HAZARDS
CAMPAIGN

Manifesto for a
health and safety system
fit for ALL workers

In 2019, the Hazards Campaign produced '*Decent Jobs and Decent Lives a manifesto for a health and safety system fit for workers' (1)*. We continue to stand by the contents of this comprehensive document, which provides a blue print for reviewing and reorganising our occupational health and safety enforcement authorities and reestablishing the principles of a precautionary, preventative and participative health and safety system with workers health as its priority. This must be based on the three principles that we know make work safer: strong laws, strict enforcement and strong, active trade unions.

In subsequent years, we have experienced the Covid-19 pandemic - a catastrophic event which has laid bare the failings inherent in the current occupational health and safety regulatory system, with its inadequate officer force numbers, decades of financial cuts and political capitulation – on top of growing deprivation that contributes to poor worker health.

In addition, the mental health crisis that had been identified before the pandemic, has deepened and employers' responsibility for occupational mental health harm needs to be strengthened.

The health and safety consequences of BREXIT also need addressing fully, to ensure the UKs health and safety regulation and standards do not fall behind those of the European Union and are brought in line with better standards adopted elsewhere.

Finally, over the last 3 years the climate crisis has deepened and workers are already experiencing extremes in weather, temperature and worsening air pollution. These increasing health and safety risks, emphasise the crucial need for policies to slow climate change which are developed and enforced in a way that ensures Just Transition for all workers, especially those most affected.

However, the harm workers are experiencing is not just in the environment. Increasing violence, sexual harassment, new working conditions like hybrid working and AI all need addressing by the next government.

- Develop an occupational health and safety system based on prevention, precaution and participation.
- End the deliberate and also de facto deregulation agenda and restore effective occupational health and safety regulation and enforcement as a social good.

- Provide real, enforceable employment and safety rights to ensure good health and safety especially in low paid precarious work with adequately funded and staffed enforcement agencies working together. All workers (including subcontractors) must be covered by occupational health and safety regulations.

Health and Safety research, regulation and enforcement must address the disparity caused by failing to recognise the effects of work on women, including reproductive hazards. All risks must be sex and gender assessed,and where PPE is required, it must be designed and fit for the person and the work activity.

The HSE must be funded sufficiently to enable it to: employ sufficient occupational health and safety inspector numbers; maintain political and industry independence; be centred on tripartism; be able to enforce all the H&S regulations including SRSC regulations and develop a working relationship with safety representatives to ensure that all reported concerns from trade union safety reps will be addressed effectively within a reasonable timeframe. The HSE must reinstate its direct phone lines and create a whistleblower help line. Local Authorities' occupational health and safety enforcement must also be adequately resourced to ensure they fulfil their legal duties. (2) (3) (6)

The HSE board must ensure a true tripartite representation: sector based trade union, employer representatives, and HSE representatives. The key principles of the HSE: to preserve life, prevent ill health and injury and ensure workers, community and the environment must not be placed at risk from business interests.

HSE – 'Our mission and priorities: Protecting people and places

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We are dedicated to protecting people and places, and helping everyone lead safer and healthier lives. Our role goes beyond worker protection to include public assurance. We work to ensure people feel safe where they live, where they work and, in their environment.'

The HSE must ensure all work related incidents are reported; all major incidents, major injuries and serious occupational diseases are investigated; and where necessary prosecutions follow. Work-related suicides must be RIDDOR reportable. The time taken to investigate and prosecute incidents, especially work deaths must be shortened. There must also be positive directors' duties – holding those ultimately responsible to account.
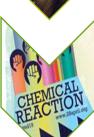
The rules covering IIAC must be reviewed. This is to ensure GB recognises the global listings of occupational diseases that exist and rapidly develop mechanisms to operationalise them for reasons of social justice to those who contract such diseases and as a means of reducing their occurrence at work which brings economic and social benefits to all and saves NHS treatment costs.

- There must be an independent occupational health service, as part of the NHS, to provide support and advice to all GB workers and employers. GPs must record occupation at every consultation. We need an occupational health service which is prevention and rehabilitation focussed on those injured and made unwell.

- Covid-19 and other airborne diseases must be identified, assessed and controlled in all workplace infection control procedures, which includes establishing adequate ventilation/air filtration systems, and other mitigations including PPE. Covid-19 to be defined as an occupational disease.

A strengthened, properly resourced and staffed UK REACH will also include oversight of the REACH decisions, by a body which includes trade union representatives, representatives from environmental justice groups and industry representatives. (5) As a matter of urgency risk controls are needed on work related exposures to Per and Poly FluoroAlkyl substances, PFAs and endocrine disrupting chemicals.

The functions of public health bodies must be reviewed, renewed and adequately resourced, to apply the principles of prevention, prolonging life and promoting health and wellbeing. Their important work must not in future supersede the occupational health and safety role of an effective HSE, but work in partnership to prevent occupational spread of diseases, through the relevant expertise.

Toxic and hazardous substances and air pollution are occupational as well as an environmental health risks. All enforcement bodies must work together to identify, assess and control these risks to workers and communities. Workers must be involved in monitoring and developing control measures for both the air inside and outside where this is their working environment. This approach links with wider public health and environmental strategies because reducing workplace air pollution and other forms of pollution benefit workers, contributes to wider zero pollution policies and global targets of agencies such as WHO and ILO. (4) A comprehensive Clean Air Act incorporating controls on indoor air pollution must be supported.

References:

(1) Decent jobs and decent lives A manifesto for a health and safety system fit for workers: hazardscampaign.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/hazardsmanifesto2019.pdf

(2) Hazards magazine – Bad climate https://www.hazards.org/climate/badclimate.htm
(3) Hazards magazine – HSE missing in action
https://www.hazards.org/deadlybusiness/ghosted.htm
(4) Workers guide to action on indoor workplace air pollution:
https://greenerjobsalliance.co.uk/air-pollution/
(5) Eliminating toxic substances at work: https://gmhazards.org.uk/index.php/eliminating-toxic-substances-at-work/

(6) Prospect – HSE under pressure: a perfect storm:
https://library.prospect.org.uk/id/2023/April/24/HSE-under-pressure-perfect-storm

Glossary

- HSE – Health and Safety Executive
- LA – Local Authority
- IIAC – Industrial Injuries Advisory Council
- WHO – World Health oOrganisation
- ILO – International Labour Organisation
- REACH – Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals
- RIDDOR – Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations
- PPE – Personal Protective Equipment