

# EUROPEAN WORK HAZARDS CONFERENCE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS, SEPTEMBER 10TH TO 12TH 2010



## WORKING LIFE BEYOND THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS: CHANGING PATTERNS OF WORKING

From 10-12 September, 2010, 190 health and safety activists from 16 countries across the world gathered together in Leeds University, England, for the biennial European Work Hazards Conference. In addition to delegates from across the European Union, participants to this 12th EWHN conference had travelled from China, Korea, India, South Africa, Mexico and USA. The conference brought together workers, labour representatives, health and safety representatives, scientists and occupational health and safety professionals.

They met to exchange knowledge and experiences; to explore the impact of the global recession on work environments and occupational health and safety; and to strengthen collective international campaigning for better working conditions in Europe and throughout the world.

Next EWHN conference: Turin, Italy, 5-7 October 2012

**EWHN** The European Work Hazards Network is a unique international forum uniting activists with different experience, skills and backgrounds - workers, labour representatives, scientists and occupational safety and health professionals. It is a permanent network of labour, health and safety representatives and professionals across Europe with many participating national organisations and networks. We welcome and hope to support increased participation by individuals, groups and nations not already involved.

Keep in touch with us through our website: [www.ewhn.eu](http://www.ewhn.eu)

**ewhn**  
WORKHAZARDS NETWORK



**Hazards**  
campaign



*Electronic waste from Europe is sorted and burned by villagers in Guiya, China. The families live amongst a toxic smog from burning plastic*



The background to the conference was the sweep of liberalisation, globalisation and capitalist-driven work pressures across Europe and other parts of the world, bringing privatisation, outsourcing, behavioural safety agendas, rationalisation of work and migrant workforces; cuts leading to unemployment – especially among unskilled workers in construction and transport but also in many branches often dominated by female labour; cuts in OH&S regulation and enforcement; workers under time pressure both in public and in private sectors; stress becoming a serious and extensive problem; employers demanding increased flexibility – from the employed as well as from casual workers; people having to work at increasing distances from our homes and over extended hours of the day.



*Food preparation in the kitchen at Rimi AS a chain of supermarkets in Estonia*



*A campaign against casual work by friends of Simon Jones 24, who was killed on his first day at work, loading ships unsupervised, at Shoreham dockyard*

Following a weekend of presentations, workshops, information meetings, workplace visits, debate and discussion, delegates voted unanimously to say:

We leave this conference pledging to work individually and collectively to:

- ◆ Resist attempts to weaken laws and agreements which protect workers; and take and support action to strengthen laws and agreements;
- ◆ Resist moves to reduce enforcement action through cuts or political pressure; and take and support action to strengthen enforcement;
- ◆ Take and support action to increase protection for vulnerable workers;
- ◆ Promote and organise for more and better regulation of markets and increased accountability of companies and individual directors;
- ◆ Take and support action to develop 'good work': work that is safe, meaningful, socially just and sustainable; work that enables workers to develop skills and knowledge and have a reasonable life/work balance; work where people are treated with dignity and respect;
- ◆ Develop solidarity with working people throughout the world to resist the transfer of risk from one country to another, with a major goal being a global ban on asbestos; work to develop an active global network of health and safety activists;
- ◆ Take and support action aimed at reducing inequalities within and between nations: equal rights for all – men and women, all races and people of all beliefs.

CONFERENCE STATEMENT

**NEXT EWHN CONFERENCE:  
TURIN, ITALY, 5-7 OCTOBER 2012**

**WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE.**

Further details will be posted on the website.

The 10 workshops produced statements to be shared with other delegates at the closing plenary of the conference.



### Migrant Workers

We demand more steady jobs instead of flexible jobs. Steady jobs are good both for our own workers and for our migrant workers.

### Sickness Absence and Rehabilitation

The workshop on support for workers who are off-sick called for a wide range of measures to enable workers to stay healthy and not to need time-off sick. We recognise that many different actors contribute to successful return to work and to rehabilitation; occupational health professionals, line managers, family doctors, trade unions, and colleagues. The timing and variety of methods they use is critical. They should work together placing rehabilitation ahead of capability issues. Law should protect workers during in rehabilitation maintaining income and the right to return to work.

### Construction

Increase efforts towards:

- ◆ a coordinated international campaign for implementation of legal duties and trade union rights on health and safety and for their effective enforcement.

- ◆ A coordinated international campaign for a world wide ban on asbestos and the elimination of asbestos diseases.

### Management Systems and Behaviour Based Safety

Management's systematic approaches to re-organizing work such as lean, Six Sigma, Continuous Improvement/Kaizen; along with technological change and general trends toward intensification of work, downsizing/ understaffing, production pressures, job combinations and extended working hours are major contributors to increased work injury, illness, stress and death.

In order to hide the injuries and illnesses caused by work re-organization, management is bringing in behavior-based safety that focuses attention away from hazards and hazardous conditions, blames workers for work-related injuries and illnesses, promotes the under-reporting of work injuries, and, at the end of the day, is destructive of union solidarity and strength. Unions must work together internationally to promote education and strategies to stop the epidemic of behavior-based safety and hazardous work re-organization schemes.

### Green jobs = Good Jobs?

Workers want a sustainable future that is socially just, does not risk workers' and their families' health and safety but improves it, so that all 'green'/ climate change jobs must have high health and safety standards. Trade unions in Europe must raise awareness of the export of hazard involved in so-called green jobs such as recycling, ship breaking, and also the vast amount of greenhouse gas

emissions associated with every product and service we use that is produced in the majority world and use this to build international solidarity action to support workers in those countries. Trade unions in every European transnational company should ask their employers about the conditions for workers and the environment in all their sites across the world, and make link with workers to fight for the highest standards for all workers and together to fight for investment in good, safe and healthy climate-change jobs to create the better world we know is possible.

### Bullying

Promote dignity and respect in all workplaces to banish bullying, mobbing and harassment.

### Occupational and Environmental Cancer

Substitution or alternative (safer) innovative working methods, has to have relevance internationally. If companies shift production to countries with less stringent H&S laws then they should have similar standards to EU. The parent company has to be held accountable for all its subsidiaries. EWHN should have a panel of 'experts' working on the suggestions arising from the conference and ensuring conference information is on the EWHN website. The EWHN website to get updated regularly including visible representations of disease and the real survivors.

Create a EWHN Facebook page, and possible Twitter account? Good ideas and campaigns around just transition, cancer prevention and risk assessments which take into account climate,

and health. Acceptability limits for cancer substance should be zero in Safety data sheets. Raise awareness within our own unions, network and friends and family.

### Uncertain Chemicals and the Precautionary Principle

OSH Activists at Company level need to press for application of the precautionary principle: NO DATA – NO EXPOSURE. We need to urge the professional OSH system to do the same.

At union/country/European level we urge our organisations to work together to promote research and information and to urge for sufficient regulation and enforcement

### Occupational Health and Safety- a recruitment tool for activists

The workshop produced 11 basics to be effective. But, OH&S is not a tool. It is an effective practice for both trade unions and activists to activate colleagues and recruit new activists – when we support those who stand up!

### Musculo-skeletal disorders

Workshop participants gave highest priority to discussing the importance of ergonomic risk assessment; the need for up to date knowledge about the risk factors for different musculoskeletal disorders; and compensation for those suffering work related musculoskeletal disorders.



Far left: Tracking musculoskeletal disorders using bodymapping

Centre: The hazardous job of recycling waste

Left: Campaigners from France, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands confront the asbestos giant Eternit



### We will work together to:

- ◆ Campaign for a global ban on asbestos and specifically against Canadian production and export of asbestos;
- ◆ Build a global campaign on the semiconductor industry's role in occupational cancer;
- ◆ Encourage trade unions in companies that have workplaces in different parts of the world to press for information about the working conditions in those countries and for their improvement;
- ◆ Build an active global network of health and safety activist networks;
- ◆ Replace Corporate Social Responsibility with Corporate Accountability.

Further information and conference material can be found at the EWHN website [www.ewhn.eu](http://www.ewhn.eu)