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1. Dancing round the maypole

Hackitt goes: Dame Judith Hackitt, Chair of the HSC, then HSE Board since 2007 has stepped down from that post having completed two terms of office. From 1 May 1, she becomes chair of the EEF – used to be called the Engineering Employers Federation, now more commonly called “the employer’s organisation”. Hackitt was an employer representative on the old HSC, before being appointed chair and successor to Bill Callaghan. She was appointed HSE chair under the old ‘Buggins Turn’ tradition, when the HSC/HSE chair alternated between an employer representative and an employee representative.

Temple comes: Martin Temple, formerly director general, then chair, of the employer’s organisation EEF has been appointed as the new chair of HSE Board, replacing Judith Hackitt, from 1 May. Temple led the independent triennial review of the Health and Safety Executive in 2014 which was reasonably positive towards the organisation and its functions, even if not received with huge enthusiasm by the DWP and government.

Buggins is reported to be concerned at being overlooked, but not surprised given an earlier ‘employee representative’ appointment to HSE board that raised serious questions

about the nature and continuation of tripartism; the most important being “Is tripartism finally dead”? An emerging consensus seems to be that it is.

2. Hazards conference 2016

The annual Hazards conference is the UK’s biggest event for trade union safety reps and activists, and is a mixture of plenary sessions, debates and discussions around specific issues and the politics of health & safety, and has a wide range of topic workshops. One UCU delegate described it as the most exciting and inclusive conference they had ever attended. It is being held at Keele University again, the opening session begins at 7:15pm in the evening of Friday 29 July, and Hazards closes at mid-day on Sunday 31 July.

UCU sends a delegation of six to Hazards Conference. We take applications on the basis of ‘first come, first served’; but in cases where we have more than 6 that includes previous UCU delegates, those who haven’t previously attended a Hazards Conference as a UCU delegate are given priority. If we have more than 6, we keep a reserve list to cover any cancellations. Branches and LA’s can and do send delegates independently, while. UCU pays the delegate fee and reasonable travel expenses of the formal delegation members; all

residential costs are covered by the delegate fee.

For information about the programme, themes, workshop topics and activities, see:

<http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/hazconf2016bookingform.pdf>

If you wish to be part of the delegation, you must confirm your Branch or LA supports your application; then send an e-mail to jbamford@ucu.org.uk with "Hazards Conference 2016 delegation" in the Subject line, and include your Branch details and membership number. We'll acknowledge your e-mail by return. We will send you a UCU-badged registration form when we confirm our six delegates. Please **don't** complete and send the form attached to the on-line Hazards booking form.

3. TUC Hazards at Work manual

The new edition of the TUC's best-selling guide to health and safety at work is now at the printers and almost ready. It is used by reps, officers, employers, professionals in the field and even some enforcement officers have a copy.

This fifth edition has been edited and updated by the Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, and is published at a time when the regulations that underpin workers' protection are still under government scrutiny.

It is no secret that cost-cutting and an obsession with 'red tape' lie behind the motives for reducing the impact of some laws, or even repealing others completely. That is why trade union reps, officers and anyone with a practical interest in health and safety matters should have a copy of the 2016 edition of Hazards at Work.

It explains the way unions organise to improve health, safety and welfare, how the law has changed in recent years and gives full details of the key legal provisions and how they are enforced.

You can place an order now at:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/publications/hazards-work>

Full price is £48 but cost to members of TUC affiliates is £20.00. For those reps attending a TUC Health & Safety Course, it will be substantially cheaper. Telephone TUC publications 0207 467 1294, or email publications@tuc.org.uk for more details.

UCU recommendation is that all Branches and LA's have at least a reference copy in the office; it is a facility and assistance safety reps reasonably require [SRSC Regulation 4A(2)] so your employer must provide it. Go and ask your employer to purchase your copy – your key bargaining point is that you can get them a discount.

4. Dying to work

The TUC supports the Dying to Work campaign, aimed at union action to ensure employers behave with decency and consideration towards employees who have a terminal illness. Their recent joint publication provides negotiating guidelines for supporting members with a terminal illness, and includes a disturbing case study that details a dismissive and unsympathetic approach by an employer.

The guidance highlights some of the important elements of the employment contract that give some protection to this group of particularly vulnerable workers, including relief from disciplinary aspects of the sickness absence monitoring procedure, and ensuring their death-in-service and other pension scheme benefits are not undermined. Branches and LA's should consider how they might approach their employer on this issue.

<http://www.dyingtowork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/D2W-negotiators-guide-A5.pdf>

5. Karoshi - Death from overwork

Reuters report a significant increase in the numbers of Japanese workers dying as a result of overwork, known as karoshi, which is recognised by the Japanese government and the International Labour Organisation as a condition caused by work. The report says there were 1,456 compensation claims in the year ending March 2015, a record number. The article quotes the National Defence Council for Victims of Karoshi, which believes the real numbers are probably 10 times greater.

Japan has no legal limits on working hours, but the Labour Ministry recognises two kinds of karoshi – death from cardio-vascular illness linked to excessive workloads and hours, and karojisatsu – suicide occasioned by work-related stress. The article says that the pressure on temporary contract workers, and the overall shortage of labour are additional factors, and there are also claims that many employers act illegally.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-economy-overwork-idUSKCN0X000F>

6. Contamination of eating places

With reference to last HSNEWS item on the lack of designated places to eat food at work. Originally the requirement for separate eating facilities to avoid workplace contamination was a Factory Act provision for workplaces that were grossly contaminated by dirt, or dealt with potentially hazardous substances like lead, silica dust or other chemical or biological substances. In such workplaces, employees must have somewhere to wash, remove soiled overalls and eat their lunch in an uncontaminated area.

The ACoP to Regulation 25 of the Workplace Regulations allows seats in an office or other similar “reasonably clean” area to be used as such eating facilities, provided workers were not subjected to excessive disturbance. I

suggested that such potential disturbance by students should be taken into account.

A potential form of contamination I didn't include is bacteriological contamination of the office environment. Research has shown that even in what we'd expect to be purposefully clean environments like hospitals, surfaces and door handles can be contaminated by faecal and other “personal” bacteria – not everyone washes their hands when they should. Open-plan and hot desking environments are at greater risk of such contamination.

Fit for Work offers this bit of advice – don't have a lunch break at your desk, get out and about and stretch your legs. (Eat on the run?) The ‘stand up at work’ proponents don't give up easily!

<http://fitforwork.org/blog/the-dangers-of-prolonged-sitting-and-how-to-counteract-the-risks/>

Or Google **Wiggle it, Waggle it, Don't Just Sit on it.** Oh dear oh dear!

The standard is a separate room to eat food away from any form of contamination – that should always be our aim. While we achieve that, as an interim measure we should be asking the employer to monitor surfaces for contamination where they expect employees to eat in the office; we should ensure adequate cleaning in undertaken with appropriate materials to reduce the chance that our food becomes contaminated, and we need to ensure that insect or other vermin infestation is controlled – things like apple cores and banana skins in waste baskets seem to attract those annoying little fruit flies, (and they don't half breed fast) for instance, and we have given advice on pigeon, mouse and cockroach infestation in workplaces in the past.

7. Stress

Quick roundup of recent guidance might be useful. The old networks are abuzz

with all sorts of advice, little of which tasks employers to do what the law requires – to reduce the causes of stress at source. It's always your fault because you don't [blank].

Fit for Work news offers 5 tips for workers: Talk about it; avoid unhealthy habits; keep active; eat well-balanced meals; tip 5 isn't a tip at all, it's a list of symptoms of distress. See:

http://fitforwork.org/blog/reducing-work-related-stress-take-5-tips-for-employees/?utm_source=RN&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Newsletter14Apr16

NHS Choices offers 10: From an HR professional guru this bunch of advice fails pretty much completely to link the causes of stress to the way your employer behaves. Includes the previous 4 from Fit for Work, plus a bit of resilience, work smarter-not harder, take control, volunteer for something; but ultimately it's your fault because you don't do the right things.

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/reduce-stress.aspx>

Public Health England is the latest organisation to offer employers advice about aspects of work-related stress – this time burnout. See the report here:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/fil

[e/506777/25022016 Burnout Rapid Review 2015709.pdf](e/506777/25022016%20Burnout%20Rapid%20Review%202015709.pdf)

The Australian case-study on Page 14 clearly identifies that additional resources reduce stress caused by excess workloads – well done. The Conclusion in this report says that some evidence suggests that organisational interventions produce longer lasting effects than individual approaches. (Page 16) Cagey or what – but we'll go with that.

8. Congress

We'll be at UCU Congress in June, as usual, with a new pull-up banner. This will be my last Congress, as (some of you already know) I am retiring in August after 55 years long and hard labour in a number of capacities. I hope to have some interesting and useful materials to give out, and as always, look forward to discussing workplace problems, so please, come and say hello.

John Bamford

UCU Health & Safety Advice

Contact **UCU Health & Safety Advice**
UCU Health & Safety Advice is provided by the Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, and is available for 3 days each week during extended term times. The contact person is John Bamford: (e) jbamford@ucu.org.uk (t) 0161 636 7558