

What makes a rep work?

Get yourself some safety rep education and you'll get a lot more done. This is the finding of HSE-backed research into the "safety rep effect," the reasons trade union reps make workplaces so much safer. Pete Kirby, one of the authors of the new study, explains.

Research studies in the UK and in other countries clearly demonstrate worker health and safety representatives make an important contribution to improving workplace health and safety performance (*Hazards 74*). There are a number of supports that are likely to be significant in promoting their effectiveness. One is training.

Our research study, *The impact of trade union education and training in health and safety on the workplace activity of health and safety representatives*, funded by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and supported by the TUC, looked to:

- ◆ gain an understanding of which elements of the content and delivery of training were thought by safety representatives to be most helpful in supporting their activities at the workplace;
- ◆ identify constraints on workplace activity prior and subsequent to training;
- ◆ examine the supports necessary to enable representatives to make best use of training provision; and
- ◆ evaluate the contribution of training in supporting the continuing activities of health and safety representatives.

The research investigated the impact of health and safety

training using: a postal questionnaire survey completed by 1,400 trade union health and safety representatives; telephone interviews with 48 respondents to the questionnaire who had all undertaken a TUC Stage 1 health and safety course; and a questionnaire survey, face-to-face interviews and group activities with 85 health and safety representatives undertaking TUC Stage 2 health and safety courses.

Rep support

Courses provided by or on behalf of trade unions was the main experience of training for the respondents, with the TUC Stage 1 being the most frequently attended course, followed by union induction courses and the TUC Stage 2 course.

The research confirmed that trade union training is a powerful support for the workplace effectiveness of health and safety representatives.

Responses to the questionnaire survey revealed that 86 per cent of safety reps who had attended TUC health and safety Stage 1, and 91 per cent of safety reps who had attended TUC health and safety Stage 1 and 2, found the training to be "extremely supportive," "supported them a lot," or provided "some support."

Safety reps attending the TUC health and safety Stage

Safety is not an optional extra

TGWU 4/550 BRANCH (FRICTION DYNAMEX)



ACTION AT FRICTION DYNAMICS

Workers at the Friction Dynamics Factory Have Been Sacked After Taking Legal Industrial Action over Working Conditions. T&G members voted by 91% for a week-long strike at the Caerwilar-based car part manufacturer Friction Dynamics.

The industrial action was called after deterioration in working conditions at the plant, including proposed removal of statutory health and safety rights, reductions in holiday allowances, and changes in shift patterns.

Following the week-long strike, workers returned to find they had been locked out of the factory, placed on an enforced holiday, and 50 temporary staff had been recruited to fill their places. The workers were offered a return to work package which involved a 15% pay cut and no change to the proposed new work patterns.

After eight weeks of stalemate, the workers were given an ultimatum to return to work or face dismissal. A mass meeting was held and the workers unanimously agreed to continue the action.

On the 29th of June the workers were issued with dismissal notices.

<http://frictiondynamex.co.uk>



2 were more inclined to value their training as "extremely supportive," demonstrating the importance of TUC/union training as an ongoing feature in a health and safety rep's work.

Action at work

Getting motivated: Detailed research was done with safety reps attending TUC health and safety Stage 2 courses. Of these, 89 per cent said that as a direct result of training they had initiated new health and safety activities in their workplaces.

Barriers: Two-thirds of the Stage 2 sample reported a lack of time, resources and facilities to do the job of a safety representative as the main barrier to their activities. In relation to training, some representatives report-

ed difficulties gaining access to courses. Reasons given included difficulties of obtaining and feeling able to take paid release. As well as employer/management unwillingness to approve time-off with pay to attend training, individual reluctance to take time out of work for training because of large workloads or a sense of burdening colleagues was also important. The study found 81 per cent of Stage 2 reps felt that TUC/union training was "extremely helpful," "helped a lot," or was "of some help" in tackling barriers.

What works: The findings provide strong evidence of how trade union training supports workplace activities and achievements of health and safety representatives, by:

- ◆ enabling representatives

- ◆ to share ideas and benefit from experiences of others;
- ◆ providing opportunities and support for flow of information between local, national and even international trade union sources and the course participants;
- ◆ encouraging participants to raise their awareness and take up new issues;
- ◆ developing an holistic definition of workers' health which includes physical, psychosocial and organisational factors;
- ◆ providing a vehicle for representatives to learn the skills of effective health and safety action and initiate the actions themselves; and
- ◆ strengthening the autonomy of health and safety representatives in participative health and safety management.

Right approach: Respondents make it clear they value the methods employed in tuition such as student-centred learning and skills development.

Active and worker-centred participation in occupational health and safety management are basic to the character, quality and success of trade union training. They are a crucial reason why this training is so highly valued by representatives as both a stimulus and support to their workplace actions.

references

The impact of trade union education and training in health and safety on the workplace activity of health and safety representatives. Walters, D. Kirby, P. and Daly, F. HSE/South Bank University, HSE Books, 2001. Contract research report CRR 321/2001. £20.00. ISBN 071 7619400. Available in full in pdf format from the HSE website at: www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr_pdf/2001/crr01321.pdf A TUC summary of the report's findings will be available from the TUC in September. Contact Liz Rees, National training and education officer, TUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS. email: lrees@tuc.org.uk web: www.tuc.org.uk

Course work	
Extent to which training helped gain achievements	all courses
Extremely helpful, helped a lot or of some help.	96 per cent
Extremely helpful	44 per cent
Of little or no help	4 per cent
Safety reps attending the TUC health and safety Stage 2 were more inclined to value their training as "extremely helpful" (54 per cent) in gaining achievements, demonstrating the importance of ongoing TUC/union training as a stimulus to a health and safety rep's work.	

SAFETY REPS DELIVER

The HSE-backed research into the impact of safety rep training shows that safety rep activities and achievements increase as a result of training.

Activity as a safety rep	Totals for "Extremely helpful", "helped a lot", or "of some help"	Totals for "extremely helpful" and "helped a lot"
Representing the health and safety interests of members/workers	98 per cent	85 per cent
Investigating health and safety complaints from members/workers	95 per cent	75 per cent
Investigating hazards in the workplace	95 per cent	74 per cent
Finding and using health and safety information	94 per cent	73 per cent
Inspecting the workplace on a routine basis	93 per cent	70 per cent
Making representations to management/employer on behalf of members/workers	91 per cent	66 per cent
Investigating accidents, dangerous occurrences, ill health incidents	90 per cent	59 per cent
Participating in health and safety committees	89 per cent	68 per cent
Persuading management/employer to find solutions/resolve health and safety problems	88 per cent	59 per cent
Receiving information from, and being consulted by management/employer	82 per cent	48 per cent
Participating in the risk assessment process	81 per cent	52 per cent
Representing members in consultation with health and safety inspectors and experts	73 per cent	41 per cent

What's a rep to do?

Sacked for safety: Workers at a car parts plant in Wales have been fired after attempting to defend safety standards. In April, Transport and General Workers' Union (T&G) members at Friction Dynamic Ltd – also known as Dynamex – in Caernarfon, went on strike for one week. The official strike was related to a dispute over health and safety conditions, impossible work targets and attempts to break existing agreements. On 29 June, 87 members were issued with dismissal notices.

Support the strikers: The TGWU Friction Dynamics Strike Fund can be contacted by telephone on 01286 672031 or 01286 672102. More information online: www.frictiondynamex.co.uk/html/support.html

Good examples: Europe's unions say workers have a crucial role to play in the design of products and work methods – and are preparing a report to prove it. The TUC-backed Trade Union Technical Bureau for Health and Safety (TUTB), based in Brussels, is looking for "concrete examples" where unions or others have used workers' experiences and views to better design machines, personal protective equipment or workplaces.

Send examples to: Theoni Koukoulaki, email: tkoukoul@etuc.org or Stefano Boy, email: sboy@etuc.org. Write to: BTS-TUTB-TGB, Bd. du roi Albert II, 5 bte 5. B-1210 Brussels, Belgium. Tel: 00 322 2240560 Fax: 00 322 2240561. Online: www.etuc.org/tutb/index_en.html

Whistleblowing awards: Hazards readers have been invited by the Campaign for Freedom of Information to nominate for an award any individuals or organisations "who have made significant contributions towards freedom on information during the year." If your union rep or union HQ has done the business, why not put them forward for a Freedom of Information Award? Nominations should be submitted before 1 October to CFOI, Suite 102, Baldwins Gardens, London EC1N 7RJ. More on the web at: www.cfoi.org.uk/awards.html