

HAZARDS CAMPAIGN

Report of the 34th National Hazards Conference

Organising for Safe and Healthy Working Environments- where prevention of mental and physical health harm is prioritised, where clean air is as important as clean water and where workers health is as important as safety.

Held hybrid, online and in-person at Keele University on 1st-3rd September, 2023



Hazards Conference has always been one of the biggest grassroots health and safety conferences for trade union safety reps and activists. This year we held it as a hybrid conference with over 230 people involved, with three online and eight in person workshops, four in person and two online fringe meetings and with one of the workshops hybrid and the Covid Workers Inquiry hybrid as well. The conference sent solidarity greetings to all those workers taking industrial action and fighting for safety at work including the railway workers. Although there was some disruption travelling to the conference fortunately, with a combination of an extra night at the venue, shared lifts or people going online we managed to run the conference without too much disruption.

Delegates who attend both the in person and online meetings are able to fully participate and exchange experience and information with and learn from other safety reps from other unions, sectors and jobs across the UK.

I would like to first thank all those who gave up their time freely to share their expertise by speaking or delivering sessions, without who we would not be able to run the conference. I would also like to thank all the attendees who came to Keele and shared lifts so that others could attend.

The conference began with an opening plenary on Friday evening entitled 'What is the reality of safe and healthy work becoming a fundamental right'. We were joined by the Assistant Secretary of the Australian Trade Union Council Liam O'Brien, and it was really interesting to hear about their top safety and health concerns and that their biggest area for compensation claims were in work related mental health issues.

Other speakers included Shelly Asquith TUC National Health and Safety Officer who said that the ILO declaring health and safety as a fundamental right was lifesaving. Hilda Palmer addressed the conference in the place of Julia Waters, sister of Ruth Perry the Head teacher who died by suicide because of an Ofsted inspection. It was heartbreaking to hear the anguish Ruth and others face with subjective comments made in Ofsted reports, which cause a devastating impact on their working lives and the need to make work-related suicide RIDDOR reportable. Finally, we were addressed by Rob Miguel the National Health and Safety Officer for UNITE union and who talked about the importance of trade union safety reps in the work they carry out everyday and in campaigning for UK employers to get onboard the ILO convention for health and safety as a fundamental right.

On Saturday, we started the morning with two meetings. The first was How can we make clean air as important as clean water and was chaired by Shelly Asquith. There were three panel members – Sarah Wooley who spoke about the issues affecting the food sector. She said that bakers suffered from the highest level of work-related asthma because of the flour dust. But also spoke about the other risks workers face such as outdoor air pollution from building dust and car emissions. Riccardo La Torre and Les Scarratts from the FBU spoke about the horrific number of cancer cases that firefighters experience because of the toxic substances they are exposed to. They explained that their recent research carried out by UCLAN had highlighted the dangers they faced and the changes that needed to be made. Finally, Georgia Montague-Nelson from Global Labour Network spoke about the link between work and climate change and how common pollutants were contributing with deadly impacts. Finally, she spoke about the need for a just transition where workers are not paying for the climate crisis.

The second meeting was on Occupational Health service crisis and how it can support workers with long covid, mental ill health and other occupational health conditions, and was chaired by Dan Shears GMB National Health and Safety Director. The panel members were Professor Raymond Agius – University of Manchester, Alex Lancaster UCU National Health and Joe Donnelly UNISON National Health and Safety Officer. Raymond talked about the limited access to Occupational Health Services for most workers and although there was some good practice it wasn't universal across all sectors. He explained that there is no legal

requirement to provide it. And it should concentrate on prevention, be a supportive service and provide comprehensive rehabilitation. Alex talked about the huge number of people suffering from work related mental ill health. She said it was a top priority for the HSE and that there needed to be a preventative approach in workplaces with root causes identified. Employers need to ensure there is organisational resilience and not just individual. Joe talked about the Long Covid impact which he said must be classed as an occupational disease. He explained that there needs to be an elimination policy and occupational health needed to work better.

During coffee break many delegates attended a training session on how to make a home-made clean air filter for as little as £180, the session was delivered by Hilda Palmer. The box provides sufficient clean air for around 20-30 people.

The rest of the day was taken up by workshops, fringe meetings, the Covid Workers Inquiry, networking, and a quiz. – see links below to presentations and other resources.

The final session of the conference was held on Sunday morning which was chaired by Janet Newsham Chair of the Hazards Campaign. The panel of speakers included Jawad Qasrawi the sub editor of the Hazards Magazine, Sarah Wooley General Secretary of the BFAWU, and Fliss Penru from MeTU. The session was entitled Organising priorities for safety and healthy work in all sectors. Janet began by saying that organising around health and safety is not just a fundamental right, but health and safety is one of the most powerful organising tools in the workplace and that this is a time when we all have to stand up and be counted for the sake of all our health and safety and those of our comrades and family.

Jawad talked about the importance of supporting the Hazards Magazine a publication that had been serving working people for decades. He explained that each edition of the publication took an enormous amount of work and that it provided the information and shared ideas to challenge employers, enforcers and governments. See link below to make donations and take out subscriptions.

Flis Penru TSSA Exec member spoke about the continued unforgiveable state of some members of trade unions carrying out acts of sexual harassment and assault. It is shocking that there have been some employed by the trade union movement who have destroyed women's lives and that this must end now.

Sarah provided the final contribution. She is a hardworking and an exemplary trade union leader and left us all with confidence and inspiration to do more.

Our final announcements of the conference included declaring the UK's worst boss which was voted on by delegates and the winner was Amazon! No surprise there! Also we gave out 6 awards for health and safety excellence to the following organisations:

RMT – ticket office campaign for campaigning for safety, security and accessibility on the railways.

FBU – DECON campaign for its work helping firefighters protect themselves and others from harmful contaminants.

MeTU – campaign for sisters fighting against sexism, bullying and sexual harassment in trade unions and labour movement.

Women’s Environmental Network - Green Baby Day Campaign for highlighting the harmful exposure of toxic chemicals on women, men, diverse genders and children and calling for a gender reponsive chemicals policy

Spycops – for their work fighting against undercover political policing scandal which impacted on workplace safety campaigns

UNITE get me home safely campaign -to make communities and workplaces safer.

The conference hall was draped in the t-shirts of previous health and safety and trade union campaigns. It was a fantastic sight under the banner of ‘been there, done that, got the t-shirt’ and hopefully inspired more campaigning.

As we say in the health and safety movement, health and safety is all about love – making sure our loved ones are safe and not harmed by work. We don’t want to hear ‘lessons learnt’ we will continue to remember our dead but vow to continue to fight like hell for the living!

#Haz2024 will be 30th Aug – 1st September.

Evaluation Sheet Comments included:

‘Inspiring speakers, good discussion, and summary of conference, look forward to looking at resources and presentations – will encourage other stewards to attend next year’.

‘Thank the whole Hazards team for a truly excellent conference. I ‘ll be recommending others attend when every I get the opportunity’.

‘I really enjoyed attending the conference it was super insightful and informative and has equipped me with knowledge on how to improve my workplace. I also loved the diverse range of workshops and the staff have also been great and super helpful’.

‘Another brilliant weekend with great speakers and loads of useful information’

RCM blog produced after the conference:

Organising a safe and healthy workplace

By RCM Health and Safety Advisor Lesley Wood on 06 September 2023 [RCM UK Research Safety Wellbeing Of Women Women ICM - International Congress of Midwives](#)

For the 34th Hazards Conference – the largest educational and organising event for trade union health and reps and activists – the RCM brought the Caring for You campaign to the fore to speak to activists and push the agenda for better health, safety and wellbeing for

members. RCM's Health and Safety Advisor Lesley Wood shares what happened on the day in her latest blog.

The Hazards campaign is well known as the campaign that brought us International Workers Memorial Day in the 90s and has since been at the forefront of tackling hazards that impact all workers. Attending on behalf of the RCM, I spoke at the Get me home safely and lone working workshop and presented Caring for You resources at the RCM stall.

The RCM membership is largely made up of women. With this in mind it was important to talk at this workshop to express the concerns of members on lone working and how they can be kept safe at work. We pointed to the RCM publication on Lone working and other Caring for You resources that can help members who have challenges with lone working.

As well as this we spoke with so many other health and safety reps on menopause policy, inclusivity policies, carer's leave, sickness and absence and all the other policies that we have successfully negotiated with employers. And how events such as Hazards are the perfect opportunity to share policies, good practice and look for new ways to improve the workplace and make them safer and healthier for staff.

We also discussed the work the RCM has taken around excessive exposure to nitrous oxide in the workplace with the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) and links with their decontamination of the workplace campaign and clean air campaign.

The passion from the delegates really shone through and made me realise the influence and importance of health and safety reps. I am very proud of all the existing reps that we currently have at the RCM but do believe the more enthusiastic and passionate people we can recruit, the more changes there will be. It was an honour to sit among reps who challenge work-related stress, injuries and deaths through dedication and hear their determination to improve working conditions of their members.

Eleanor Ritchie, RCM Bedfordshire Branch health and safety rep, steward and assistant staff side chair joined me on the day and said "I have never in my NHS career been included in workshops from such a varied background, shop workers, prison warden, teachers, Royal mail, Bakers Union and Firefighters to name a few. It was refreshing to network with all the trade union health & safety representatives, learning and exchanging good/not so good practice in our workplace. I would recommend this conference to all H&S representatives, I have gained & improved my knowledge in attending. Looking forward to next year."

To mark the upcoming the National Suicide Prevention Day (10 September) we also learned about the Hazards suicide prevention campaign. It is shocking that worldwide, work kills a minimum of 2.9 million people every year. You can help the campaign by completing [this postcard](#) and sending it to employers using [this link](#).

If you are interested in becoming a health and safety rep for the RCM, access resources and contact us here.