

Pulp truth

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Workers Uniting is the global union the USW and Unite formed in July 2008. Please copy Workers Uniting Pulp Truth front and back and distribute it during non-work time using your Communications and Action Teams, steward system, Unite Chapel Representatives and members or Rapid Response network. Be sure to leave copies in lunchrooms, break rooms, Chapel notice boards, etc. We want to hear what's happening in your workplace. Send your news to Lynne Baker at lbaker@usw.org

Unite, USW Urge Locals to Adopt Hazards-Based Approach to Workplace Safety

Unite and the USW are working together to encourage chapels and local unions to seek out the safety hazards in their workplaces and fix them.

Unite has launched a campaign to tell its members in the paper and packaging sector about the potential pitfalls of safety initiatives that focus solely on workers' behaviour as a cause of workplace accidents.

Proponents of these programs believe that 80% to almost 100% of accidents are caused by unsafe acts by workers. They argue that to prevent these unsafe acts, management should target specific behaviours and aim to change them by observing and monitoring workers.

But Tony Burke, Unite Assistant General Secretary for manufacturing, says: "Too many employers are introducing these safety schemes thinking they are the answer to everything on health and safety. They cost a lot of money and they don't work. We know from our experience, dealing with safety in thousands of workplaces, that hazards and unsafe conditions cause injury and illness. When the hazards are properly identified and fixed, injury and illness decrease.

"In the meantime, it is our members who face the workplace risks and under these management-imposed programs tend to get the blame as well. Involving Unite safety reps and identifying hazards and fixing them is the real route to safer workplaces," Burke adds.

Tragic Deaths in UK Paper Mills

Inquest says 2009 death was caused by "insufficient guarding and training"

Unite member Richard Zebedee, described by a workmate as "probably the best worker in our factory, an all-round genuine person," suffered what a hospital consultant called "severe multiple injuries" as a result of an incident on April 28, 2009. The 45-year-old worked as a process operator for Arjo Wiggins paper mill at Stowford Mill in Ivybridge. An inquest heard how Mr. Zebedee suffered extensive damage to his rib cage, arm, shoulder, neck and face just a few minutes into his 6 pm shift. The jury heard how Mr. Zebedee, who worked as the dryer man on a

Management's Role Ignored

Unite and the USW say that many management-imposed safety programmes undermine worker participation in health and safety, reduce the role of joint health and safety committees and shift the blame for accidents and poor health and safety from management to workers. Unite and the USW oppose the use of any scheme that looks to "blame the worker." Too many of these managerial safety programmes ignore management decisions on whether and how to handle the safety hazards.

Unite and the USW say: "Safety reps need to be involved in all decision-making processes around health and safety so that they can bring their expertise to any discussions on what is needed to improve workplace health and safety. It is important that workers and unions achieve the fundamental goals of the union — achieving safer, healthier and more hazard-free jobs."

As part of its campaign to focus on identifying and correcting workplace hazards, Unite published posters and ran a pilot training course last summer at the union's training facility in Esher for representatives from Crown Packaging where both Unite and USW have members. Jim Frederick from the USW's health, safety and environment department and Mike Danbrook from Crown's plant in Toronto, Canada attended the training.

papermaking machine, was attempting to clear paper waste from fast moving rollers with an improvised tool.

Co-worker Gregory McCallion told the inquest he saw Mr. Zebedee open up a gate which had an unlocked padlock on it to get access to the spinning rollers. While the action was considered dangerous and against the firm's safety regime, Mr. McCallion claimed workers often took such action because of pressure to get the work done. Mr. McCallion praised Mr. Zebedee's work ethic, saying he "constantly worked like a machine and rarely moaned."

He said Mr. Zebedee was "the best worker in our factory. He was polite, humorous at times" but had only been at the firm for about a year.

Insufficient Training

He explained how it was the first time Mr. Zebedee, who was responsible for drying the paper and finishing it before chemicals were added, had worked on the particular unique security paper which was being produced on that shift. Mr. McCallion said he saw Mr. Zebedee initially pull out a small knife to clean the 'broke,' but he stopped him and suggested he use a longer improvised device.

The jury heard how the staff was given training, but due to staff shortages and sickness, Mr. Zebedee was promoted to dryerman without completing all the training necessary.

Tony Lord, who was in charge of the line on the night, said Mr. Zebedee would have known the safety guidelines and safer options that should have been used. This included disengaging the rollers or even stopping the line to scrape off the 'broke.'

The jury heard how another workmate, retained firefighter Trevor Chandler, attempted to revive him but to no avail.

An inspection by the Health and Safety Executive found safety measures were not being followed and in some areas of the machinery were not sufficient. Since the incident, the firm had spent £400,000 improving safety measures.

In response to questions by the coroner, the jury found there had been "inappropriate and insufficient guarding that allowed access to dangerous parts where the fatal

accident occurred." The jury went on to say: "There's evidence of proper training procedures not being followed or complied with in relation to the post of dryerman."

Following the inquest, Richard's wife, Sarah Zebedee, said: "This is, of course, a difficult day for my family and I. Richard was a wonderful man who lived for his family and the void his death has left is immense.

"The verdict of the inquest was as we expected and we hope that as a result of the investigation, valuable lessons will be learnt and no other family will have to suffer as we have," she added.

Mill Manager Killed in UK Mill

A paper mill manager who was trapped in machinery at a Devon, UK paper mill died Sept. 24, 2011 after he was freed from the machinery and taken to the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital.

A spokesperson for the mill's owners, DS Smith Paper Ltd, confirmed an investigation had begun and said: "We are doing everything we can to establish the full circumstances and have launched an investigation in conjunction with the relevant authorities."

Unite's Assistant General Secretary for Manufacturing, Tony Burke, said that there is a real worry about an underlying health and safety problem in UK paper mills.

"Unite has worked hard to eradicate accidents but these two fatalities are shocking. Richard Zebedee was a member of our union and so the union is looking after everything from the legal point of view. No matter how well we look after the families left behind you still can't replace a loved one who never came home from work."

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