

Hazards Conference 2018 Workshop: Resources and creative action for safety reps

Safety reps@40 – four decades of making work safe and healthy

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CASE HISTORIES OF ACTION BY SAFETY REPS

Unite safety rep **Bob Grant** says his work with shipyard apprentices stands out. The coppersmith recognised the risks new starts frequently faced and helped set up an apprentice safety forum so they could get ‘hands on’ experience. With his assistance, the apprentices developed a successful “I can” safety poster campaign - for example “I can play football because I am safe at work”. Yellow safety helmets were also introduced to identify new starts. The work all made a real difference. For example, after it was noticed that the apprentices were reluctant to wear the cheap safety glasses provided, he helped convince management to buy more stylish pairs. All sites reported a reduction in eye injuries, one by 93 per cent in one month.



Catriona Goldhammer is a GMB safety rep in a high street supermarket. She first became a representative when she witnessed young workers being pressured by management into operating equipment they were not trained to use. A bullying culture meant they did not feel they could say 'no' to management. She says the impact of her safety rep role has been 'immense', with workers no longer bullied into doing things they think are unsafe, or feeling they can't go home when they are ill. Among a string of other wins, Catriona got management to review risk assessments to reduce the amount of heavy lifting up and down stairs, leading to a reduction in musculoskeletal disorders. Her good work led to three other union members signing up as safety reps in the store.



Malcolm 'Mal' Woods is a CWU safety representative in a parcel delivery company. Safe working in the vicinity of vehicles was a top concern, so Mal successfully negotiated the fitting of reversing cameras in vans. However, the company only installed the cameras in vans that were driven by their own drivers. About a quarter of the vehicles were driven by "owner-drivers". Mal was able to demonstrate that most accidents were caused by these owner-drivers, possibly because the more parcels they delivered, the more they earned. Mal persevered and finally got the company to insist that all the owner-driver vans were fitted with reversing cameras. The company also had to revise its safe system of work, which has led to a significant reduction in injuries to the public.



Janise Corfield, a safety rep with the retail union Usdaw, works in a supermarket in an out-of-town retail park. One of her proudest achievements was making sure lighting in all warehouses was at the correct wattage and time switches were corrected locally so there is enough light for members to work safely. This is because there were parts of the warehouse where members had difficulty reading labels, leading to eye-strain and headaches. There was also an increased risk of tripping. To save energy, lighting and heating was centrally controlled by the employer but is now adjusted to suit local needs.



Ambulance driver **Angie Roberts** became a UNISON safety rep when she saw many of her colleagues were suffering long term health conditions such as back pain. When the local ambulance service decided to buy a new fleet of patient care ambulances, a partnership agreement meant Angie was consulted by management. She in turn consulted with members, who said the existing practice of pushing patients up a ramp and in to the ambulance manually could be quite dangerous. Angie successfully made the case for tail lifts to be included on the vehicles, something that management had not considered previously. She says feedback from staff has been 'brilliant.'



Members represented by **Steven Owens**, a PCS safety rep at a government office in North Wales, can breathe more easily thanks to his support. The office was next to a railway line and members complained that they were being exposed to fumes. Management had failed to act on complaints, until Steven demanded management conduct a risk assessment as required under the chemicals regulations COSHH. The assessment established the fumes were a real problem and recommended action to improve office ventilation and sort out problems with the heating. Steven also insisted management undertake a deep clean of dust-ingrained carpets and furniture.

