



The journal of the
Unity Trades Union

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Glass maker fined over lead problem

A Black Country glass maker has been fined £3,600 after its premises were found to be contaminated by lead.

An unannounced Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspection of the factory in Brierley Hill found the levels of lead contamination to be above the occupational exposure limit. This created a significant and substantial risk to the

health of employees in the factory itself and in the office areas.

The visit found there wasn't even a place for workers properly to wash their hands or a rest area for workers to have meals. In good weather they would go outside, but otherwise they would have lunch in the factory, greatly increasing the prospect of them ingesting lead.

An HSE inspector said: "Firms that are operating with lead-based materials need to ensure their workers are protected at all times, not just in the processing areas where they are carrying out their duties, but also the rest and eating areas."

More information about working safely with lead can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/lead

Globalisation claims sanitaryware company

Minimum wage avoiders to be 'named and shamed'

Employers who deliberately flout minimum wage laws will be publicly named under a new scheme announced by the Government.

Cases where employers breach the rules are to be publicised by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills from January 1 - giving them three months to 'put their house in order'.

The new sanction was announced in October as the new rates for the Minimum Wage came into effect. They are:

- £5.93 per hour for low paid workers aged 21 and over, increased from £5.80 and with the adult rate coming into effect at 21 rather than the previous 22;
- £4.92 per hour for 18-20 year olds, increased from £4.83; and
- £3.64 per hour for 16-17 year olds, increased from £3.57.

For the first time there is also an apprentice minimum wage of £2.50 per hour. The new rate applies to those apprentices who are under 19 or those that are aged 19 and over but in the first year of their apprenticeship. All other apprentices are entitled to the standard minimum wage for their age group.

The Low Pay commission estimates that around 970,000 people stand to benefit from these increases.

Unity general secretary Geoff Bagnall said: "We are pleased that the National Minimum Wage, which was first introduced under Labour, has gone up again this year, although the main rate has only been put up 13p per week.

"Unity represents many low paid workers, and we hope that the scheme to 'name and shame' employers who flout the law by paying less than the minimum wage proves successful."

When the minimum wage was launched in 1999, the main rate was £3.60.



180 all out: Four of the many long-serving employees who will lose their jobs when Twyford's shuts its Alsager plant (from left to right): John Jones, the last apprentice, 43 years; Alan Brandall, 48 years; Unity works representative David Wood, 39 years; John Cooper, the last worker ever able to achieve 50 years' service.

Twyford Bathrooms has announced that its Alsager, Cheshire factory is to close next year with production moved abroad. Around 150 people, many of them Unity members, will lose their jobs.

Unity general secretary Geoff Bagnall said: "It is an extremely sad day when an historic name like Twyford Bathrooms says it is no longer to continue to manufacture in Alsager.

"Many of our members who work at the factory have decades of service and it will be extremely hard for them to find alternative work. Unity will do all in its power to assist them find new jobs.

"Because of the nature of the work at sanitary companies, most, but not all, of our members in the sector have been men. At least two former general secretaries of Unity were employed at Twyford's, while the sanitary ware section of the industry also produced many NEC members. Assistant general secretary Garry Oakes worked at the company before joining Unity's head office team in the early 1980s."

Abroad

Unity's works representative at Twyford's, Dave Wood, said: "It is the end of an area when such an established sanitary ware manufacturer has finally been forced to cease production and move it abroad."

Twyford's, which has been part of the Finnish group Sanitec since 2001, said

Alsager production would be transferred to other parts of the business. The company had decided that UK-made products would still not be able to compete with goods made in lower-cost countries, despite looking into improved productivity and efficiency methods and a reduction in the number of employees.

Thomas Twyford and his son first set up in Bath Street, Hanley, in 1849. A new plant was built at Cliff Vales in 1887, and the business moved to Alsager in 1956.

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Membership benefits

industry and whilst we will never forget our roots it is worth remembering that 467 of our members are working outside of ceramics.

Hopefully we will continue to grow our membership. We still aim to provide the best benefits and service at the cheapest subscription rates of any trade union.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continuing support, and on behalf of the National Executive Council, officers and staff to wish you and your family a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Geoff Bagnall