

TUCAN Newsletter

SPRING 2022



Welcome to the spring edition of the newsletter

The **Trade Union Clean Air Network (TUCAN)** continues to highlight the importance of treating air pollution as an occupational health emergency. Unions need to be at the forefront of local and national campaigns, as well as those in their own sectors of employment.

1. Transport sector – workers in the front-line

The sector's contribution to poor air quality is well documented but not so much is said about the hazards faced by transport workers themselves. This was the theme of the **RMT Annual Health and Safety Reps Conference** that took place in Doncaster on February 23rd, 2022.



Photo: Julian Brown

Graham Petersen and Hilda Palmer from the Greener Jobs Alliance, and Hazards, were among the speakers that focused on toxic air in the workplace. The presentations included the results of monitoring that had been carried out by TUCAN on the underground network on the day of the conference. Fine dust levels (PM_{2.5}) were recorded at over 1,100 mg/m³ in some locations, which is more than 40 times the current inadequate UK standard. Tube workers, unlike commuters, can be exposed to these excessive levels for much longer periods of time, and are at greater risk.

A study of PM_{2.5} on the London tube carried out in 2019 of passenger exposure highlighted major concerns. The problem may well have got worse and TUCAN is calling for studies on staff as a matter of urgency.

[Spatial variability of fine particulate matter pollution \(PM_{2.5}\) on the London Underground network - ScienceDirect](#)

The conference agreed to follow up on monitoring and standards across the transport network, including liaising with RMT sponsored MP, Andy McDonald.



Image: Meter indicating dangerous levels of particulate matter near the London underground ticket office.

2. Clean Cities scorecard

The need for further action is also highlighted by the latest assessment to deliver net-zero emissions by major cities [City Ranking - Clean Cities \(cleancitiescampaign.org\)](https://cleancitiescampaign.org)

Out of 36 cities scored there are 3 in the UK. London comes 12th, Manchester 30th and Edinburgh 31st - so plenty of room for improvement. Unfortunately, there is no sign yet that the government is willing to do its bit. A report in February 2022, revealed that one of Boris Jonson's flagship green pledges – to provide 4,000 new zero-emission, British-built buses by the end of 2024 - has been cast into serious doubt by UK manufacturers who say they have yet to receive any orders for new vehicles. [Boris Johnson's promise to build 4,000 zero-emission buses makes zero progress | Transport | The Guardian](#)

3. Toxic Use Reduction conference

Report by Janet Newsham, Coordinator Greater Manchester Hazards Centre

On Friday 25 February, Greater Manchester Hazards Centre organised a conference 'Toxic Chemicals – Risk prevention through use reduction.'

The conference was held online and the speakers included **Bud Hudspith**, the national health and safety advisor for Unite the Union, **Dan Shears** national health, safety and environment director for GMB union, **Prof. Andy Watterson** an occupational health expert from Stirling University and **Hilda Palmer** from the Hazards Campaign. For decades, Greater Manchester Hazards

A major part of our work has always been on preventing and reducing workers' exposure to chemicals by elimination, substitution and altering processes

Toxic Use Reduction is about reducing the amount and number of toxic substances to which workers are exposed based on their hazards. This can be achieved by eliminating the most hazardous substances and processes and substituting safer chemicals and redesigned processes. All that should be done under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) Regulations. However, we recognise the limitations of COSHH which is poorly enforced and many of employers are ignoring their legal duties.

In organising the conference, we wanted to put the focus on supporting trade union and workers' action to eliminate and reduce exposure to all toxic substances at work to improve workers' health and those of other family members. Around 100,000 chemicals are used in workplaces worldwide. Barely 1 in a 100 has been thoroughly tested for health risks. Over 50 substances are rated by the United Nations' International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) as a definite or probable cancer risk at work. Over 100 more are IARC rated as a possible cancer risk.

Following the conference GMHC will also be:

- Compiling a priority list of most common problems safety reps identify- hazardous chemicals and jobs/processes in which they are used, including information on toxicity (e.g. mutagens, endocrine disrupting chemicals, reproductive toxins, carcinogens, allergens, irritants, sensitisers);
- Working with unions to analyse policies and procedures currently operating and discuss how to refine or change these policies and



Centre has supported and worked with tens of thousands of workers across the UK, in hundreds of workplaces across all sectors and types of workplace, working closely with all the unions.

practices to ensure a structure for addressing current and future toxics problems can be developed.

- Developing case studies that show the harm these substances/jobs cause, safer substitutes that are available, how jobs could be made safer, linking to research and safe substitutions that work in practice.
- Developing tools for safety reps to use in their workplaces on principles of TUR, assess extent of the problems, harms caused and how to tackle them, ensuring COSHH assessments are resulting in a hierarchy of control that TUR and safer substitutions.
- Developing and deliver training in using the tools, case studies and COSHH in applying a TUR workplace approach.

Resources

A copy of the recording and presentations given can be found [here](#).

Presentation by Hilda Palmer – Greater Manchester Hazards Centre, FACK facilitator and Hazards Campaign

TUR paper and Ventilation

Presentation by Bud Hudspith – Unite national health and safety advisor

Union workplaces are safer workplaces - Fix the Hazards - Don't Blame the Victims

Unite dust info and silica info

Presentation by Prof. Andrew Waterson – Occupational health expert Stirling university

Presentation by Dan Shears – GMB national health, safety and environment director

4. Clean Air Campaigns

Reports by Mick Holder, Waltham Forest Trades Union Council

Silvertown tunnel



The campaign against the Silvertown road tunnel under the Thames ramped up in February leading to a unanimous vote against the project by Newham Councillors. This makes a total of four council's having written to The Mayor calling for a halt to the project.

The Mayor's office says the project will ease congestion and pollution at The Blackwall Tunnel. The new tunnel is controlled by Transport for London, is planned to open in 2025, and is estimated to cost around £1 billion.

Campaign group *No To Silvertown Tunnel* have been resisting the plans for several years saying the tunnel is the wrong solution to a massive problem that will actually make things worse. Air pollution is a huge problem in cities and urban areas around the world, with London a prime target for action. The Mayor's office has already attempted to reduce this by introducing congestion charge and ultra/low emissions zones. Campaigners say moving some traffic from one place to another with traffic dramatically increasing at the new tunnel site will mean more, not less pollution. To be consistent with climate goals the focus should be on reducing polluting traffic, not increasing it, especially in densely populated Silvertown.

Work on the tunnel has now started and The Mayor's Office has said they will not back away from the project despite objections from residents, health professionals and doctors

No To Silvertown Tunnel: silvertowntunnel.co.uk

Edmonton and other incinerators in the UK



The huge amounts of waste we produce is a massive problem for society. We have five ways to deal with it – reduce waste generation (cutting back on packaging etc), reduce the amount of plastics/toxics produced and replace with safer products, recycle/re-use, bury in landfill or destroy by burning.

After waste reduction at source the best option is recycling and whilst we've made strides towards that the reality is that nowhere near enough is being done, and this is leading to huge amounts of waste going to landfill or being burnt in massive incinerators.

There are also questions about where these incinerators are built, in cities, urban areas or nearby and the economic model that sees each incinerator having to keep burning to be profitable. Worryingly there are twenty or so new incinerators being planned.

Campaigners in Edmonton and elsewhere have said the new incinerators will still produce airborne dust and toxins that will be spread over a large area; produce greenhouse gasses; increased traffic will add to the problem; urban areas such as Edmonton are totally unsuitable for these incinerators; the calculations on the number of incinerators we will need has been over-estimated and their construction will take the focus away from looking for other solutions such as achieving better reduction or recycling rates.

Questions are being raised about a number of new incinerators around the country such as Aycliffe, Simonswood, and Barr Killoch. One successful campaign against an incinerator is that in Alton, Hampshire where councillors recently voted down the plan. However, there is currently no sign of that happening over the Edmonton project.

Stop The Edmonton Incinerator Now The UK Without Incinerators Network: ukwin.org.uk

5. Consultations

Environment Act air quality standards – This consultation is expected to begin at the end of March. TUCAN will be working closely with other organisations to press for the implementation of WHO standards and other parts of our [charter](#).

ULEZ expansion – In better news for the Greater London Authority the Mayor has announced plans for a London-wide pollution charge. This will be put through a public consultation and TUCAN will be pressing for a set of measures that will address the social justice impacts as well as wider environmental concerns. **ULEZ: Mayor announces proposals for London-wide pollution charge - BBC News**

If any further proof of the need to act was needed the latest figures on the links with asthma provide it.

Air pollution in London contributes to over 1,700 hospital admissions for asthma | Imperial News | Imperial College London

6. Dates for your diary

TUCAN meeting

Friday, May 6
11.00am – 1.00pm.

It will provide updates on union campaigns and prepare actions for the events below.

[Register for the online meeting](#)

National Clean Air Day

Thursday, June 16

Climate and Environment Proof Our Workplaces day .

Wednesday, June 22

[Register here.](#)

