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Nov. 23, 2009

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U.S. Safety Study Prompts Transatlantic Campaign to Prevent Deaths in Paper Industry

Workers Uniting to Conduct Industry's Largest Health and Safety Research Project

Embargoed until 12:01 a.m. Monday, Nov. 23, 2009.

A recent increase in workplace fatalities and serious injuries in the paper industry may have been brought on by employers trying to increase profit margins at the expense of health and safety, the world's first global union said as it prepares to launch an investigation of the UK industry.

The investigation to be conducted by Workers Uniting comes after a survey of paper industry workplaces in the United States that shows widespread dilution of health and safety procedures. That survey was carried out by the United Steelworkers (USW) from the United States and Canada.

The USW and Unite the Union have partnered to form Workers Uniting, the world's first global union. The transatlantic campaign involving the paper sector is just one example of how the global union is using its power to improve the lives of workers around the world. The joint paper industry campaign is the largest health and safety research project in the history of the industry and is the first to connect workers in different continents.

The USW survey reveals:

- Widespread cut backs on safety training
- Reduction of union safety committees
- The use of financial incentives paid to staff when the number of reported accidents falls.

Workers Uniting will follow-up with a survey of UK workplaces. Tony Burke, Unite Assistant General Secretary, will today (Monday 23rd) launch the investigation at the union's print and paper conference in Brighton.

Tony Burke said: ***“Globalisation of the paper industry is pushing employers to shirk their responsibilities for the health and safety of their staff.***

“Workers Uniting is very concerned with the emergence of financial rewards scheme for reduction in reported accidents in the workplace. It is a cynical development designed to hide safety problems and avoid investigations. The global union intends to come down hard on this practice wherever we find it.”

The details of the U.S. survey will be revealed at the conference by USW Vice President Jon Geenan, lead negotiator for 120,000 members in the paper and pulp industry in the USA.

Jon Geenan said: ***“The USW share many common employers with workers in the UK paper industry. The safety problems we have discovered in the United States will already be in existence or will soon be imported into the UK.***

“Through Workers Uniting, our joint campaign will encourage members on both sides to report unsafe working practices. The message we will send from this conference to employers in this industry is the global union is watching you.”

The campaign to be launched in January by Workers Uniting and will offer a free phone number for members to report unsafe work practices, which will be reported to the health and safety authorities in both the U.S. and the UK. For more information: www.workersuniting.org.

The USW represents 850,000 workers in the U.S. and Canada employed in the industries of metals, rubber, chemicals, paper, oil refining and the service sector. For more information: www.usw.org/.

Unite is the UK's biggest union with over two million members. Unite represents working people in manufacturing, banking and insurance, healthcare and science, and the voluntary sector. For more information: <http://www.amicustheunion.org/>