housing property. 'If these accidental releases are going to continue to happen, we've got a serious problem,' said Bishop.



HSE pocket card for building workers is part of a campaign launched in 1995 after years of complacency (see last Daily Hazard)

Sarah Copsey, Director of Health and Safety for UNISON, said she was 'glad to see the HSE taking a tough line. All too often we get reports of work on asbestos not being properly managed and controlled. This decision should be a clear warning to employers that there is no way around compliance with health and safety and asbestos regulations.'

Aggressive enforcement on asbestos is welcome, but how successful is the HSE in preventing exposures? 'We have to believe that employers are going to do things,' said HSE inspector Roberts.

Southwark tenants fight for right to know

Just a week after the Enfield verdict (story opposite), a meeting of tenants on Southwark's 1,300-home Heygate Estate was asking why Southwark Council hadn't alerted them to the asbestos hazard in their homes.

In May, Southwark Council had told Heygate Tenants Association committee members that a report by Adamson laboratories based on 3 sample flats showed asbestos in most areas, in artex on the ceilings, panels above doors, wall panels, duct covers, pipe wadding and probably floor tiles.

The tenants's committee asked the Council to circulate a leaflet to all tenants advising them not to disturb asbestos by decorating, drilling, etc. The Council refused: they wanted to survey a full ten percent of flats before 'alarming' the tenants.

The tenants meeting on 31 July heard London Hazards Centre worker Mick Holder and TGWU Health and Safety Coordinator Alan Dalton explain the hazards of asbestos.

'Government experts have recently admitted they grossly underestimated the numbers of workers in construction maintenance who will die from asbestos cancer and disease,' said Alan Dalton. 'They are warning electricians, plumbers, carpenters and painters and decorators not to work on

anything they suspect to be asbestos. The same experts refuse to accept tenants decorating asbestos ridden flats are at a similar risk. But people are, as I speak, decorating, drilling, sanding — in other words damaging and disturbing the asbestos in their flats.'

Tony O'Brien, Convenor of Southwark Direct Labour building workers, pointed out that the council had cut its 'asbestos team', responsible for surveying and managing asbestos, from 25 to 3 workers, and that contracting out would lessen its ability to monitor the safe management of asbestos.

In 1989, the local government ombudsman condemned Southwark council for maladministration when it refused a similar request by a Tenants Association. On that occasion, the council undertook to warn new, but not existing, tenants. Tenants who innocently removed warm air ducting from their flats were exposed to asbestos.

The HSE has just followed up the Enfield verdict by asking all local authorities to 'alert contractors and workers involved in local government building and refurbishment projects to the serious health risks of exposure to asbestos dust'. But on the Heygate and other estates, tenants are not being alerted and are still being exposed.

Centre Open Evenings

Wednesdays 6-8
Use the library
Meet other reps and
campaigners
Details on back page

The Centre's Asbestos Hazards Handbook

will be published shortly.
Advance order form in
this issue

Jobs and the environment, American-style

Cora Roelofs spent the summer working at LHC as part of her masters degree in Environmental and Occupational Health Science. Back home in New York, she works at the Mount Sinai Irving J. Selikoff Occupational Health Clinic's 'Lead in Construction Program' and is a volunteer coordinator of the NYC Labor and Environment Network.

As times get tougher, and jobs scarcer, workers will be faced with more of the familiar 'your job or your health' double jeopardy. All over the world proponents of deregulation, competitiveness and free trade claim that society has to choose between the benefits of industry on the one hand and a clean environment and safe workplace on the other.

Activists in the United States are working to defeat this blackmail and head off potential conflicts between labor advocates and environmental campaigners. Trade unionists and environmentalists are making links between workers' health and community health, reporting on statistics proving that environmental regulation does not cost jobs, but creates them, and joining in alliances to fight for policies

reflecting their mutual interests. A leading light in this area is the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) which was one of the first unions to link up with environmental groups concerned about environmental hazards in the chemical industry. In the 1980's, OCAW workers joined forces with a local environmental group to gain environmental improvements and an end to a lock-out in a BASF chemical plant in Louisiana. OCAW teaches a 'Jobs and Environment' curriculum for their members and campaigns for environmentally sustainable industrial development and a retraining 'Superfund' for workers displaced by environmental measures.

In Los Angeles, the Labor/Community Strategy Center was born of the twin disasters of a massive layoff of autoworkers and intolerable levels of air pollution in the workers' neighbourhoods. The Center organizes for jobs and clean air via a campaign to shift transportation away from private automobiles to mass transit.

The small town of Jay, Maine has seen some big action over the last few years. Following a lock out and a strike lost at the town's



dominant employer (and the notorious polluter), International Paper, workers ran successfully for local political office. Once elected, they enacted a series of strict environmental controls and hired a local environmental enforcement officer. This unprecedented effort improved the quality of life in Jay, saddled International Paper with substantial fines and forced them to revamp production. In 1993, the New York City Labor and Environment Network helped Greenpeace and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union forge a coalition to phase out the carcinogenic drycleaning agent,

perchloroethylene. U.S. Greenpeace incorporates concerns about workers' health and jobs preservation into many of its campaigns.

Jobs and the Environment — UK Resources

Labour Research Department. A Trade Unionists' Guide to Environmental Issues, Nov. 1990
MSF. 'Action on the Environment' and 'Clean Production'
Institute of Professionals, Managers and Specialists (IPMS), Negotiators' Guide: Greening the Workplace, May 1992
Trade Union Congress, Greening the Workplace: a TUC guide to environmental policies and issues at work, Aug. 1991

Successful substitution in printing industry

The substitution of organic solvents by safe vegetable oil based cleaning agents (VCAs) is now a reality in the printing industry. VCAs are safer both for the workers who use them and for the environment. Daily handling of solvents exposes printers to dermatitis and the risk of liver, kidney, central nervous system and brain damage. Emissions evaporate into the atmosphere in the vicinity of print works and expose residents to these dangerous chemicals.

Significant headway has been made since the European Community backed Subprint project was extended to the UK in October 1993. The printers' union, the GPMU, is closely involved. Early progress was made in Manchester where trials at Express Newspapers, one of UK's largest print works with seven million copies of national newspapers printed every week, led to the company substituting VOCs with VCAs.

GPMU member, Arthur Berry went to Denmark to learn the use of VCAs for the UK Subprint project. He says: 'To be honest I was amazed how effective they are. They do not take much more time either, say four minutes to wash-up a 2 colour press. I think the asthma I have come from the solvents I used during my 40 years in printing. If printers value their health, they will use these products. The proof of their effectiveness is in the fact that all the companies I have



Cleaning up with VCAs in Save the Children print room

demonstrated VCAs to, in the Manchester area, now use VCA products'.

HMSO, with five large printing works are also experimenting with VCAs. On a smaller scale, Save the Children recently adopted the use of VCAs. Although initial attempts were unsuccessful, experimentation with the correct dilution brought better results. Printer Peter Broughton said 'For the first time in seven years I did not have a headache when I washed down the printing machine!' Save the Children's Health and Safety Adviser, Roslyn Perkins added: 'These products saved us the cost of expensive extraction equipment that an organisation like ours, with only a small print operation just could not afford'. For reasons unconnected with this issue, Save the Children no longer operate these machines, but the experience was nonetheless valuable to the Subprint programme and there is reason to believe that other

similar organisations will follow their path.

Now that VCAs have been shown to work, their use should now be required under the terms of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations.

Meanwhile, the government is also seeking significant reductions in emissions from the print industry. London's docklands has the highest concentration of printing works in Europe. The local community have complained at environmental pollution caused by emissions of used organic solvents there. News International are now testing VCAs.

A manual for printers is in preparation. Contact the Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, 23 New Mount St, Manchester M4 4DE for details and a Subprint information pack including a newsletter, seminar reports and information on suppliers of vegetable based products.

WORKPLACE HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE REGULATIONS

This factsheet describes the main provisions of the Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare (WHSW) Regulations not already covered in *Daily Hazard* No. 47 (air, light and temperature). The WHSW Regulations deal with physical conditions in the workplace. They replace the Factories Act and the Offices, Shops and Railways Premises Act on 1 January 1996 for existing workplaces; they also introduce some additional features. On the whole, they do not improve on the previous legislation and the legal rights of workers in respect of physical conditions are absolutely minimal. Many of the Regulations qualify the duties placed on employers by the phrase, 'so far as is reasonably practicable,' which is a get-out clause. The legal standards should be seen as the rock bottom on which improvements must be built.

Employers must comply with the WHSW Regulations for premises they control. Tenant employers must ensure that facilities required by the Regulations, e.g. sanitary conveniences, are provided. The facilities need not be within the employer's own workplace but it is the employer's responsibility to provide them. Landlords should ensure that common parts of buildings, common facilities, common services and means of access comply with the Regulations. Tenants should co-operate with each other and with the landlord. (Regulation 4)

Employer's Responsibility

Employers must maintain the workplace and any equipment required by the WHSW Regulations, including mechanical ventilation systems, in safe working order. Regular maintenance should be carried out, potentially dangerous defects should be remedied, and records should be maintained. (Regulation 5)

Maintenance

Workplaces should be kept clean, indoor surfaces should be capable of being cleaned, and waste material should not be allowed to accumulate outside suitable containers. Floors should be cleaned at least once a week. Cleaning should be carried out by a safe method. (Regulation 9)

Cleaning

Workers should be able to get to and from workstations and move about freely. The recommended minimum space is 11 cubic metres per person, including the space occupied by furniture, and the minimum area is 3.7 square metres per person. More space per person may be required by the contents and layout of the room and by the nature of the work. (Regulation 10)

Space

Workstations must be suitable both for the users and for the work so that all operations can be performed safely. Where work can be done sitting down, a seat must be provided, together with a footrest where necessary. The particular requirements of disabled workers must be considered. (Regulation 11)

Workstations

Floors and traffic routes should not have holes and slopes or be uneven or slippery. Defects in floors should be guarded against. Floors likely to get wet should have a slip-resistant coating. Leaks and spills should be dealt with promptly. There should be no obstructions particularly at any place which is likely to cause slips, trips or falls. Handrails or guards should be provided on at least one side of staircases unless this obstructs access. (Regulation 12)

Floors and stairs

Suitable measures should be taken to prevent accidents arising from falls from heights or into dangerous substances or from falling objects. This deals with the provision of fencing where there is a possibility of a fall of 2 metres, or less if there is a particular risk of injury. It also deals with covers for tanks, pits and similar structures. Safety measures when fencing and covers cannot be used are also mentioned. There is guidance on ladders, work on roofs, stacking and racking, and loading and unloading vehicles. (Regulation 13)

Falls from Heights

Transparent or translucent surfaces (e.g. windows) shall be made of safety material if necessary or protected against breakage and incorporate features to make them apparent. This refers to clear surfaces where there is a danger that someone might walk into them. If a window, skylight or ventilator can be opened, then it must be possible to do it in a safe manner. When open, the window should not create a hazard (e.g. of collision). Windows must be able to be cleaned safely. This entails either a safe method of cleaning them from the inside or the provision of safe access equipment for cleaning them from the outside. (Regulation 15 & 16)

Windows

Pedestrians and vehicles must be able to move about workplaces in a safe manner and without danger to people working near by. It should be possible to separate pedestrians and vehicles safely. Traffic routes should have suitable signs. Traffic routes include stairs, staircases, fixed ladders, doorways, gateways, crossings, loading bays or ramps. (Regulation 17)

Movement

Doors and gates must be suitably constructed and fitted with necessary safety devices. These should be fitted to sliding doors to prevent them coming off tracks and to upward opening doors to prevent them falling back. Powered doors should be prevented from trapping people and if the power fails should be operable manually or open automatically. Doors which can be pushed open from either side should allow a clear view of the space close to both sides. (Regulation 18)

Doors and gates

Escalators and moving walkways should have safety devices and at least one emergency stop control which is easily identifiable and readily accessible. (Regulation 19)

Escalators

Toilets and washstations (basins, showers) should be in adequately ventilated and lit rooms and the toilets and rooms should be kept in a clean and orderly condition. There should be separate toilets and washstations for men and women unless each is in a separate room which can be locked from the inside. Toilets need not be in the workplace or even in the building but must be available at all material times. Toilet paper in a dispenser and a coat hook must be provided. For women, suitable means should be provided for the disposal of sanitary dressings. Washstations should be provided in the immediate vicinity of toilets. Privacy must be protected in toilets and washstations. The minimum number of facilities is specified (broadly — up to 5 people, 1 toilet and washstation; 6-25 people, 2 toilets and washstations; 1 extra toilet and washstation for each subsequent 25 people). For men a mixture of toilets and urinals can be provided. On temporary sites toilets and washstations should be provided as far as possible. On remote sites water in containers and chemical closets should be provided. Toilets should never communicate directly with a room in which food is prepared or eaten. (Regulations 20 and 21)

Toilets and washing

Employers must provide wholesome drinking water and vessels from which to drink it. The water should normally be from the mains and if refillable containers are used the water should be changed daily. Drinking water taps should not be installed where contamination is likely. Drinking water or non-drinkable water should be clearly marked. Washing facilities should be provided for non-disposable cups. (Regulation 22)

Water

Lockers and changing rooms should be provided for workers' clothing not worn at work

Lockers and changing rooms

and special work clothing which is not taken home. The facilities should enable clothing to be dried. Changing facilities should be provided for special clothing needed at work and to safeguard health and propriety. For the latter purpose separate facilities for men and women are needed. (Regulations 23 and 24).

Meals and restrooms should be provided to eat meals at work where meals are regularly eaten, though your desk can count as a suitable facility. Eating facilities should enable hot drinks to be obtained or prepared. Rest rooms and areas should protect nonsmokers from discomfort caused by tobacco smoke. Rest facilities must be provided for pregnant women and nursing mothers. These last two points are new and not found in previous legislation. (Regulation 25)

Meals and restrooms

ACTION

Workers can protect their conditions by:

ACTION

Workers can protect their conditions by:

- ensuring safety representatives carry out regular inspections
- calling on the employer to ensure that suitable training and education is provided on health and safety
- bringing all departures from the legal standards to the attention of their employers and asking for remedial action
- ensuring all incidents, accidents and injuries are reported in the accident book
- calling in the enforcement authorities if the management persistently fails to meet the minimum standards
- organising through their union to demand satisfactory conditions

Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1992, approved code of practice and guidance. HSE publication no L24. ISBN 0-11-886333-9. £5.00 from larger bookshops or HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 6FS, tel 01787 881165

COURSES

Half price to London Boroughs Grants Committee funded groups under the LBGC Training Bursary Scheme.

Full wheelchair access.

Date	Course
Tuesday 10th October	Office Health and Safety
Tuesday 17th October	Safety Representatives and Safety Committees
Thursday 26th October	Repetition Strain Injuries (RSI)
Tuesday 7th November	Tackling Violence at work
Thursday 30th November	General Health and Safety
Tuesday 5th December	Chemicals and the Control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH) regulations

Tuesday 30th January	Hard Labour — Getting to grips with Stress at work
Thursday 15th February	Reproductive hazards
Tuesday 20th February	Health and Safety Law

Courses run 10.00-4.30. £40 per person (£20 under LBGC bursary), places reserved on payment, 16 places on each course. Ring us for more details!

The Centre also designs courses to run at your workplace. The latest of these is

Introduction to the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations.

This one day course examines the process of risk assessment from the design of a construction project, through on-site safety to maintenance, refurbishment and demolition. Through the use of group work and student centred teaching, course participants will examine the roles of designer, client, planning supervisor and principal contractor, and the responsibilities allocated to each under the new regulations.

Case studies provide an opportunity to draw up a health and safety plan and a health and safety file, two new documents introduced in the CDM regulations.

The course is available at a cost of £320, a charge of £20 per person if the maximum 16 participants attend. Ring for further information, 0171 267 3387.

ASBESTOS HANDBOOK 1995 APPEAL

Our Asbestos 1995 Appeal has nearly raised the £3,500 we need to publish the Asbestos Hazards Handbook. Thanks to all the donors below in addition to those listed last issue.

If you think your union branch or other group might donate to the Asbestos Appeal, please contact us for details.

AEEU London Airport: EEPTU Section	NUCPS: Department of Health London Branch
ASLEF: Neasden Branch No 138	NUCPS: DSS HQ Branch
ASLEF: Neasden Branch No 138	NUT: Croydon Teachers' Association
AUT: Goldsmiths College	POTASH
Bolt Burdon	Sheffield Occupational Health Project
CPSA: DSS West Sussex and South Downs Branch	Southwark Trades Council
CWU: City of London Engineering	TGWU 1/294: Potters Bar Bus Garage
CWU: South London M.T. Branch	TGWU: Region 1 (South East & East Anglia): Building, Construction & Craft Workers' Trade Group
Drysdale & District Residents Association	UCATT: London & SouthEast Region
EPIU: London Divisional Committee	UCW: London No.1 Branch
GMB: Cambridge	UNISON: Barnet Branch
GMB: Midlands and East Coast Region	UNISON: Camden
GMB: Norwich/Ipswich CATS	UNISON: Croydon
GMB: Plymouth P20 Branch	UNISON: Greenwich A
GMB: Southern Region: GLSS	UNISON: Hammersmith Branch
GMB: Swanscombe Branch	UNISON: Haringey
GPMU: Anglia Branch	UNISON: Hillingdon Branch
GPMU: MGN Clerical Chapel	UNISON: Test Valley Branch
Haringey Trades Council	Walpole Branch Labour Party
Health and Housing Group	Maggie Alexander
Hull Asbestos Action Group	O M Bailey
Hull Trades Council	Alex Balsdon
IPMS	Mick Carter
Joint Union Committee of MSF and NUJ at Consumers Association	Peter Crampton MEP
Mid-Bedfordshire TUC	Kevin Curran
Mobile Repair Service	Alan Dalton
MSF: 9732 Branch (Rhone-Poulenc)	Cyril Jones
MSF: Brunel University 0008 Branch	Robert Kane
MSF: Cambridge General	Kathy Ludbrook
MSF: Central London (692) Branch	John Needham
MSF: Central London Health Branch	W P O'Connor
MSF: Eastern Region	Mic L Porter
MSF: London Regional Council	Geoff Potter
MSF: Newcastle Engineering Branch	R.H Price
MSF: St Pancras 0389 Branch	C.A. Turberville
MSF: West End Branch	
National League for the Blind and Disabled: West London	

PUBLICATIONS

New in October

- ▲ **The Asbestos Handbook: a guide to safety at work, in the community and at home.** £12 (£5 to trade unions, community groups, tenants' and residents' and residents associations when ordered from the Centre)
- ▲ **Hard Labour: Stress, ill-health and hazardous employment practices.** August 1994. £6.95.
- ▲ **VDU Work and the Hazards to Health.** August 1993. £6.50
- ▲ **Protecting the Community: A worker's guide to health and safety in Europe.** May 1992. £9.95
- ▲ **Basic Health and Safety: Workers' rights and how to win them.** June 1991. £6.00
- ▲ **Repetition Strain Injuries: Hidden harm from over-use.** January 1988. £3.00*/£6.00
- ▲ **Out in the Open** (supplement to *Repetition Strain Injuries*). January 1993. £1.00 (free with *Repetition Strain Injuries*)
- ▲ **Sick Building Syndrome: Causes, effects and control.** June 1990. £4.50
- ▲ **Fluorescent Lighting: A health hazard overhead.** March 1987. £2.00*/£5.00
- ▲ **Toxic Treatments: Wood preservative hazards at work and in the home.** January 1989. £5.95
- ▲ **After the Sprayer: investigation and treatment of ill-health caused by wood preservatives and how to get help.** January 1992. Factsheet. £1.00
- ▲ **Factpack:** Set of factsheets from the Daily Hazard. £5.00
- ▲ **Daily Hazard** complete run: £25.00

* Price to community/tenants/union groups.

Post and packing: £1.00 up to £10.00 worth of books, add £1.00 up to each subsequent £10.00 worth. Discounts for 10 or more copies. All orders must be accompanied by a cheque made payable to London Hazards Centre.

HAZLIT is London Hazards Centre's library database. For information about on-line access, contact the Centre.

AN INVITATION TO LONDON HAZARDS CENTRE OPEN EVENINGS WEDNESDAYS FROM 6PM TO 8PM

A three month experiment will see the London Hazards Centre throw open its doors every Wednesday evening to safety representatives who wish to visit the centre and use its facilities.

Hazards campaigners will be on hand to show you how to use the library and database. The evenings will provide an opportunity to meet safety reps from throughout the South East.

The first open evening will be Wednesday 25th October, and the experiment will run until 24th January 1996. The Centre will not open on the evenings of 29th November, 20th and 27th December and 3rd January.

Please ring the Centre on 0171 267 3387 and let us know when you would like to visit.

SEND US YOUR PRESS CUTTINGS

You can help by sending us any press cuttings of local campaigns, accidents, inquests, prosecutions or any other health and safety information from your local newspapers, trade magazines, etc. If you think you can regularly check a particular publication, let us know — phone and ask for Tim or Chris.



Interchange Studios
Dalby Street
London NW5 3NQ
tel: 0171-267 3387

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