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**Hazards
Campaign**

Summer Newsletter

August 09

Hazards Conference Manchester, July 2009

The weekend of July 10th - 12th saw over 500 delegates gather at Manchester University for the 20th Annual Hazards Conference. Once more an enormous organisational effort by Manchester Hazards Centre staff produced an excellent event with many first time delegates.

Delegates from all over the country, including many different workplaces and employment sectors gathered to hear input from international delegates, the TUC as well as applauding the presentation of the **Alan Award** by Eve Barker to Hank Roberts of Brent for his work in respect of asbestos problems in local schools.

The Opening Plenaries were addressed by **Fiona Murie** of the International Wood and Construction Federation and by **Satinath [Sathu] Sarangi** of the **Bhopal Campaign** (Friday evening). [The toxic gas escape from Union Carbide's plant and the continuing fight for justice and compensation for the continued suffering and deaths over 25 years]. On Saturday morning **Charley Richardson** and **Nancy Lessing** gave us the current picture from the US, with insights into American working practices and Union activity. The biggest surprise was how restrictive working life in America seemed to be, and that in a country that tries to sell "liberty" as an exportable product. Where in the majority of cases, if a person loses his/her job they also cease to have membership of their Union.

Hugh Robertson of TUC presented a well-considered view of the current HSE and Government failings in safety law enforcement, despite the very welcome drop in workplace fatalities last year. The above presentations are posted on the Hazards Website and links are indicated in the text. It was most refreshing to have such excellent international input from three good friends of the Hazards Campaign.

Two Workshop sessions followed and were interspersed by three campaigning debates. The **Stress Network** was invited to contribute to the **Bullying debate** along with **David Beale** of Manchester University. Once more we provided a range of workshops.

Vaughan Skirrey supported **Dave Jones** in the **Stress Risk Assessment** workshop – a very popular session that has been on the programme for several years now.

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Ian Draper and **Brian Robinson** again examined the handling of specific stress and bullying casework in the workplace. Both sets of workshops were well received. **Dianne Jones** [Trades Union Education, Stockport College and the Stress Network] also presented a session on Mental Health in the workplace.

Sunday morning's session saw reports presented from 7 **Campaigning meetings**. The Stress Network hosted over 90 delegates to the discussion on **Workplace Stress**, and produced a motion for Trade Unions and the Hazards Campaign to carry forward to HSE and Government seeking enforcement of risk assessment and the Stress Management Standards on Stress.

Workshop reports in brief



Dealing with Stress Casework – Ian Draper & Brian Robinson

This workshop examined a real-life case study of a young man whose personality, disabilities and physical appearance became the source of ridicule and victimisation by his workmates, leading to isolation and long-term sickness absence. Groups examined the issues and established a strategy to take the matters up with the member himself, his manager and his co-workers – also members in the same union. We also considered how the union supports the member and especially the caseworkers, upon whom a very intense level of stress can descend and affect not only their own work performance but also their ability to deal with casework.

This is an area that Trades Unions need to examine with some thought as to how caseworkers are supported and protected from their own levels of stress generated by the demands of members.

Key Stress factors in the workplaces represented in the two workshops, were briefly recorded and the following table indicates frequencies:

Stress Factor	Indications	Stress Factor	Indications	Stress Factor	Indications
Workload	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	Restructuring	✓	Safety of Staff	✓ ✓ ✓
Lone working	✓ ✓	Shift working	✓ ✓	Lean Processes	✓ ✓ ✓
Worklife Balance	✓ ✓	Inconsistencies	✓ ✓	Change	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
People	✓ ✓ ✓	Frustration	✓ ✓	Control	✓ ✓
Cuts	✓ ✓ ✓	Bullying	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	Environment	✓ ✓
Single Status	✓	Pay/grading	✓ ✓	Lack of delegation	✓
Targets	✓ ✓ ✓	Sickness absence	✓ ✓	Poor public image	✓
Job evaluation	✓ ✓ ✓	Management	✓ ✓	Poor consultation	✓ ✓

Workshop Report: Mental Health in the Workplace – report from Vaughan Skirrey, Steering Group

Dianne Jones, a fellow Network Steering Group member, led this workshop. Dianne set out her aims for the session as: providing an overview of mental ill health in the workplace, examining mental health issues likely to be faced by workers, and identifying strategies trade union representatives can adopt if they become professionally involved with these issues.

It is likely that most if not all reps, and especially health and safety reps, will encounter some mental health issues during their work with and on behalf of members. Statistics suggest that around 300 people out of every 1,000 will experience mental health problems every year in Britain, of which (approximate figures) 230 will visit a GP and 102 will be diagnosed as suffering with their mental health. Mental illness has a variety of causes, some of which necessarily overlap and affect each other, so it can be difficult to agree on “reasons” why a person’s mental

health breaks down. Family background, repressed feelings and stressful life events are familiar causes, but genetic and biochemical factors are increasingly thought to be significant factors.

The consequences for individuals may be complex and severe. Sufferers can experience problems in the way they think, feel or behave, which in turn are likely to impact upon relationships, efficiency and productivity. This has significant implications for those in employment. Discussion among those attending this workshop suggested that the main issues for reps are likely to be centred upon the perceptions of mental illness held by the sufferer's colleagues and line managers. Mental illnesses are some of the least understood conditions in society, and can therefore attract prejudice and discrimination. Another key point is that not all sufferers recognise that they have mental ill health, and may have few or no personal coping strategies. This can make representation difficult, and such cases have to be handled with particular care and sensitivity.

Prescription drugs and other medication are effective in some cases, but not all. We should try to take a holistic view both of the condition and its treatment. Medication may only be a part, and not even the main part, of what helps a person recover good mental health. In the same way, if we see mental health problems as "only" an illness requiring treatment, we are likely to miss the 'big picture' of the many influences and factors which affect an individual's life, behaviour and self-image.

An important theme of this workshop was that of the 'union team'. Many reps agreed that the usual practice is for shop stewards, safety reps and, where present, learning reps to work very much within their own specialist area. This may be convenient for managers who tolerate, rather than support, the principle of a unionised workplace: it is easier to 'pick off' reps who work in isolation. A team approach, where all reps meet together to discuss casework and share good practice, will provide a stronger challenge to management. It could be particularly effective in the context of mental health. A steward representing a member in any disciplinary hearing where mental ill health is a factor should be able to use the expertise of the health and safety rep in preparing a case for mitigating circumstances and persuading management to take a compassionate view of the case. The learning rep could also have a role in providing and using union resources which inform members about the impact of mental ill health in the workplace.

In the final stages of the workshop, we looked at the business case for understanding mental health issues, and the importance of an enlightened approach on the part of employers and managers. Problems associated with mental ill health, taken together, now form the biggest single cause of sickness absence. In England, the total cost of this to the economy has been estimated at £32 billion – "half as much again as the entire defence budget" – and the cost of providing treatment is an estimated £4.2 billion, or 10% of the total NHS spend. With over 91 million working days being lost to mental ill health every year, it has never been more important for employers to address the problem with understanding. All too often, however, the response is to introduce punitive absence monitoring policies which either intimidates people back to work before they are properly recovered, or push up the levels of absence still further through generating yet more stress. A strong and cohesive trade union team, with all member reps being well informed about mental health in the workplace, has the potential to be a powerful influence for reform where it is necessary. This was a really positive final message to take away from the workshop.

Manchester University

The University has chosen in recent years to privatise much of its conference facility, leading to long hours, high work demand and low pay for those workers. The knock on effect for some delegates was a poorer standard of housekeeping, and in the refectory less tasty food and somewhat sub-standard service. For the majority of delegates accommodation was acceptable, but some of it is getting past its sell-by date! Next year we return to Keele University, where in 2008 we had an especially good experience. Hazards 2011 will be probably at Leeds University.

Hull & East Yorkshire Mind

Working to Overcome the Stigmas Impacting on Mental Health Issues in the Workplace

Hull & East Yorkshire Mind, a Mental Health Charity operating across the Humber Region, has increased its portfolio of mental health support projects by securing funding to deliver employment advisor support through the national *Improving Access to Psychological Therapies* (IAPT) initiative. This will be delivered across the East Riding of Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, which sees us partnering with the East Riding of Yorkshire NHS and the Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust in North Lincolnshire.

As part of the initiative we will work with employed people, (including those on sick leave), who are experiencing mild to moderate mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, depression causing low mood and low self esteem, with the main purpose of supporting people back to work through "Job Retention".

We will achieve this through support and guidance to employees in one to one sessions, which can include, self-development training (assertiveness, confidence building, and practical help).

We also support employers in identifying mental health issues in the workplace and reacting appropriately. This can also include initiating phased returns to work and acting as an intermediary during this process for both employer and employee.

We are passionate and committed to helping employers and employees in large organisations as well as Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and invite geographically appropriate referrals and enquiries from across the East Riding of Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire regions.

In the first instance please contact:

Esther Hall, Employment Advisor on (01262) 608784 or email ehall@mindhey.co.uk

Alternatively, you can contact **Phil Anastasi**, Senior Employment Advisor on

(01482) 886098 or email
panastasi@mindhey.co.uk



Convenor's Report Ian Draper (Network Convenor)

The heat of summer was briefly with us once more and stress levels increased because of the continued recession, job insecurity and now the added factor of workplace temperatures.

In addition there is the growing threat from the swine flu pandemic, and the likely impact it will have through mass sickness absence in the workforce and of course directly on the NHS.

The Network has exhibited at recent Union Conferences for ATL, UNISON Health Sector, NASUWT and UNISON Local Government and National Delegate Conferences.

We look forward to follow-up from those visits and to invitations to speak at Regional, Branch and Employer/Staff-side meetings.

We are keen to see new blood in our organisation, welcoming membership of our Steering Group from younger enthusiasts.

Diary Dates

**Stress Network Conference,
Hillscourt, Rednal November
21st/22nd 2009**

**Hazards 2010, July 9th – 11th
Keele University**

Hazards 2011, Leeds University

**EWHN Conference September
10th to 12th 2010, Leeds University**

More details to be released in due course.

Workers' Memorial Day Recognition and Consultation

DWP has made this consultation document widely available and included it on the consultations section of its website

www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2009/

We encourage you to make your responses – closing date 19 October 2009.

Sponsors' Support Network – THANKS!

We are pleased to note and thank recent sponsors for their generous support for our work.

We were invited to facilitate **Stress Workplace Action Workshops** for the *Yorkshire & Humber TUC Safety Representatives Network* at Sheffield Cathedral on May 21st. The workshop was run three times in the day with Ian Draper and Vaughan Skirrey (UNISON Sheffield) both from the Stress Network, guiding all 70 delegates through ideas on workplace audits and the raising of stress issues with management.

Our very grateful thanks are extended to the **Yorkshire & Humber TUC** for its very generous donation to our funds.

A Staff Training day at **King Edward Sixth Form College, Stourbridge** in the West Midlands saw Ian Draper present on **Workplace Bullying and Cyber-Bullying**.

Facilitated through **NASUWT Dudley Branch Union Learning Team**, the morning session was well attended by a range of staff, and detailed consideration of Bullying and Cyber-Bullying activities enabled staff to identify how the College leadership should deal with such unwelcome behaviours.

We express our grateful thanks to **King Edward Sixth Form College, Stourbridge** for its very generous support for our work.

We would also like to place on record another very generous donation from the **Fire Brigades Union**. Without such support the Network could not survive, as it has no formal funding stream.

We are totally dependent on sponsorships donations and what our Annual Conference makes, as well as the benefits we receive in kind from Trade Unions, especially **NASUWT**.

If your Union Branch or Union Learning Team would like to speak to us for some input, please make contact via the [website](#) or direct to Ian Draper by email or telephone.

If you or your Branch would like to sponsor our work and our Website activity that

continues to increase month by month, please get in touch – we'd love to hear from you.

Stress Snippets

Employers urged to cool down their offices and their staff

With a heat-wave warning in place this summer for parts of the UK, and temperatures predicted to soar as high as 32°C, the TUC called on employers to relax office dress codes and cool down their overheating offices and wilting employees.

Employers who provide their staff with a cool and comfortable work environment will get more out of them when it's hot, says the TUC. Workers who are unable to dress down into more appropriate summer clothing and who work in offices without air-conditioning, fans or a plentiful supply of cool drinking water are going to feel lethargic, and lack inspiration or creativity. Heat generated stress levels will increase and reduce productivity.

It should be possible to agree on an appropriate dress code that fits with the corporate image and helps keep staff cool.

And with summers predicted to get hotter and drier over the coming years as a result of climate change, keeping workplaces and staff cool is going to be of increasing concern for employers, warns the TUC.

TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber said: 'Allowing employees to dress down in a heat-wave will prevent them from collapsing at their desks, and could also save companies money as they are able to turn down the air con a notch.'

Bosses would only be expected to stop staff from wearing shorts to work if they have first carried out a proper risk assessment, and only those jobs, which require appropriate protective clothing, would need to be considered separately, or changes made to working practices as an alternative.



No Maximum Temperature

Although the law states that staff should work in a reasonable temperature, there is no legal maximum. Employees are not expected to work when the temperature drops below 16°C (or 13°C if they are doing physically demanding work), but there are no similar restrictions for when the workplace becomes too hot.

The TUC calls for an absolute indoor maximum of 30°C, with employers required to introduce cooling measures when the temperature hits 24°C, supported by:

1. Allowing staff to adopt less formal attire - with jackets and ties out, and short sleeves, vest tops and shorts in;
2. Distributing fans to staff and provide portable air cooling cabinets;
3. Installing air conditioning and maintain it regularly, so that it doesn't break down during a heat-wave;
4. Allowing flexible working so that staff can have the option of coming in earlier and staying later to avoid the sweltering conditions of the rush hour commute;
5. Moving desks away from windows, draw blinds or install reflective film; and,
6. Allowing staff to take frequent breaks and provide a ready supply of cool drinks.

Lack of urgency on NHS violence in Wales

Violence and aggression against NHS workers in Wales have been tackled with a "lack of urgency", according to a cross-party group of Assembly Members [AM]. Progress on the issue over the past three years had been "limited," said the assembly's audit committee.

The AMs agreed some improvements had been made but were concerned about the prosecution rates compared to attacks. The assembly government said it would consider the report, and extra measures to protect staff had been announced.

It was noted that assaults were still under-reported because many workers did not

believe action would be taken against their attacker.

Chairman Jonathan Morgan AM said: "It's just over three years since the committee reported first on the need to protect NHS staff from violence and aggression. It seems that there has been a general lack of urgency given to this important issue. "There is still a long way to go and in three years only limited progress has been made. Alongside this, it seems that there has been a general lack of urgency given to this important issue and it was disappointing that the main response from health management seemed to be "wait till October, following NHS reorganisation."

In particular, the audit committee raised concerns about the low rate of prosecutions compared to the number of incidents. It has called on the health minister to investigate, in conjunction with health service unions, whether there is a need to lobby Westminster for tough new legislation.

Members also raised concerns that many security staff were temporary and privately contracted, which meant some lacked the skills and training to cope with the specific issues of a hospital or health care setting. They also found that the general approach to training of staff to deal with incidents of violence was still too casual.

The committee has recommended that greater priority should be given to all the issues they outline in their report and that the assembly government speeds up all the work identified by the Auditor General for Wales in his report on the same issue.

An assembly government spokesperson said: "The health minister has received a copy of the report and will consider its findings and recommendations.

"In April, the minister announced extra measures to protect NHS staff including CCTV cameras at accident and emergency units and in ambulances."

Restructuring risks workers' health

UNISON is urging employers to carry out risk assessments when restructuring in

the wake of new findings which show that the move can seriously harm workers' health.

The UK's largest public sector union, which helped carry out a Heath in Restructuring Report supported by the EU Commission, is calling on organisations to put their five-point action plan into place.

The research shows that workers who take part in restructuring are 2.5% more likely to get ill, with workers who lose their jobs and survivors both affected.

The organisations' efficiency is also likely to suffer, as there is increased absence, a rise in injury and accident rates and a wide variety of depressive disorders. This may lead to other stress related illnesses creating a vicious cycle of work related ill health.

Greg Thomson, UNISON's National Development Manager and the report's co-author said, "Restructuring is common during a recession and workers need to be treated as fairly as possible. Restructuring can also have an impact on the family and friends of those affected, as it may involve relocation as the only option to retaining the post. This can be expensive, lonely and disruptive for the family as a whole.

"We are urging employers to follow our five-point plan to prevent health and safety issues."

UNISON's five-point plan:

1. Employers must be open about any proposed restructuring and consult properly.
2. Workers should have access to counselling.
3. All workers should be treated fairly, the process should be transparent and workers who lose their jobs should be properly compensated.
4. Restructuring should take into account all the possible negative side effects.
5. Lifelong learning should be made available to help workers find other jobs more easily.

Council loses £1m sickness case

A Council has lost its High Court case against a former managing director after claiming she withheld a history of depressive

illness. Cheltenham Borough Council was suing Christine Laird, 52, appointed in 2002 for £1m. Mrs Laird left in 2005 on an ill-health pension after taking sick leave on full pay. The council had claimed it suffered financial losses amounting to more than £1m including interest as a result of Mrs Laird's "deceit".

Andrew North, Chief Executive of Cheltenham Borough Council, said they were disappointed with the judgement.

"While the outcome is not what we had hoped for, we felt we had a duty to take action to recover losses for what we felt was a disastrous time for the council.

"Had the council known Mrs Laird's medical history it would most probably not have employed her and incurred the costs it has.

"Undoubtedly the council went through a very difficult time between 2002 and 2005 and we are now a very different organisation to the council which Mrs Laird was appointed to lead."

Mrs Laird, 52, told the High Court in March that she believed the appointment was "unconditional" and there had been no requirement for a medical report. She said she had given accurate information about her past.

Mr Justice Hamblen dismissed the council's action, but also rejected a counterclaim by Mrs Laird for damages. The judge said: "It is over eight years since Mrs Laird joined the council and much of the intervening period has been spent in bitter dispute before various tribunals, at much personal and financial cost."

Mrs Laird said at the hearing in March that the work she did for the council was worth at least £1.5m in efficiency savings because of her financial and local housing expertise.

She claimed this resulted in a £30m benefit for the council. In court Mrs Laird said she had been forced out of office by a poor working atmosphere on the local authority and council members who opposed her implementation of restructuring departments.

The legal costs for the action are expected to run into hundreds of thousands of pounds.

Bullying probe after teacher dies

A Member of staff has been suspended after bullying allegations were raised at an inquest into a teacher's death.

Britt Pilton, 29, collapsed and died at High Greave Junior School in Rotherham in February, an inquest heard.

The coroner recorded a narrative verdict, saying Ms Pilton died from the effects of bulimia which arose out of long-standing anxiety at the school.

Rotherham council said a member of staff had been suspended while an inquiry into the allegations was held.

The inquest heard Ms Pilton had been prescribed anti-depressant drugs.

During the six to 12 months before her death her anxiety increased because of the stress she was under at the school. The inquest was told Ms Pilton was scared that she would be forced out of her job by bullying behaviour.

Ms Pilton, who was due to marry this summer, died despite staff efforts to revive her.

A spokeswoman for Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council said: "Our thoughts are with the family at this time and with the school community of High Greave Juniors who have had to come to terms with the death of this popular teacher.

"She was a very special young lady who loved and deeply cared for the children at High Greave Junior School and who in turn was loved by them. We have been made aware of the allegations of bullying and these are being investigated by the school and ourselves.

"We take all such allegations seriously, as bullying of any kind is not tolerated in our schools."

HSE accused of being asleep on shift-work risks

A Leading academic has warned that the health and safety of the UK's estimated 3.5 million shift-workers is being put at risk

because the HSE undertakes no routine inspections during atypical working hours.

In a report published in June, University of Stirling Professor Andrew Watterson says shift-workers are receiving second-class treatment because no HSE staff are rostered to work outside of normal hours. This means that, after dark, there is no preventive health-promotion work and no routine 'graveyard shift' health and safety inspections.

According to Prof Watterson, who heads up the University's Occupational and Environmental Health Research group, "Shift-workers face all the same risks as workers on normal hours, plus a slew of risks all of their own. Atypical working hours have been linked to conditions including breast cancer, prostate cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, heightened injury and disaster risk, fatigue, heart-disease risk factors, and pregnancy problems.

"Evidence is emerging that these health effects combined make shift-workers – particularly women – far more likely to take early ill-health retirement."

Some workers will always have to work anti-social hours, but HSE guidance plays down many of the chronic health risks and ignores others, such as cancer and heart disease. This gap in the guidance could prevent both workers and their doctors from making the link between working hours and patterns of poor health.

Accusing the HSE of being "near dormant on the working-hours issue," Prof Watterson added:



"HSE undertakes no routine inspections and has taken no prosecutions in the last five years related to health risks arising from gruelling and body-wrecking work patterns. In fact, it barely takes any action on work-related ill health, at all."

His report, *'While you were sleeping'*, published in Hazards Magazine, calls for more HSE resources to be targeted at workers on atypical hours, rigorous enforcement of working-time law, and an end to the UK's Working Time Directive opt-out. It also urges the UK government to follow the Danish

authorities' recent move to compensate workers who have suffered breast cancer related to long-term night work.

Responding to the report, the HSE's chief medical advisor, John Osman, said: "An important element of HSE's normal inspections is an examination of provision for ensuring the health and safety of those working outside 'office' hours. This examination includes a physical inspection of the control measures and consultation with employees and trade unions, or safety representatives.

"Any concerns raised with HSE about shift or out-of-hours working are treated seriously and investigated – this may include an out-of-hours inspection. If HSE took any enforcement action it would not necessarily show as a Working Time Regulation matter and could fall under the HSWA."

Blood clot worker wins compensation after breaks cut

Government worker Angela Lamberton, 53, developed a life-threatening blood clot after sitting at her desk for hours without a break, has won more than £10,000 in compensation.

Angela nearly died after the work schedule at her office was restructured to reduce the time employees spent away from their desks.

Managers at HM Revenue and Customs in Leicester set new routines that meant staff no longer had to leave their desks to complete printing or photocopying. Mrs Lamberton worked as an administrator.



She complained to her managers indicating that she needed to walk around every 15 minutes after she suffered a similar blood clot five years ago.

But they refused and after four weeks of sitting at her desk for up to three hours at a time her GP diagnosed a pain in her legs as a blood clot and referred her for emergency treatment.

Mrs Lamberton said: "My whole life has been changed. I'm terrified of flying and, if we drive anywhere, it takes a long time because we have to take so many breaks. "My legs are sore and what used to be a 20-minute walk to work now takes me over an hour. "I felt I had no choice but to accept the new working system because my complaints were dismissed.

"Now I will be on medication the rest of my life and the fear that I will develop another blood clot will always be with me." Angela eventually contacted the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), which instructed Thompson's Solicitors to pursue a claim for compensation. HM Revenue and Customs admitted liability and settled out of court for an undisclosed sum, understood to be around £10,000.

Pete Lockhart, national officer of the Public and Commercial Services union said: "It is disgraceful that Angela's complaints were ignored despite her medical history.

"It is a classic case of management putting targets above their staff's health. It should never have taken the threat of legal action for Angela to be allowed to take a break from her desk."

Peter Magee, from Thompsons Solicitors, added: "Angela must live with the threat of another potentially-fatal blood clot for the rest of her life. She argued that the new working system was damaging her health but was ignored.

"Employers must make sure they take into account their employee's physical ability to undertake a job and must be prepared to make allowances."

A spokesman for HM Revenue and Customs said: "We cannot comment on individual cases. However, as an employer of 83,000 staff HMRC takes staff welfare very seriously."

RMT warns of staffing and safety dangers over swine flu pandemic

TRANSPORT UNION RMT has warned of severe pressures on staffing levels and serious safety risks across the transport system as experts advised that up to 40% of

the population could become ill with the swine flu over the coming months.

Transport workers are known to be at greater risk of infection, as they tend to work in close contact with the public and colleagues, and often in confined spaces like trains, buses, the Underground, ferries and offices.

Reports today suggest that a meeting between the government and emergency services has raised specific concerns about the impact on transport services including trains, airports, ferries and bus services. RMT are demanding to see the contingency and safety plans that have been drawn up and to be included in future discussions on coping with the pandemic.

The London Underground is identified as being a high-risk area. RMT today dismissed claims from Transport for London that they would simply run a reduced service, as there will be less people travelling as "dangerous nonsense that's miles out of touch with the safety implications of running services with inadequate staffing levels."



Bob Crow, RMT general secretary, said today: "We are demanding to see the contingency transport plans that have been drawn up in Whitehall and to be involved in future discussions on dealing with the flu pandemic. RMT members are seriously concerned about the safety implications of so many staff being off sick at the same time.

"If the predicted development of the swine flu is accurate it will have a devastating impact on transport services and will expose both the shortage of staff and the inadequate planning across our fragmented system.

"London is expected to be hardest hit and it would be a dangerous gamble to try and run services without adequate staffing levels," Bob Crow said.

Workplaces set to get 'smarter'?

Office buildings may get more hospitable in the future.

Today work is somewhere you travel to - in the future work will come to you.

So says a report attempting to work out what the offices and workplaces of 2030 will be like.

It predicts that technology will ensure that everything an employee needs is available no matter where they are.

Head offices and individual desks are likely to disappear in favour of hot desks, collaborative spaces using decor that adapts to a worker's mood.

"We are getting more mobile and can work anywhere, that we might be going," said Dr Marie Puybaraud, research director at Johnson Controls, a company that designs car and office interiors and sponsored the report.

"By 2030," she said, "all IT applications will be embedded throughout the environment and become completely transparent."

"A fully integrated set of technologies will follow users," said Dr Puybaraud. "The whole focus is on user empowerment."

Walls could become screens showing diaries, documents or video conferences. Homes and cars would measure mood and tune surroundings to, for instance, soothe a worker if they were feeling stressed.

The number of offices in use could shrink as smart scheduling software ensures that they maintain maximum occupancy.

"The whole idea is to have this sensory, seamless smart environment," said Dr Puybaraud. "You will turn up and this environment is ready to support you and the way you work."

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"Stress, the 21st Century epidemic?"

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