Every year, 1,200 people in the UK – three a day – die due to passive smoking at work, according to new research by second-hand smoke expert James Repace.

A killer on the loose reveals that in the UK around 900 office workers, 165 bar workers and 145 manufacturing workers die each year as a direct result of breathing in other people’s tobacco smoke at work.

The figures show that there are three times as many deaths a year from passive smoking at work as from workplace injuries.

ASH research suggests three million people in the UK are exposed to second-hand smoke while at work.

James Repace said: “This study shows that previous research has seriously underestimated the number of people killed by second-hand smoke at work.”

The TUC, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), who teamed up for a 9 April “Don’t choke on the smoke” conference, say the research demonstrates the need for a legally binding Code of Practice for workplace smoking, proposed over two years ago by the Health and Safety Commission.

Amanda Sandford of the anti-tobacco campaigning group ASH said: “One death caused by passive smoking is unacceptable but more than 1,000 a year is a disgrace and for every day’s delay the government has deaths on its conscience.”

Why won’t they act? ASH has accused the government of being more concerned with keeping the tobacco and hospitality industries happy than it is with keeping the workforce healthy.

In March, ASH charged the government with suppressing a study that concluded thousands of lives and millions in business and health care costs could be saved each year by outlawing smoking at work.

The unpublished HSC study says up to 2,340 lives a year could be saved by banning workplace smoking. The total savings to government and business, including the National Health Service, could be £21 billion, the study says.

ASH says the government is putting the inflated concerns of the hospitality trade and small businesses ahead of the very real health impact of passive smoking.

Internal industry documents show that tobacco manufacturers have deliberately conspired to prevent bars and restaurants from becoming smoke-free zones.

Researchers writing in the June 2002 issue of the medical journal Tobacco Control say the evidence that profits would be hit was a tobacco industry smoke screen and the industry had in fact conned the hospitality trade, which the industry says is our greatest potential ally, into doing its dirty work.
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A new study in Tobacco Control, published in March 2003, has confirmed the pos-
impact of smoking bans on hospitality venues.
An analysis of 97 studies in eight countries on the impact of smoking bans on the hos-
pitality industry showed that the most rigorous and inde-
pendent studies found no negative impact on business.
Researchers found that those studies that concluded smoking bans were bad for business were poor quality. They were four times as likely to use subjective rather than objective measures to esti-
ate the impact and 20 times less likely to be peer reviewed.
All the studies that con-
cluded smoking bans had a negative impact were funded by sources that were in some way related to the tobacco industry.
Of the 21 quality studies, none reported a negative impact on business, and four reported that bans had a positive effect.
The US experience suggests the tobacco industry is playing for time – once bans are implemented, hospitality employers quickly come to appreciate them. And their customers like them too.
The April 2003 edition of the American Journal of Public Health reports a study in California, which has had workplace no smoking rules for eight years, which found most bar-goers said they sup-
ported and complied with a similar law two years after it went into effect. While 60 per cent approved of the law three months after it went into effect, that number reached 73 per cent about 2.5 years after the law was in place.
Brendan Barber, who steps up from the post of deputy to general secretary of the TUC in June, said: "Ministers should stop defending the fug-filled snugs of Britain’s pubs, which are proving fatal for bar staff and putting off possible customers."
* The Code of Practice is sensible and pragmatic, and it’s backed by unions and employers. It will protect the rights of non-smokers and smokers alike, and will end the uncertainty about where employers stand."
CIEH president Brian Hanna, who represents the health inspectors who would enforce the code in service sector workplaces – such as offices, hotels, pubs and clubs – said inspectors "need the government to provide them with the right tools to do the job. Relying on weak volun-
tary arrangements will simply not have the desired effect."
A killer on the loose, the ASH investiga-
S Glantz and others. Tobacco industry manipulation of the hospitality industry to maintain smoking in public places, Tobacco Control, vol.11, pages 94-104, June 2002.
www.tobaccocontrol.com
Union resources
Europe: SmokeAtWork – pan-European project on passive smoking at work (see right). www.smokeatwork.org
Australia: SmokeFree ‘03 – alliance of employee and health groups aiming to make all Australian workplaces safe and clean (smoke-free) by the end of 2003.
www.ashaustr.org.au/SF’03
USA: Organized Labor and Tobacco Control Network – network of trade union and tobacco control movements, c/o Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, 44 Binney Street, Boston MA 02115, USA. www.hazards.org/smoking/ oltn.htm

Europe’s unions fight the fug
The TUC is co-ordinating a Europe-wide project that aims to protect workers from passive smoking, explains SmokeAtWork co-ordinator Debbie Sanders.
The SmokeAtWork project is focused primarily on the workers most at risk from second hand smoke – those work-
ing in pubs, clubs and restaurants.
The aim is to develop practical tools for union representatives – such as a website and training materials – to help them to negotiate smoking policies at work.
Union representatives from the UK, Sweden, Portugal, Ireland, Denmark and Romania are working on the project.
Each of these countries deals with smoking at work very differently. In Ireland, all workplaces will be smoke-
free from 1 January 2004 – including pubs and restaurants.
Sweden has already banned smoking at work. Others have more to do.
The website, smokeatwork.org, will include information, collective agreements, best practice case studies and negotiating guidance.
The TUC will host a conference later this year to mark the end of the passive smoking project.
If you have any smoking policies please send them to Debbie Sanders, c/o Owen Tudor, TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS or email to otudor@tuc.org.uk
The TUC’s two-day SmokeAtWork pilot courses are being held in: Dundee (2 and 9 June), Exeter and Solihull (both 30 June and 7 July), Liverpool (4 and 11 July), Putney (7 and 14 July), Sheffield (11 and 18 July) and Newcastle-on-Tyne (18 and 25 July). Contact your local trade union college for details or on the web at www.tuc.org.uk/h_an_d_s
www.smokeatwork.org