



STRONGER TOGETHER

CONGRESS

Northern Ireland Committee

Health & Safety

NEWS

Northern Ireland Committee Irish Congress of Trade Unions

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Welcome to the second edition of Health and Safety News, produced by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

International Workers Memorial Day 2009.

Members of the NIC ICTU Health and Safety committee met with Belfast Lord Mayor Tom Hartley to highlight International Workers Memorial Day 2009 and to begin to plan for IWMD 2010. Some of the ideas which came forward from the meeting with the Lord Mayor included commissioning a piece of public art which would commemorate all those people who have been killed, injured or suffered workplace related diseases whilst carrying out their job.

The Health and Safety committee hopes to develop these ideas in the coming year and would welcome ideas or comments from Health and Safety Reps or unions. Contact Clare Moore, 028 9024 7940, clare.moore@ictuni.org

Sick Leave worry

by Aodh McCay, NASUWT

Workers in Britain are afraid to take time off sick, despite having one of the lowest sickness absence rates in Europe.

Apparently 4 in every 10 workers throughout Britain are worried about taking sick leave because they are afraid it will jeopardise their jobs. Two-thirds have serious concerns about the unstable job climate and would be prepared to forgo their basic rights to avoid risking their job security.



Sound familiar? How many times have teachers dragged themselves into school knowing full well that they are feeling distinctly unwell?

As a teacher, you are extremely vulnerable to bacteria and any sort of virus that any one of the children in your classroom (or the school) brings into your immediate environment. Indeed, teachers who do the right thing and take time off when they are sick are often treated with scorn by colleagues. This is mainly because of N.I.'s abusive system of having teachers cover for absent colleagues and the overwork and stress caused by that!

A day in the life of Pat Archer

Continuing our series where we look at the work of health and safety representatives, issues facing them in their workplaces and ways in which they have dealt with these.

Pat Archer is a long time member of the NIC ICTU Health and Safety Committee. He is a past Board member with the Health and Safety Executive and has worked for the Housing Executive for many years where he carries out the role of Trade Union Co-ordinator representing UCATT and Unite Trade Unions

The Union to which I belong is called UCATT which stands for the Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians. The Union membership is largely based in the Building Industry and Local Authorities.

Due to the nature of the work our members do, health and safety is of paramount importance because a lot of the work is in the medium to high risk categories.

The NIHE, which is a public housing authority, has been at the forefront of promoting effective health and safety policies and practices throughout the organisation.

The cornerstone of the NIHE health and safety strategy has been regular inspections jointly carried out by the local line manager and the Trade Union appointed Health and Safety representative.

In the main these inspections are about taking preventive actions in removing potential hazards and any dangerous working practices. Joint health and safety inspections also help in identifying areas where working conditions have changed and new risk assessments are needed.

The three year cycle of health and safety audits carried out by the Central Health and Safety Unit provides a detailed and valuable measurement of aspects of health and safety management in selected areas.

What has been of significant importance is the direct engagement of all staff in building a health and safety culture across all the divisions within the Housing Executive.

I don't want to give the impression that we have solved all health and safety issues because as we deal with one problem, other incidents like dangerous near misses demonstrate all too clearly that even in the best run organisations, complacency can lull you into a false sense of security.

The acid test of any organisation's health and safety policy is to ensure that the current operating practices are following best practice in line with the organisation's policy and strategy.

Some of the problems safety reps have encountered and the solutions

- Working at heights (Solutions like edge protection and fall protection)
- Regular inspection of scaffolding and ladders for any defects
- In some cases we have avoided working at heights by using other methods
- Using a special designed hoist to lift and fit security screens onto second floor windows instead of working from ladders.
- Slips and Trips (posters on tidiness of work areas highlighting hazards, ensuring that work areas are kept clean and tidy)
- Joinery and Mechanical Workshops (Only trained staff allowed to operate machinery, Replacement of existing equipment with modern machinery)
- Manual Handling (training in proper lifting techniques)
- Lone working (Introduction of diary drill and security checks, Pilot on lone working protection)
- Violence at Work (Introduction of policies and procedures and improved reporting along with training in dealing with difficult situations)
- Quarterly and annual Health and Safety Audits
- Asbestos awareness training for all operatives.

Occupational health issues

by Pat Archer

One of the most recent health and safety initiatives undertaken by the Housing Executive was the setting up of a Health and Safety Management committee as recommended in an external review of health and safety structures. In the past a lack of senior managers attendance at health and safety committees and meetings had not conveyed the impression that management were committed to improving safety at work.

The recognised Trade Unions sit on the management committee which in reality is a super central health and safety committee comprising of senior directors from all sectors of the Housing Executive. One of the committee's first statements was the need to recognise its role in engaging the active participation of all staff in improving health and safety and the appointment of a health and safety director.

The Housing Executive has made considerable progress in its workplace health programme notably in promoting work life balance, health screening and tackling obesity among staff. In some cases one to one advice and individual training has been offered to staff who wish to improve their fitness levels.

Senior management commitment is crucial to fostering a positive health and safety culture, it is best indicated by the proportion of resources (time money, people) and support allocated to health and safety management and the status given to health and safety. This recognises that decisions made at senior levels will affect the priorities attitudes and behaviour of managers and staff lower down the organisational hierarchy and will be a critical driver on the level of emphasis that front line managers place on competing elements within their own portfolios.

Effective two way communication with our Health and Safety representatives is of vital importance in making sure that the Union Reps on the various health and safety bodies are fully briefed on the Trade Union side position regarding best health and safety practice.

Some additional matters for the attention of the NIHE Health and Safety committees were as follows:

- Accident investigations
- Health and Safety arrangements for district wardens
- Procedures in relation to the management of ASBOs
- Procedures in dealing with alcohol abuse in the workplace
- Health and safety arrangement specific for Agency and Temporary workers
- Health and safety aspects of landlord responsibilities.
- Risks to lone workers



Health and Safety Rep Award 2009

Once again the Health and Safety Executive NI and ICTU are joining forces to celebrate the achievements of Health and Safety reps in the workplace.

The Safety Reps Award is open to both trade union nominated Health and Safety Reps and employer selected safety reps and people can either nominate themselves for the award or can be nominated by their union or employer.

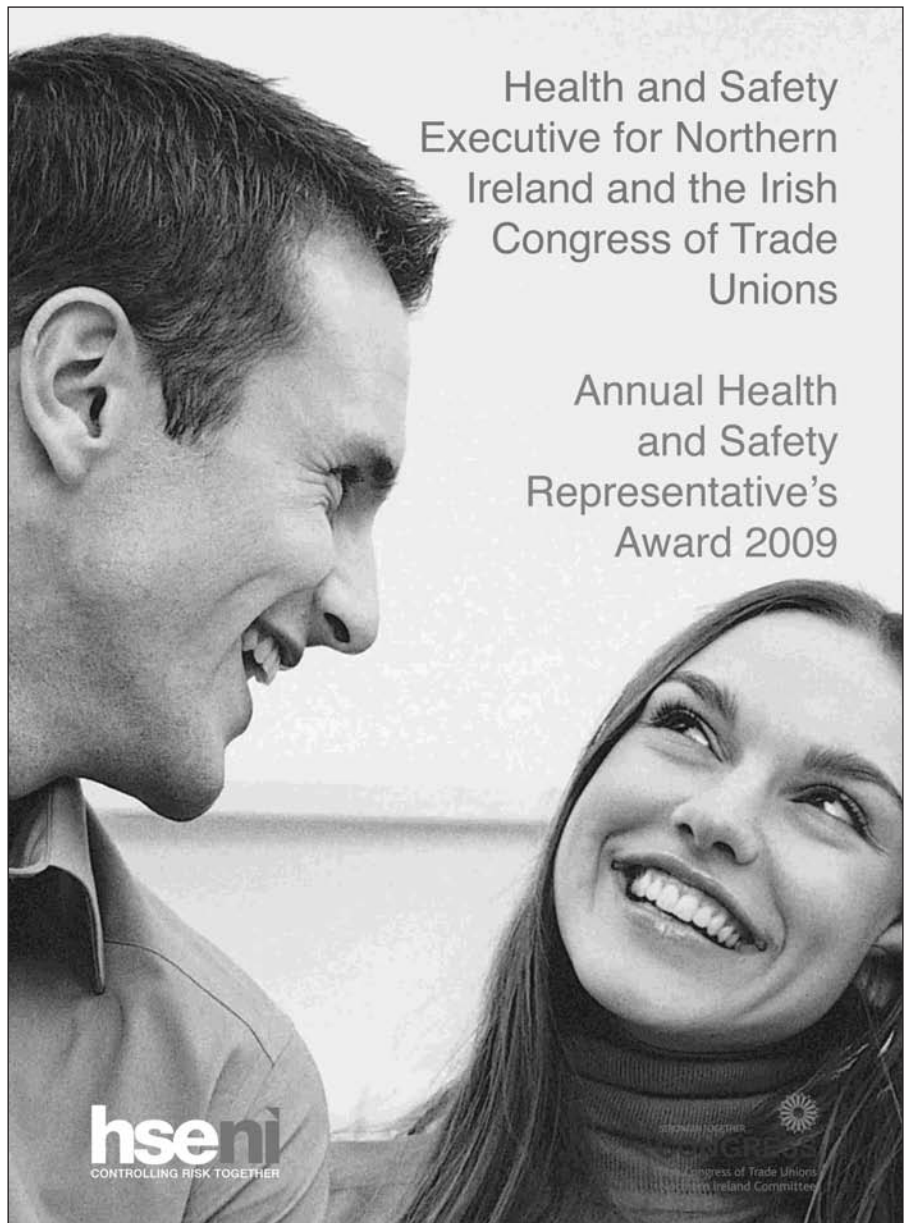


Last year Communication Workers Union Regional Safety Representative **Sean Doherty** was the worthy winner.

Sean tells us why he entered the award and what it means to him:

Colleagues I have been involved with the trade union movement all my life, firstly as a member of the plumbers union as I served my time as a plumbing and heating engineer and for the last twenty four years as a member of the communications workers union.

I am employed by Royal Mail N Ireland and have been seconded by the CWU as their area health and safety rep for the whole of N Ireland. I have held this position for the last twelve years and have worked very closely with the Irish



Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

Annual Health and Safety Representative's Award 2009

Congress of Trade Unions and the Health and Safety Executive for N Ireland.

For some years now, these two bodies have joined together each year and put up an award for a safety rep within N Ireland who has shown a commitment to improving health and safety within the workplace, by working with their employer through risk assessments and audits. This year I myself entered this great competition and was selected as the winner for 2008/2009.

To say I was gobsmacked would be an understatement! This is a prestigious award and I am

honoured to be the recipient of it. It is an award for all my years of hard work commitment and studies but not just an award for me alone. It is also an award for my family, all my safety reps who have always been my eyes and ears, and my employer who has helped me over the years with release for my studies.

I would encourage all safety reps to participate in this annual event and put themselves forward, don't be afraid and always remember the work you do does not go unnoticed.

Yours In Solidarity
Sean Doherty

What's it all about?

HSENI (Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland) and NIC ICTU (Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions) have joined forces to present an award that recognises the achievement and contribution Health and Safety Representatives make in improving health and safety standards in workplaces across Northern Ireland.

The Health and Safety Representative's Award will be presented to a health and safety representative who, in the view of HSENI and NIC ICTU, has made an exceptional contribution in the role.

Who can enter for the award?

The award is open to both trade union appointed health and safety representatives and elected representatives of employee safety*, who are committed to working together with management to improve workplace health and safety, with all the associated positive benefits this can bring for colleagues, the working environment and the economic viability of the organisation itself.

What can be won?

An award of £500 to be spent on training and reference materials for health and safety; this can include using it towards fees for health and safety courses or donating it to your Union (if applicable) for them to use it for the benefit of your trade union colleagues.

In addition, the award recipient will also receive a crystal plaque engraved with their name which will be presented at a special event.

What do I have to do to enter for the award?

It couldn't be easier! All you have to do is complete a simple application form providing a number of basic details together with a brief statement as to why you believe you merit the award. You can either complete this yourself or ask your trade union officer or employer to complete it on your behalf.

Representatives from HSENI and from NIC ICTU's Health and Safety Committee may then wish to meet with you to obtain more details through discussion. The award will be judged on the information you provide in relation to the following areas:

- The ability to identify health and safety problems and influence senior management in implementing improvements;
- The ability to influence and represent other members of the workforce;
- A sound working knowledge of health and safety theory and practice; and
- Participation in health and safety inspections/ audits, both in terms of identification of risks and providing solutions.

How do I get an application form?
Just contact

0800 0320 121

to get an application form posted out or emailed to you.

Closing date for entries is Thursday 30 July 2009.

*ie: Those elected under the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations (NI) 1996. For further information on this and the award itself please contact HSENI's Helpline on 0800 0320 121.

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We the management of Royal Mail N Ireland recognise the commitment Sean has always shown and we were delighted when he won this great award. He has once again brought great praise to ourselves and his colleagues.

**G Taggart
Royal Mail**

workplace and to describe how they have developed their own working knowledge of health and safety work and practice.

Each year the award attracts nominations across the full range of Northern Ireland public and private sector organisations and each year's nominations illustrate the effort and interest shown at an individual level by men and women who are committed to working together to improve workplace health and safety.

It is always a very positive and encouraging experience for HSENI to participate in the discussions with nominees and from those discussions it is clear that the work undertaken by the health and safety representatives brings real benefit to their fellow workers, the overall working environment and the economic well being of the organisation."

The closing date for applications is 30 July 2009. Contact Clare Moore at ICTU for more information.



Rosaleen McMullan from the HSENI comments that

"The Health and Safety Representative's award provides

an ideal opportunity to recognise and highlight the valuable contribution made by workplace safety representatives to improving occupational health and safety standards in their workplace.

HSENI is delighted to work alongside NIC-ICTU in encouraging both trade union appointed representatives and elected representatives of employee safety to nominate for the award. The nomination process itself is simple with nominees having the opportunity to outline their contribution to identifying and tackling health and safety problems in the

Health and Safety – an Education viewpoint

By Aodh McCay, NASUWT and NIC ICTU Health and Safety Committee member.



It is now a maxim that, “*Good Safety is good for business*”, as stated by the Chair of HSENI when opening a recent Conference on Health and Safety in Newcastle recently.

The majority of the participants in that Conference were managers from a wide range of industries and services throughout Northern Ireland – as were most of the speakers. One of these speakers – a manager in industry – spoke of his (and his industry’s) understanding of good practice in Health and Safety which now involve employers asking employees “What is your risk profile?” Of course, it makes sense – blindingly obvious! Of course an employee who is actually doing the job (hands-on, so to speak) is the best one to ask about any risks he or she is being confronted with.

This particular speaker told his audience (mostly employers) that “good management needs active lines of communication constantly in order to properly recognise “risks and to properly deal with these risks” and – that “just because an employer has a written policy they must not assume that this will take care of everything”. The best way? Ask the employee!

Schools / employing authorities do deal properly with many risks, e.g. the school steps are icy on a winter’s morning – information gets to Principal and to Caretaker (sorry, “Buildings Supervisor”) who deals with it before a pupil slips, falls and contacts Mum and Dad who dutifully contacts a solicitor before the school gets the child to Casualty - but maybe that’s just this writer being cynical. The point is that the slippery step will be dealt with in a reasonable timescale.

However, what about other risks to employees (teachers) in this service industry (education)? The imposition of a/many new initiative(s); possibility of violent behaviour in the classroom; low level, constant disruption; poor work/life balance; meeting increasing demands of examination bodies (including a myriad of “entrance exams” for

Grammar Schools); to name but a few! Are employees/teachers asked by managers if one or more of these is causing stress to the point that they could be falling ill?

There are some school managements that do ask teachers and have set up clear times of communication so that an up-to-date “risk profile” (call it what you will) is maintained. Result : a well run school looking after its biggest asset – its staff which produces excellent levels of teaching, and consequently, high levels of pupil achievement.

Why then, do we have so many self-promoting / indulgent / lazy – managers who wouldn’t last five minutes in industry? Their refusal / inability to establish such “lines of communication” results in diabolical “productivity” levels due to ‘lost workers’ (e.g. long term absence due to illness) would mean that if they appeared in “The Apprentice” they would hear the words, “You’re fired!” ringing in their ears (not that I would seek in any way to endorse such an programme openly advocating abusive management behaviour).

Part of the problem in education is that many Principals and/or school senior managers are never sufficiently trained to deal with other adults or are too long in the job to understand that their “way of doing things” may actually cause injury to others and too many teachers are stuck with this poor management.

It would be of great help to NASUWT in Northern Ireland if members here would briefly note their experiences of aggressive management styles (or bullying) and provide me with a short (or longer, if you wish) email.

Please send your email to the Northern Ireland Centre for my attention (Aodh McCay / Red hair / glasses / good looking / handsome). The address is rc-nireland@mail.nasuwt.org.uk and be assured that everything will be treated with the strict confidentiality. Your experience is very important and could help us to ensure employers and DENI provide proper training for school managers.

Training for Health and Safety representatives.

The new training programme for 2009/2010 is currently under development.

Training courses for health and safety reps will include:

- Health and Safety stage 1 (10 weeks)
- Next Steps for Safety reps (stage 2 – 10 weeks)
- Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety (36 weeks)
- Short courses including risk assessment, bullying in the workplace and tackling stress in the workplace.

ICTU Course Pathway for Health and Safety Reps

Education that Makes Workplaces Safer

Union Safety Reps who have IOSH Technician membership can use short health and safety courses to maintain their membership professional development requirements as well as keep up-to-date on key knowledge.

This popular one year day-release course will help safety reps to develop their in-depth understanding of health and safety law, occupational health and work-related environmental issues.

Completion at level 3 will entitle union safety reps to apply for Institute of Occupational Health and Safety technician membership (Tech IOSH).

Short 2 or 3 day courses bring safety reps up-to-date with new issues and provide more opportunity to understand key processes such as risk assessment and managing workplace hazards.

Next Steps is the Stage 2 course for trade union safety reps. It helps to build skills, knowledge and confidence in practical issues such as researching problems, report writing and speaking up on workplace health and safety problems.

Health and Safety Stage 1 is an essential course for union reps. It provides an understanding of the health and safety legal framework, trade union safety rep functions and the union approach to health and safety. The course is linked directly to the workplace making it practical and relevant.

Continuing Safety Rep Development



Occupational Health and Safety Diploma



Short special courses



Next Steps for Safety Reps



Health and Safety Stage 1