

Hazards attends TUC Midlands Health and Safety Forum in Birmingham

Hazards attended the TUC Midlands Health and Safety Forum in Birmingham. The day began with a welcome from the chair, followed by the first session, the 'Pain at Work Trial', work being developed by Dr Angela Thornton and Dr Wendy Chaplin. The session was framed around three key themes: not all disabilities are visible; not all line managers are equal; and who has control? Together these summarise how invisible disabilities such as chronic pain are underestimated, poorly understood, and inconsistently provisioned for in organisational policies.

The session also highlighted the key role that line managers play in employee disclosure and access to support, while demonstrating the wide variation in how that support is delivered to employees. Finally, it explored stakeholder perceptions of the roles of the employer relative to the employee living with chronic pain. The workshop reiterated the importance of additional resources to plug organisational gaps and to give workers the tools to self-manage their pain at work.

The next session was led by Tracey Bennett from Thompsons Solicitors, on personal injury and the role of the health and safety rep. Tracey captured the importance of gathering evidence and reporting accidents and near misses, and of collecting data when an accident occurs, from risk assessments to film footage. It reinforced the important role that union health and safety reps play in supporting members.

After a short comfort break, Stephen Green from the HSE delivered an excellent session on isocyanates, with a particular focus on paint spraying and the importance of extraction, respiratory protective equipment, proper ventilation, health surveillance, biological monitoring and proper training. For example, not removing masks until extraction is complete, and the importance of occupational health surveillance in picking up the onset of asthma. Inhalation of invisible paint mists, or skin contact, can trigger life-changing respiratory sensitisation and dermatitis. More information is available from the HSE's Work Right Isocyanates Campaign:

<https://workright.campaign.gov.uk/isocyanates/>

Finally, Hazards Geoff Smith gave an update on the forthcoming Hazards Conference. The 37th National Hazards Conference takes place from 4 to 6 September 2026 at Keele University, with this year's theme, 'Psychosocial hazards and work', focusing on mental health, work-related stress, workload, violence and bullying, and the critical role that safety reps play in protecting workers. As one of the largest grassroots events for trade union safety reps and activists, the conference combines plenary sessions with a comprehensive workshop programme, giving delegates the chance to share experience and learn from reps across different unions, sectors and workplaces. Details are available on the Hazards Conference website:

<https://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/conference>.

Trade unions and branches are encouraged to send delegates. Bookings can be made online through the conference booking page at <https://gmhazards.org.uk/index.php/ev/the-37th-national-hazards-conference-2026/>, where unions, branches and individual activists can register to attend. Unions and branches are also warmly invited to affiliate to the Hazards Campaign, the UK-wide network campaigning for safe and healthy work, which helps to sustain its work supporting safety reps and activists across the country. To request an affiliation form, email info@hazardscampaign.org.uk.

The day ended with an open mic session and a discussion on best practice. This was an excellent event and well worth Hazards attending. If you are holding an event, do let us know if we can support it.

<https://gmhazards.org.uk>