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To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

TUC Health and Safety Reps Survey 2020/21

The Survey

Further to LTB No. 554/2020 dated 17 November 2020, the TUC have today published the results of the 13th biennial TUC survey of trade union safety representatives.

The report is analysed by senior TUC policy officials and union health and safety specialists in order to understand the changing experience of safety representatives at work and to help provide more support. The TUC also uses the survey report and outputs to inform public policy debates and in discussions with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and other Government Departments, Agencies and Politicians.

The TUC also wants Union Safety Representatives and Safety Committees to discuss and use the report to help with their ongoing work.

Safety Representatives

Safety Representatives are trained worker health and safety experts, with protected legal rights under the Health and Safety at Work Act and Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations. They are often on the front line of safety enforcement in workplaces across the public and private sector. Employers must consult safety representatives on their safety policy, risk assessments, safe systems of work, safety controls and method statements plus 'Covid-Secure' action plans.

Number of Safety Rep Respondents

A total of 2,138 Trade Union safety representatives responded to the 2020 questionnaire in the survey period November 2020 to January 2021. This was almost twice as many as in the previous 2018 survey in which 1,073 safety representatives took part and 1,039 took part in the 2016 survey. The responses provide much information about the profile of safety representatives, the work they do to improve

safety and the help (or otherwise) they get in this from employers and enforcement agencies.

The Industry Profile of the safety representatives responding was as follows:

- Transport and Communications 17%
- Education 17%
- Local Government 12%
- Health Services 12%
- Central Government 8%
- Manufacturing 7%
- Distribution 6%
- Energy & Water 2%
- Banking, Insurance & Finance 2%
- Leisure Services 1%
- Construction 1%
- Agriculture & Fishing 0%
- Hotel & Restaurants 0%
- Voluntary Sector 0%
- Other Industries combined and not listed above 17%

Time Respondents Had Been a Safety Rep

- Over 5 Years 45%
- 1 to 5 Years 35%
- Less than 1 year 18%

Main Hazards of Concern

Safety representatives were asked to identify the main hazards of concern to workers at their workplace (excluding Coronavirus/Covid-19), and to identify the top five of their concerns in order of importance. All those mentioned as being in respondents' top five were aggregated to provide a table of 'top-five hazards' across all survey respondents which resulted in the following:

- Stress 70%
- Bullying & Harassment 48%
- Overwork 35%
- Harassment/Violence/Verbal Abuse 31%
- Slips, Trips & Falls 30%
- Long Hours 29%
- Back Strains 29%
- Display Screen equipment 21%
- Low Temperature 20%
- Working Alone 19%
- Repetitive Strain Injury 18%
- High Temperatures 18%
- Handling Heavy Loads 18%
- Infections 10%
- Dusts 10%
- Asbestos 10%

- Noise 9%
- Cramped Conditions 6%
- Workplace Transport Accidents 5%
- Chemicals/Solvents 5%
- Falls From Height 4%
- Road Traffic Accidents 4%
- Machinery Hazards 4%
- Dermatitis/Skin Rashes 4%
- Asthma 4%
- Vibration 2%
- Passive Smoking 2%

This shows that of all the hazards listed, stress is again the most widespread concern, cited by 70 per cent of safety reps. The other most commonly cited main hazards of concern were 'bullying/harassment', 'overwork', 'harassment, violence and abuse' and 'slips, trips, falls'. Back strains and long hours of work were in sixth and seventh place, respectively, cited as a top-five concern by almost one in three safety representatives, and one in five say there are serious concerns about display screen equipment and low temperatures.

Transport and Communications Industry Safety Reps Responses

The two highest responding groups of Safety Reps were those in the Transport and Communications Industry and the Education sector with around 300 Safety Reps from each responding. The top 5 hazards of concern for Safety Reps in the CWU's Communications and Transport Sector were Stress 58%, Bullying & Harassment 43%, Slips, Trips and Falls 42%, Long Hours 34% and Harassment/Violence/Verbal Threats 34%.

Survey findings Summary and Top Five Health and Safety Hazards

Stress, bullying/harassment, overwork, harassment/violence/verbal abuse, and slips, trips and falls fill the first five places as they did in the last survey in 2018.

- **Stress** – Once again stands out as the main dominant health and safety hazard of concern, identified as the top hazard by 70% of safety representatives in the survey (Also top with 69% in 2018).
- **Bullying/Harassment** – Was in second place again with 48%. Concern over this hazard has grown more widespread in recent years. (Also second with 45% in 2018).
- **Overwork** – Still in third place, with 35%. (Also third with 36% of respondents citing it in 2018).
- **Harassment/Violence/Verbal Abuse** – Up one place to fourth with 31%. (Fifth in 2018 with 23%).
- **Slips, Trips and Falls** – Down one place to fifth with 30%. (Forth in 2018 with virtually the same percentage 31%).

The Survey Also Reveals Widespread 'Covid-Secure' Failures

The TUC's biennial survey has also found that, in many cases, employers have been failing to follow 'Covid-Secure' rules – and this had been putting workers at risk of infection and avoidable illness.

- **Workplace outbreaks:** More than eight out of ten safety representatives (83%) said employees had tested positive for Covid-19 in their workplaces, while more than half (57%) said their workplaces had seen a "significant" number of Covid-19 cases.
- **Social distancing:** A quarter (25%) of representatives said their employer did not always implement physical distancing between colleagues through social distancing or physical barriers. Just over a fifth (22%) said their employer did not always implement appropriate physical distancing between employees and customers, clients or patients.
- **Personal protective equipment:** More than a third (35%) said adequate PPE was not always provided.
- **Mental health concerns and stress:** Almost two-thirds of safety representatives (65%) said they are dealing with an increased number of mental health concerns since the pandemic began. Three-quarters (76%) cited stress as a workplace hazard.

Government Must Improve HSE Enforcement To Keep All Workers Safe

The survey found that less than one quarter (24%) of the safety reps responding said their workplace had been contacted by a Health and Safety Executive inspector, or other relevant safety inspectorate in the last 12 months. More than a fifth (22%) said their workplace had never been visited by an HSE inspector, as far as they were aware.

A copy of the final report is attached for your information.

Yours sincerely



Dave Joyce
National Health, Safety & Environment Officer