

# Hi-Viz

News from the NUJ Health and Safety Committee

Issue 1 April 2023

## Staying healthy as important as ever as work pressures increase

**WELFARE, safety and health are always crucial at work – but never more so than now, which is why the NUJ’s health and safety committee has decided to produce this, its own (quarterly) newsletter for reps *Hi-Viz*.**

The coronavirus pandemic reminded us that staying safe and well is not just a matter of avoiding infection or getting the best care if you do become ill. It’s also about making sure work is as safe as possible in other ways.

If you’re working from home, then you may lessen your risk of infection, whether that’s coronavirus or a common cold, but at the same time if you don’t have somewhere comfortable and ergonomic to sit at a computer, you could be risking muscular-skeletal disorders – what

we used to call repetitive strain injury (RSI).

Also, heavy workloads or shift timings that get in the way of family life or cause problems in shared accommodation contribute to “stressors” recognised by the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

Spending more time online may increase exposure to trolling, eye damage or mental health problems, because you’re not getting enough sunlight or exercise, or relationships with others are becoming increasingly stressed.

*Hi Viz* will flag up risks at work that can cause health problems – and look at them from a trade union perspective.

Each issue will appear shortly before quarterly informal online updates for reps as these are timed to coincide with the

more formal meetings of the NUJ’s health and safety committee.

*Hi-Viz* will also cover the latest H&S concerns, the committee’s work plus resources, initiatives and links to help reps and members.

We want to share good practice too, that reps can in turn share with branches, chapels, colleagues and individual members. If you know of good practice that others should adopt, please let us know. (We don’t need to name names, but it would be good if we could.)

To get in touch with your experiences, ideas and suggestions, please e-mail us at [tuttraining@nuj.org.uk](mailto:tuttraining@nuj.org.uk).

**Adam Christie**  
Chair

**NUJ Health and Safety Committee**

### CAMPAIGNS UPDATE

## New security law impacts journalists

**SPRING sees the union’s campaigns team continue to oppose harmful policies that threaten NUJ members and journalism.**

A work-to-rule continues across the BBC in England following a 24-hour strike opposing local radio programme cuts and job losses while the union prepares to ballot members for industrial action in Northern Ireland, over cuts at BBC Radio Foyle.

Progress has been made with getting some protection for journalists into national security legislation as it went through the Westminster parliament but the NUJ remains concerned

over the chilling effect the bill will have as presented. Protecting journalists’ private messages and other material remains a campaigning priority ahead of the Online Safety Bill’s return after Easter recess.

We’re also reminding reps in organisations where jobs are threatened to ask for risk assessments of workloads for those remaining as a potential risk to mental health under the Health and Safety Executive’s stress management standards.

**Bea Bennett** (pictured)  
Senior campaigns and communications officer  
[www.nuj.org.uk/campaigns](http://www.nuj.org.uk/campaigns)

### NEWS IN BRIEF

## Office working arrangement takes the heat out of summer

**LAST summer may seem a long time ago but good practice at one title in London is worth remembering as spring approaches.**

The employer opened their offices so staff could go in

and work somewhere with air conditioning. They also paid for taxis for the “front of house staff” needed when the building was open.

With the cost of living crisis, the NUJ Health and Safety

Committee hopes employers will follow this example if summer 2023 is just as hot.

■ Regular breaks are important in helping manage stress. Take a screen break every 40/45 minutes and, if

possible, move away from the computer for five minutes. Also, make time to go outside every day. <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/coronavirus/simple-tips-to-tackle-working-from-home/#3>

# Monitors offer breath of fresh air

Neil Merritt

**IN writing for a publication that is partly a ventilation magazine, it is fair to say that indoor air quality has been something of an undervalued concern in the push to guarantee safer buildings.**

After the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017, concerns about fire safety and the price of inaction on cladding have understandably dominated media coverage and public discussion.

We're all aware of the horrendous impacts of the Grenfell Tower fire and its numerous victims – yet it's much harder to quantify the impacts of poor air quality on our wellbeing and lives.

Poor air quality has often unseen, yet devastating impacts on long-term health, but it has taken the coronavirus pandemic to begin to shift public understanding about what we are breathing, be it at homes, in offices or just living our lives.

So how do unions such as the NUJ progress and try to ensure members and occupants have a say on their homes and offices?

In an ideal world, we would and perhaps could start by calling for proper air quality assessments for our buildings, and what is happening to it once inside. A qualified

heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) engineer can then suggest improvements – from simply opening windows to the cost of filters and purifiers.

For those of us not trained as ventilation specialists, carbon dioxide (CO2) monitors can be a start.

A high build-up of CO2, created as we exhale, comes when too little air comes into a building.

Industry experts point out that CO2 does not tell us if Covid, or any other harmful pollutants are present but helps show whether ventilation is sufficient. Based on current Health and Safety Executive (HSE) advice, a consistent CO2 value of 800 parts per million (ppm) shows somewhere is well ventilated or has sufficient air flow. Readings of 1500 (ppm) in an occupied space indicate poor ventilation.

Some monitors even have a handy traffic light-style colour coding system to denote whether ventilation is sufficient, or whether further action is needed – such as opening a window. It's not a perfect catch all solution, but CO2 monitoring does give us a means to start talking about air quality to employers.

■ Neil Merritt is deputy editor of EMAP's *H&V News* and *RAC Magazine* and

# Dates for your diary

INFORMAL online health, safety and wellbeing **updates for NUJ reps** that began during the first pandemic lockdown in 2020 are to continue.

NUJ trade union training coordinator – and health and safety committee member – Caroline Holmes says they're opportunities for reps to discuss current concerns, share good practice and share experience to help solve members' problems.

They take place from 12.30–**1.30pm on April 5, July 5 and October 4.** Register by e-mailing Caroline Holmes at [tuttraining@nuj.org.uk](mailto:tuttraining@nuj.org.uk)

Also, anyone interested in becoming a (health and safety) rep should contact Caroline to find out more and book a place on the next available training event.

## RESEARCH ROUND-UP

# Pandemic leaves legacy of harm

**Caroline Holmes** recommends a selection of online resources

**AS hybrid and flexible working become more common, more people are exposed to mental health risks. Meanwhile Long Covid is pushing many into inactivity.**

- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have also confirmed a link between people having Long Covid and being economically inactive. Former TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady says: "ministers must ensure everyone with Long Covid is recognised as disabled under the Equality Act". Burke v Turning Point Scotland <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Thompsons-Solicitors-Roger-Ellis.pdf>. Also [www.ons.gov.uk/releases/freportedlongcovidandlabourmarketoutcomes](https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/freportedlongcovidandlabourmarketoutcomes)
- <https://www.acas.org.uk/> describes hybrid working as a type of flexible working where employees split their time between the place of work and elsewhere. Working from home is the most common remote working, but hiring a work station as a "hub" is an alternative.
- Research from Manchester and Salford universities found that 37 per cent of the

workers interviewed believed their physical health had worsened while working at home. Poor and inadequate risk assessments were cited as main reasons with more people also experiencing musculoskeletal problems or disabilities (MSDs) such as stiff necks, stiff shoulders and numbness in arms, wrists or hands. ONS, *Labour Research*, Nov 2022 LRD.

■ The UK is seeing greater work intensity – with growing workloads and longer hours adversely affecting physical and mental health. The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) argues that poor health is undermining the UK economy and, with more than a million people waiting for mental health support, this is likely to get worse. [www.ippr.org/news-and-media/press-releases/revealed-mental-health-problems-most-common-condition-among-the-sick-forced-out-of-the-workforce](https://www.ippr.org/news-and-media/press-releases/revealed-mental-health-problems-most-common-condition-among-the-sick-forced-out-of-the-workforce).

■ Freelance workers should conduct their own risk assessments: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/home-working/index.htm>

## Hi-Viz

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(from Delegate Meeting, April 2023 until DM 2025)

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