



Fighting the fear

Attacking safety reps creates a climate of fear in which other workers are less likely to raise legitimate concerns.

We should remember that nothing in the world ever changes for the better just because it should. Progress happens because human beings make a fuss. Over 100 years ago, Victorian factory inspectors identified that asbestos was killing people; scientists confirmed this time and again throughout the twentieth century. But it took construction workers on the Barbican refusing to install the deadly fibre, libel cases and staff in schools across the country to collectively decide to refuse to work with asbestos, before the politicians took notice.

It was only in 1999, after a high profile campaign by trade unions and safety campaigners, that the UK finally banned the importation of asbestos. During the intervening decades, hundreds of thousands of workers suffered slow painful deaths.

The union effect

If you want better pay, more job security, lower injury and ill-health rates and better terms and conditions at work, then unions have a proven track record. In a virtuous circle, unions make workplaces fairer, which makes the union voice stronger, which makes workplaces safer and healthier.

Wherever there is an active union presence, this union effect is likely to be observed – and there are economic benefits too.

A September 2013 study covering 31 industrialised countries, published in the journal *Social Science & Medicine* concluded: “Union density is the most important external determinant of workplace psychosocial safety climate, health and GDP.” The paper added “worker health is good for the economy, and should be considered in national health and productivity accounting.

Unions narrow workplace inequalities, make work fairer safer and healthier. It’s not just about wages, or equality or safety. It is about dignity and respect at work.

The shame is that without unions this basic decency is in increasingly short supply. So the message is loud and clear joins a UNION and get others to do the same.





CCTV monitoring

For Safety or not for Safety?

CCTV monitoring can be used in the workplace for a number of reasons, however, if CCTV is installed the employer should make sure the employees are aware it, this is usually done by displaying signs to say where the locations of the cameras are. Workers should also be given the reason for the monitoring



Signs should be clear, visible and readable. It should also contain details of the purpose of the surveillance and who to contact about the scheme and Include contact details such as website address, telephone number or e mail address.

Under the Data Protection Act if the employer gives a reason for the cameras for example to prevent theft, the employer cannot then use the footage for another reason such as recording entry and exit of workers from the workplace.

Further information is available from the Information Commissioner's Office guidance **In the picture: A data protection code of practice for surveillance cameras and personal information [PDF, 312kb]**

Health Check

The Data protection act doesn't prevent employers from monitoring workers but employers must tell employees about any monitoring arrangements and the reason for it

Key points –



- Employers should have a written policy and procedure
- Monitoring should not be excessive and should be justified
- Staff should be told what information will be recorded and how long it will be kept
- If the employer collects and or uses information the Data Act will apply
- Any collected information should be secure

STOP SNOOPING

There are simple solutions to workplace safety problems - proper systems, risk assessments, asking the workforce how the job can be made safer. They usually require management to remedy management shortcomings.

Workforce monitoring: Studies show productivity drops when workers are monitored and worker health can be adversely affected. A US study found monitored workers suffered more depression, extreme anxiety, severe fatigue or exhaustion, strain injuries and neck problems than unmonitored workers. And it is not just hi-tech monitoring that's a problem — some employers think policing their workers toilet breaks is perfectly acceptable.

Pregnant employees' rights

Pregnant employees have 4 main legal rights:

- paid time off for antenatal care
- maternity leave
- maternity pay or maternity allowance
- protection against unfair treatment
- protection against discrimination or dismissal

'Antenatal care' is not just medical appointments - it can also include antenatal or parenting classes if they've been recommended by a doctor or midwife

Employers cannot change a pregnant employee's contract terms and conditions without agreement - if they do they are in breach of contract.

Employers must give pregnant employees time off for antenatal care and pay their normal rate for this time off. The father or pregnant woman's partner has the right to unpaid time off work to go to 2 antenatal appointments.

"Union reps have an important role in holding employers to account and ensuring that pregnant women are protected from workplace hazards."

If you unsure about your rights before, during or after maternity – call the Branch on 01443 863279

What should be done? –

Carry out a specific risk assessment where woman of child bearing age and new and expectant mothers may be at risk from a work process, working conditions or physical, chemical or biological agents. Altering working conditions or home of work where reasonable and the risk cannot be avoided.



The TUC and Maternity Action have warned that employers are not doing enough to protect pregnant women at work.

The organisations have published new guidance which details steps bosses should be taking to keep female staff safe during and after pregnancy.

The new guide says there are clear laws in place to protect new and expectant mothers. But warns that many bosses don't know what they should be doing or are ignoring their legal responsibilities.

A recent survey by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) found that two in five (41%) expectant mothers felt that there was a risk to their health or welfare at work during pregnancy.

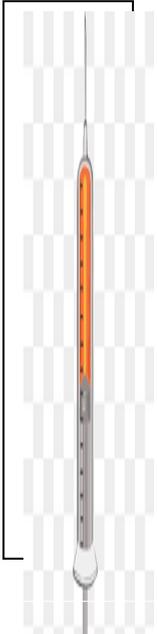


Assess early, assess often

The TUC/Maternity Action guide says focusing on the health and safety issues related to pregnancy "is not about trying to wrap all pregnant women in cotton wool. "It is about accepting that, in some workplaces, there are very real and potentially serious risks that need to be assessed and controlled."



Managing and preventing sharps injuries



Many UNISON members across all sectors face the daily risk of injury and infection through used sharps, whether they are delivering injections or handling discarded sharps.

Staff affected include:

- care assistants, social workers;
- teaching assistants, cleaning and maintenance staff;
- workers in the waste and recycling sector;
- Those working in communal areas or in other areas or where drug related litter or other sharps might be left such as care takers, gardeners and park attendants.

It is difficult to accurately estimate the number of sharps injuries. The overwhelming majority are not RIDDOR reportable and there is no other national system for reporting and recording all sharps injuries. In addition studies have demonstrated that, because of under-reporting, local reporting systems fail to capture the majority of sharps injuries.¹

However the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that within the health sector there could be many as 100,000 sharps injuries per year and also lists sharps injuries as one of the most common causes of injury in the waste sector.

UNISON has a long history of campaigning for stronger measures to combat sharps injuries. UNISON has campaigned for:

- robust procedures to ensure reporting and recording of all sharps injuries;
- stronger preventive measures, based on risk assessment, including safer sharps;
- improved training for staff and managers.

UNISON played a leading part in negotiating the “Framework Agreement on prevention from sharp injuries in the hospital and healthcare sector” concluded by HOSPEEM (European Hospital & Healthcare Employers’ Association) and EPSU (European Federation of Public Service Unions) on which the European Directive 2010/32/EU and subsequent Health and Safety (Sharp Instruments in Healthcare) Regulations 2013 are based. Although UNISON welcomed these regulations, it continues to campaign that they should apply to all sectors not just the healthcare sector.

The effectiveness of this legislation is dependent on trade union safety reps campaigning to ensure that they are implemented at local level. It is also important that branches work together.

If you feel there are no robust procedures in place or arrangements for you to notify and report sharps injuries in a timely manner, or that support available from the employer to you or someone who is injured by a sharp is lacking – Your Branch Health and Safety Rep can help you.

Get involved

UNISON needs and continues to recruit more safety reps and through the Greater Gwent Safety Committee shares best practice with other branches. If you’re interested in getting involved contact the Caerphilly Branch on 01443 863279

Further information on this and other issues can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk>
<http://www.hazards.org/index.htm> or by contacting your Branch

