

WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY: 28TH APRIL 2026

Introduction

As we prepare to commemorate Workers' Memorial Day (WMD) on Tuesday 28th April 2026, TSSA is issuing this updated Reps' Bulletin to draw your attention to a range of health and safety issues that explain why the aims of WMD remains just as relevant:

“Remember the Dead and Fight for the Living”.

In many ways, these words summarise what motivates union safety reps to take up their role in the first place - a concern for others, a need to speak out when employers attempt to cut corners, ignore the voice of workers or expect friends at work to put themselves at unnecessary risk. It is a day when we think about the 'union effect' – how those workplaces with safety reps are safer.

Health, safety and welfare are concerns for all of us, irrespective of where we work or what we do. You may not work in an environment where there are obvious risks, perhaps from moving trains or the operation of heavy machinery. Your office can still have hazards that affect colleagues, that lead to musculoskeletal injuries and mental health issues, two of the three primary problems facing railway workers.

It is in all our collective and individual self-interests that we stick up for one another, working with managers and employers to retain and improve on the levels of safety performance that mean our railway is one of the safest.

But to do this requires vigilance and adherence to safe working practices, spotting and raising concerns about hazards and ensuring risk assessments have considered those issues.

Ever thought about being a safety rep?

If you have ever thought about becoming a union appointed health and safety rep, maybe words like these inspire you – and may be remembering Workers' Memorial Day is the event that will mean you contact your TSSA organiser and ask for information about becoming a safety rep.

Why do we have a Workers Memorial Day?

The whole purpose of WMD is to remember those people who have been killed or

injured in work or who have developed a disease or other condition because of their work.

Inevitably, this means campaigning for improvements in regulations and to highlight issues like the continuing threat of asbestos and the recognition of suicide as a work-related issue.

How many people die because of work?

The Hazards Campaign estimates that over 66,557 workers in the UK died as a result of work.¹

This figure is far in excess of the HSE's published figures of 138 workers in the year 2023/24 and 124 deaths in 2024/25 that have been reported as having been killed in work related accidents.² These figures, everyone a tragedy, are based on reports made under the RIDDOR³ legislation which defines 'work-related' as meaning "an accident arising out of or in connection with work" and an 'accident' as "including an act of non-consensual physical violence done to a person at work".

However, as the Hazards Campaign makes clear, work-related deaths can be for reasons other than accidents at work. For instance:

- **Asbestos**

Inhalation of fibres from this substance can cause cancers like mesothelioma and lung cancer, and other serious lung diseases such as asbestosis and pleural thickening.

It was not fully banned in the UK until November 1999 which means that it can still be found in workplaces and homes built before that date.

The HSE's figures⁴ (for the year 2023/24), indicate that there were around 5,000 deaths from past exposure to asbestos, including 2,218 due to mesothelioma in that year, with a similar number of lung cancer deaths linked to past exposures to asbestos. In addition, there were 497 deaths mentioning asbestosis on the death certificate (excluding deaths that also mention mesothelioma).

Asbestos remains a significant issue, but it can take years for signs of illness to become apparent by which time it could be too late to provide effective treatment.

¹ Hazards' Campaign: The Whole Story: Work-related injuries, illness and deaths" updated August 2025 at: <https://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/The-Whole-Story-2025-FINAL.pdf>

² <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/fatals.htm>

³ Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013

⁴ HSE: Asbestos Related Diseases Statistics 2024/25 at: <https://www.ukata.org.uk/library/asbestos-health-statistics/>

TSSA published a Repts Bulletin on the subject in 2022 which you will find on TSSA's Website under the title of "**The continuing danger posed by asbestos**", reference H&S135 Oct 2022.⁵

Asbestos Register: TSSA has had members who have died of asbestos related diseases because of their work in the past. We have also raised concerns about the presence of asbestos in specific railway premises. It is for these reasons that we operate an Asbestos Register through our solicitors, Morrish & Co, which records the names of members who know or suspect that they have been exposed to asbestos. If that describes your experience, please contact jenksr@tssa.org.uk and we will put you in touch with the person who maintains the register.

- **Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)**

In addition to asbestos, the HSE estimates that there are approximately 4,000 deaths each year that can be attributed to occupational exposures leading to COPD.⁶

- **Suicide**

The HSE does not collect data on work related suicide, claiming that it does not meet the reporting requirements under RIDDOR. This means that the HSE does not regard suicide as being a work-related issue!

In some other countries – like France – the opposite approach is taken because there, suicide is considered to be a work-related risk. This means that employers have to prove that suicide by one of their workers was not for a work-related reason.⁷

In England and Wales, however, coroners are required to investigate unexplained deaths which means that suicides can be investigated, as occurred with the death of Ruth Perry, a Primary School Head Teacher who ended her life in January 2023 following a downgraded Ofsted Report.

The Office of National Statistics (ONS)⁸ and National Records of Scotland⁹ has estimated that there were 5,496 suicides in 2024 among men and women in the working age group of 20 to 64. The figures breakdown in the following table:

⁵ Available to download at: <https://assets-eu-01.kc-usercontent.com/81b3452f-5056-01c8-b2c8-1c901bd27e20/6c98e52a-3914-4532-aa58-66777a75459c/H%26S135%20Oct%202022%20%28Asbestos%29.pdf>

⁶ See Page 6, Work-related Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) statistics in Great Britain, 2025 at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/assets/docs/copd.pdf>

⁷ British Safety Council: "Work-related suicide: a complex picture" at: <https://www.britsafe.org/safety-management/2023/work-related-suicide-a-complex-picture>

⁸ ONS, Suicide by occupation in England and Wales 2023 and 2024 – Table 1 and Table 2 at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/adhocs/2726suicidebyoccupationinenglandandwales2023and2024provisional>

⁹ See "Probable Suicides 2024 Publication Table in "Probable Suicides, 2024" at: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/probable-suicides-2024/>

Nation	England	Wales	Scotland	Total
Women	1157	73	161	1,391
Men	3410	272	423	4,105
Total	4567	345	584	5,496

The suicides in England and Wales have been categorised by general occupation categories, but the ONS advise that it may not have been a person's occupation that caused their death, especially if they still used that description (perhaps as a GP) but had long since retired when they died.

When a worker gets to the point that they can see no other alternative but suicide, perhaps because of pressures and situations in work – may be due to the intensification of their job's duties and responsibilities resulting from job cuts – or a bullying boss who is constantly demanding more – it becomes a work-related matter and should be recognised as such by the HSE, the safety regulator in UK places of work.

For this reason, the Hazards Magazine has been campaigning for the HSE to recognise and investigate work-related suicides. There is a lot of information on their website at: <https://www.hazards.org/suicide/>

Take Action: On Workers' Memorial Day, why not show your solidarity with others by taking a simple action?

On the Hazards website at <https://www.hazards.org/suicide/> there is a simple action that requires you to click on a link to an e-Postcard. It will take very little time to add your details and follow the instructions. The more cards that are sent, the more chance the HSE's position on RIDDOR reporting of suicides connected to work can be overcome.

Take action: Reps are recommended to have a look at what their company is doing about mental health in the workplace. Many railway companies have signed up to the RSSB Railway Mental Health Charter¹⁰. TSSA is also the only union that is a signatory.

Workers' Memorial Day is also about how we can be injured by work

The work we do may not kill us, but it can leave us injured in mind, body or spirit - or having to cope with disease or other conditions.

- **Mental health**

This issue is really important because stress and poor mental health is a huge and growing issue identified in the UK workplace. The HSE has reported that the ONS' Labour Force Survey calculated that there were 1.9 million workers suffering from work related ill health in 2024/25 and that 52% of them were due to stress, depression or anxiety! ¹¹ That is 964,000 workers!

¹⁰ Railway Mental Health Charter: <https://www.rssb.co.uk/about-rssb/key-industry-topics/health-and-wellbeing/mental-wellbeing/railway-mental-health-charter-rmhc>

¹¹ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/causdis/overview.htm>

Mental health is one of the three major health concerns in the GB railway industry. The Rail Safety and Standard Board's "Rail Industry Mental Wellbeing Survey"¹² published in 2021 highlighted how amongst the 4,000 respondents:

- 43% met criteria for a clinical mental health condition.
- Symptoms that are indicative of depression were most frequently reported, with 38% of respondents demonstrating scores in the moderate to severe range.
- Moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety were reported by 29% of participants.
- 41% reported that they experienced a traumatic event, with 74% describing at least some of these events as work-related.
- 10% of all participants reported symptoms consistent with a clinical post-traumatic stress disorder.

- **Musculoskeletal disorders**

Although not normally life threatening, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) can impair the quality of life for a large proportion of the adult population.

Using the ONS's Labour Force Survey, the HSE¹³ estimate that work-related MSDs were experienced by 511,000 people in 2024-25, causing the loss of 7.1 million working days.

Work-related MSDs occur as a result of the physical tasks that individuals have to use to carry out in their normal work and are associated with work patterns that include:

- Fixed or constrained body positions
- Continual repetition of movements
- Force concentrated on small parts of the body, such as the hand or wrist
- A pace of work that does not allow sufficient recovery between movements.

The HSE also add that factors such as organisational culture, the health and safety climate and human factors may create the conditions for work-related MSDs to occur, although they add that "generally, none of these factors act separately to cause work-related MSDs."

¹² <https://www.rssb.co.uk/en/about-rssb/key-industry-topics/health-and-wellbeing/mental-wellbeing/how-is-the-mental-health-of-rail-employees>

¹³ HSE "Working days lost in Great Britain 2024/25 at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/dayslost.htm>

The latest analysis carried out by the HSE shows that the top four reasons for work-related MSDs in 2023/24¹⁴ were:

- 28% - Heavy lifting
- 19% - Material manipulation
- 11% - Keyboard work
- 10% - Guiding/holding tool

The Railway Safety and Standards Board's Annual Health & Safety Report for 2024-2025 reported that 15% of incidents of absence are due to MSDs.¹⁵

Research from the RSSB reported by CIRAS also suggests that MSDs are underreported by around 12%, with some roles showing estimates of 20–25%. The CIRAS article¹⁶ attributed key barriers to reporting as “organisational culture” and “reporting procedures”, listing the top five reasons given as:

- worrying about management responding negatively
- believing that aches, pain, and discomfort are part of the job
- believing that nothing will be done if they report it
- fear of potential job loss
- preference to not change their duties or job.

- **Fatigue**

Another significant issue across British industry is fatigue. In the rail industry it has been a contributory factor to accidents such as Clapham Junction in 1988 when 35 people were killed and 484 injured.

The ONS estimate from their research surveys that 27% of the UK working population – 8.7 million people – have a requirement to work nights in some form as part of their jobs.

TSSA has members amongst that number as our membership includes people who are employed in a variety of roles that enable the 24/7 railway to operate. Those members are to be found in control offices, resourcing centres, the provision of customer support as well as in infrastructure and rolling stock maintenance and renewal activities. Many TSSA members are also on call that often leads to night working.

The issue of working nights, adequate rest periods and the impact on human body clocks, health, relationships and so much more was the focus of a Nightwork Report that TSSA and four other trade unions commissioned from

¹⁴ Work-related musculoskeletal disorders statistics in Great Britain, 2024

¹⁵ <https://www.rssb.co.uk/-/media/Project/RSSB/RssbWebsite/Documents/Affiliate/Affiliate-content/Improving-Safety-and-Health/AHSR-2025/ahsr-24-25-health-wellbeing.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.ciras.org.uk/whats-new/articles/musculoskeletal-disorders-surveyed#:~:text=normal%20work%20duties,-.Underreporting,for%20not%20reporting%20MSDs%20were:>

the Universities of Greenwich and Anglia Ruskin in 2024. Fifteen TSSA members participated in the project and the final report was shared with reps, along with union guidance. It was also subsequently shared with the Office of Rail and Road (ORR).

If you haven't already, reps interested in this subject are recommended to acquaint themselves with the university reports and the union guidance. If you need a copy, please contact jenksr@tssa.org.uk.

- **Dust and air quality**

Dust in the atmosphere where staff are working is a significant issue for those members who may have to work where ballast is being moved or in tunnels which do not have adequate ventilation or where cleaning regimes are insufficient.

The effects of ballast dust, for instance, especially where workers are involved with track maintenance or renewal work, can lead to staff breathing in very small ("respirable") crystalline silica particles. These can cause multiple diseases, including silicosis, an incurable lung disease that leads to disability and death.¹⁷ More information on Ballast Dust can be found on Network Rail's Safety Central website.

In other situations, like on London Underground, research has shown that the effect of trains running within the confines of tunnels causes a dust which a study by Queen Mary's University has identified as mainly made up of iron and graphite particles.

These are toxic and are able to enter the bloodstream via the nose, a process called "pneumococcal adhesion and penetration," leading to infections like pneumonia.¹⁸

Research is continuing on the long term effects of this dust, but it has already been shown that there are higher levels of sickness absence amongst workers exposed to the dust. TSSA is pursuing this issue via a Tube Dust Campaign.

- **Violence and abuse of staff**

The RSSB¹⁹ reported that in 2024/25 "there were 8,396 events involving work-related violence, affecting 9,227 employees. Of these events, 7,388 resulted in no injury." This means that 1,839 workers were injured, 212 of whom had to

¹⁷ [Silica, Crystalline - Health Effects | Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#)

¹⁸ Reported in London Evening Standard, 26th May 2022 at:
<https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/london-tube-underground-dust-air-pollution-risk-study-passengers-b1002495.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.rssb.co.uk/-/media/Project/RSSB/RssbWebsite/Documents/Affiliate/Affiliate-content/Improving-Safety-and-Health/AHSR-2025/ahsr-24-25-passenger-staff-assaults.pdf>

take time of sick. A weapon was used in 255 of the events (including 205 instances of non-traditional weapons (eg, pipe or spanner) was used. RSSB comment that this is an increase on the previous year in which there were 8140 events involving work-related violence.

The situation in TfL, based on the company's data, also shows an increase in work-related violence and aggression from the 2022/23 period to 2023/24, with reports going from 9,989 to 10,493. Work related violence and aggression have increased across all TfL modes with around 200 incidents reported on average every week.

TSSA published the results of a survey of members in February 2025 under the title of "Keep Transport Workers Safe: No to abuse and harassment on the transport network"²⁰. The survey attracted 650 participants and revealed how our union's members are having to contend with violence and abuse, including with weapons. The report also highlights the level of sexual assaults perpetrated on women workers as well as the racial motivation behind many attacks.

Reps are encouraged to review the report, its recommendations and the call to action. TSSA has raised our members' concerns with the UK and Welsh Governments, with MPs in Parliament and with employers. Your union is continuing the campaign to eradicate violence and abuse through participation in industrywide forums as well as with the ORR.

The results of a further survey – this time of TSSA reps - will shortly be made available on our Website as part of Workers' Memorial Day 2026.

Reps Action

Reps are asked to bring the contents of this Bulletin to members' attention.

Acknowledgements.

TSSA wishes to acknowledge the sources of information in the footnotes that were used in the production of this Bulletin.

²⁰ Available at: <https://www.tssa.org.uk/about-tssa/what-we-do/campaigning/stop-violence-against-transport-workers>