

**Hazards
Campaign**



**HAZARDS CONFERENCE EDITION, JULY
18TH/19TH 2008, KEELE UNIVERSITY**

Work makes you Sick?



The Annual [Hazards Conference](#) weekend gathering of over 500 Shop Stewards, Safety Reps and general H&S activists was relocated to **Keele University**, with the regular venue at Manchester University being unavailable because of modification and upgrade work to the site.

Despite recent ongoing difficulties between the local unions and the university management, the conference went ahead. It was a well staged, well-supported and popular success, with delegates leaving on a high, feeling enthused by the activities of the weekend and supported by a "get up and go" speech from **Pete Kilbane [Leeds Occupational Health Centre]**, to conclude closing.

Delegates gathered from Friday afternoon onwards and were invited to participate in two informal evening sessions, highlighting the issues of work-related deaths.

The main focus was on a short drama focusing on the many deaths in the workplace, and the lackadaisical approach of many employers to their duty of care in protecting the public and employees from danger.

This was followed by video presentations, on the Mesothelioma and Simon Jones Memorial Campaigns.

Whilst a somewhat depressing start to weekend, the presentations set the theme for the weekend's search for ways to protect workers from fatal and long-term harm.

The Saturday morning Opening Session, ably chaired by **Doug Russell [USDAW]**, covered a range of key issues. Speakers included **Andy Turner [Rotherham OH Advice Centre]**, who outlined the current disappointing situation of poor enforcement and the continued under-funding of HSE.

Andy showed that the real totals of [work-related injuries and deaths](#) are not really known, nor are they accurately recorded.

When adding the acknowledged deaths and injuries to those which are clearly work connected but may be well outside the remit of the current data collection, some 50,000 per annum is a more realistic total, including work-related traffic incidents and deaths at over 1,000 a year. This global figure also includes the 20,000 or so heart disease cases, many of which are directly related to working conditions and demands.

Despite Government insistence that UK enjoys a high standard of workplace safety, the numbers of injuries continues to remain unacceptably high.

Andy revealed that Occupational Health provision remained an inconsistent and inadequate tool to 'seek out and sack' of the employer.

He posited again the view that it should be neutral and confidentially and freely available to the workforce at large.

Government now insists that the mantra "**Work is Good for You**" is a key factor in ensuring that the psychology of well-being at work is at the forefront, and is designed to reduce the large numbers on Disability benefit, mostly brought to that condition by their work.

He concluded by asking whether the HSE remained a credible deterrent to improper safety management in the workplace.

A fascinating presentation based on research in Canada's Quebec, was given by **Karen Messing** [[International Ergonomics Association](#)].

Karen demonstrated, with reference to a range of research outcomes, that the common assumptions that male dominated work was heavier than that carried out in traditionally female workforces, where in reality overall the loads carried by workers were much higher and exhausting than those for men. Using the concept of a 'ton of feathers' being as heavy as a ton of bricks, she was able to show that women and those in the 'lighter trades' were at risk of greater injury than was normally expected and accepted.

Mike Lees, widower of an Infant teacher who suffered 'death by industrial disease' caused by Mesothelioma, having been exposed to asbestos fibres over many years in schools, gave a short, but detailed and emotive account of the issues that face school in UK, where asbestos is widely in use.

Predicted annual deaths from asbestos related illnesses in the teaching profession continue to rise from only 21 in the 1980s to over 90 in 2000 and beyond.

The plenary session closed with acclamation for the recipients of the Hazards Silver Badge, and the coveted **Alan Award**, which this year was presented by Eve Barker, partner of the deceased Alan Dalton to representatives of **FAK [Families Against Corporate Killing]**.

FAK is a group of families who have suffered great losses through deaths of their loved ones in work-related incidents.

Delegates then moved on to the first of two Workshop Sessions, followed by three debates and a series of Information/Fringe Meetings.

Sunday morning saw the concluding workshop session followed by the usual closing plenary session, address most ably by **Carole Duerdon [Bradford WHAT], Julia Brandreth [Battersea and Wandsworth TUC Group]**, and concluded by **Pete Kilbane**.

Carole Duerdon presented a [motion](#) which had emerged from the debate on the Dame Carol Black report, "**Working for a Healthier Tomorrow**". The text of the motion is below.

'Whilst the 19th National Hazards Campaign Conference welcomes the review it rejects the report "*Working for a Healthier Tomorrow*" because of its failure to make recommendations for the prevention of ill health, injuries and deaths at work, and the need for stronger enforcement and better and stronger rights for Health and Safety Representatives.

"*Working for a Healthier Tomorrow*" takes no account of the competence of those charged with carrying out risk assessments and has no clear strategies for the rehabilitation of injured workers.

"*Working for a Healthier Tomorrow*" is an ideological document with no reference to occupational diseases and bears no resemblance to the realities of working life in Britain today. It is a tool for driving workers back to work taking no account of the causes of their ill health and will not deliver a healthier tomorrow for workers.'

Conference voted unanimously for a rejection of the report and called for improved Occupational Health provision, and improved enforcement of safety legislation.

Stress Network contribution to Hazards Conference is again well received

The **UK National Workstress Network**, as always supported the Hazards Campaign and Conference. **Dave & Dianne Jones** facilitated the usual **Stress & Risk Assessment** workshops. **Ian Draper and Brian Robinson** presented a new workshop on **Handling Stress Casework**. Both sets of workshops were well attended and received.

In addition, Ian and Brian also presented an Information Meeting and discussion forum on Stress causes, effects and strategies to deal with it.

For the duration of the Conference, our exhibition table was available to delegates

where detailed information could be obtained including the Summer Newsletter and the network's [Information Pack](#), sponsored by ATL, Community, Hazards Campaign, NASUWT, PCS, UNITE and UNISON.

Details of our [Bullying Conference](#) in November were also available, and places can still be reserved if you are interested.

Congratulations to Hazards Campaign and Greater Manchester Hazards Centre

The success of every Hazards Conference is down to much hard work carried out by members of the Hazards Campaign, and the staff at [GMHC](#) - in particular by **John Bamford**, the Conference organiser and **Hilda Palmer** and other colleagues.

Without this phenomenal work, the conference would never be the success that it is. However it is also down to the many volunteers who assist with the Registration tables and generally around and about the Campus.

And the Delegates and workshop facilitators too, play their own significant part in the work of the weekend.

Well done everyone!

Book your place for 2009

Manchester University, Friday July 10th to Sunday July 12th, 2009 – book a date in your diary now and don't be disappointed.

Stress Snippet

Return to work is 'good for health'

The government wants one million people off incapacity benefit by 2015

Most people with health problems can be helped back to work with the right type of support, new research suggests.

Long-term sickness and the number of workers on long-term incapacity benefits could be cut by up to 60%, a report by the University of York confirms.

And those with mental health issues who talked about their condition at work found colleagues to be positive and constructive, it said. The report said having a job might actually help their recovery.

Commenting on the research, Work and Pensions Secretary James Purnell said: "Our

radical proposals to reform the welfare system are designed to ensure people can stay at or return to work if they are able to.

"This evidence shows working can be an important step in people's recovery. We are looking at how we can work with employers to make sure people get the support they need in the workplace.

"We have proposed doubling the amount of money we make available to employers to adapt the workplace to accommodate employees with specific needs."

Poor mental health is one of the most commonly cited reasons for claiming incapacity benefit (IB). The government has pledged to get a million people off IB over the next seven years.

Research from the university's social policy research unit, suggested that many employers and employees were very supportive of mental health conditions.

It discovered that employers were keen to learn more about mental health issues and would welcome more contact with GPs about individual employees with these problems so they could better prepare for their return to work.

Jane Aston, of the Institute of Employment Studies, which led the research with employers, said: "The research found that early intervention is critical in addressing mental health problems at work.

"Often, adjustments to the person's role or workplace need only be minor and inexpensive. Line managers in any organisation have a vital role in recognising the signs of mental health problems and being confident enough to talk to staff about it."

Network Comment

Properly negotiated and formally agreed reintegration and rehabilitation schemes are essential to success both for employees and for businesses to become recognised as good employers.

In light of the recent Dame Carol Black report, the whole issue of getting people back into work has been promoted up the agenda. However as has been noted from the debate at Hazards Conference the report skims the surface and seriously ignores key factors.

Additionally, we are now faced with the transformation of the Stress agenda into a 'Mental Health at Work' mantra. Whilst stress does affect the psychological makeup of a victim, it is the excessive pressures and stresses at work that have caused this illness, and so it should remain under the name of STRESS.