



With workplace injuries in the wire industry at a high, the Live Wire campaign encourages workers to be aware of health and safety risks, report them and behave safely at work.

Cutting accidents in the wire industry

High accident rates in the wire industry have prompted nine UK wire companies to sign up to a charter that pledges to reduce accidents by 10% by the end of 2007.

The charter is part of the Wire Health and Safety Committee's Live Wire campaign. Launched in July 2006 by Community, UK Steel and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the campaign came about because accident rates in the wire industry weren't falling despite the efforts of unions, management and the HSE. 'We needed something to kick-start a reduction,' says Sue Harris, head of commercial services at UK Steel.

Any UK-based wire company can sign up to the charter and at the end of 2007 there is an award for the firm that reduces its accident rate the most and £1,000 reward for the employee who contributes most to health and safety in their workplace.

The Live Wire campaign has three main aims: to reduce accidents by 10% by the end of 2007, to improve safety management systems and to promote a culture of health and safety awareness.

'This is a health and safety shake-up the wire industry really needs,' says Community's health and safety officer Rob Sneddon. 'It has made a lot of progress in recent years but it still lags behind on issues such as near-miss reporting. When near-miss reporting was first initiated, a few companies didn't handle it very well, which has affected people's confidence. It also needs to involve the workforce more and train more Community health and safety reps. There's still a lot to do, but through Live Wire, we can achieve the 10% reduction.'

Community member Keith Brockelbank, is a senior warehouse person at Bridon Stocksbridge near Sheffield, which has signed

up to the charter. A member of the Live Wire Steering Committee, he ensures reps are well-informed about health and safety issues by sending them to meetings. He himself attended a Live Wire workshop in March in Rotherham. 'It was very informative, and reports from other reps who have been on Live Wire courses are encouraging,' he said. Rob Sneddon also attended the seminar: 'It was very useful in helping companies meet their targets,' he said, 'and relevant to current risks.'

As well as producing a regular campaign newsletter, Live Wire also runs inter-company visits, where employees and managers share information and good practice, and near-miss reporting forums. All the Live Wire firms have signed up to a No Blame Near Miss Reporting initiative so that employees aren't penalised for reporting a near-miss.

So far the total number of accidents is decreasing in the firms that have signed up. But there's still a long way to go.

Sue Harris recommends that anyone who wants to improve health and safety in their workplace should 'participate in events, tell co-workers what's happening, make suggestions and report near-misses so management can solve problems.'

To find out more about the campaign, visit the Live Wire pages at www.community-tu.org or contact Sue Harris at UK Steel on 020 7654 1550; email sharris@eef-fed.org.uk

Putting a stop to workplace cancers

Community is supporting a global union campaign to make workers more aware of the risks of working with potentially cancerous substances and showing how to take action to protect themselves.

Every 52 seconds someone in the world dies from an occupational cancer caused by exposure to hazardous materials at work, according to the International Labour Organisation. Worldwide, that's more than 600,000 deaths a year and 6,000 in Great Britain alone – and it's increasing.

'This rise in the incidence is partly due to globalisation and industrialisation in developing countries where workers don't have the same levels of health and safety protection,' says Rob Sneddon, Community health and safety officer. 'But workers face risks in the UK as well, and the International Trade Union Confederation's new campaign is about the need to be more aware and vigilant.'

While occupational cancer is the most common cause of work-related death, many cases could be prevented. While the dangers of asbestos which causes mesothelioma and lung cancer are now widely known, there are other known cancer-causing substances - electromagnetic radiation, certain metals, silica dust and various solvents - which workers might not be aware of working amongst.

Backed by 10 global union federations, the Occupational Cancer/Zero Cancer initiative encourages unions to investigate the risks of cancer-causing substances in the workplace and take action to make working environments safer.

'It's a timely reminder of the risks involved in working with hazardous substances,' adds Rob Sneddon. 'We are asking our health and safety reps to review and update their risk assessments regularly, to thoroughly investigate all potential risks and take action to eliminate, substitute or control the risks. It's up to everyone to make the workplace as safe as possible and let their reps know where they think there might be a problem.'

A campaign guide has been published to help workers identify and minimise risks. Below you'll find some quick tips on how to make your work environment safer. The full guide, the Zero Cancer Campaign poster and more information can be found at www.imfmetal.org/cancer

Quick tips for a healthier workplace

Draw a basic workplace risk map showing where machines, workplaces, substances and processes are used. Record any reported health problems on the map and repeat periodically to see if any patterns emerge.

Draw body outlines (front and back) and ask workers to mark where they have problems. Investigate any patterns and look for links with workplace factors.

Check workplace sick leave and accident records. Newspaper reports and retired members can also reveal deaths linked to occupational diseases. Raise any suspicions emerging from these.

Workplace surveys can be used to check if workers have concerns about particular jobs or substances, or have noticed any ill-health trends.

Negotiate safer substances, processes or work methods immediately if you discover cancer-causing substances or processes are in use.

Cancer screening - talk to your employer about providing screening.

OCCUPATIONAL CANCER
work started it...

...unions will stop it
ZERO CANCER

www.imfmetal.org/cancer

UNIONS ARE THE BEST PROTECTION AT WORK

OCCUPATIONAL CANCER/ZERO CANCER
A union guide to prevention