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ERIS, Tolpuddle Martyrs House, 238 Holdenhurst Road, Bournemouth BH8 8EG

E-mail: erispapers@mypostoffice.co.uk

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**Health and Safety
Briefing**

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MORE ACTION ON RAIL SAFETY

Rail unions have stepped up their action to defend safety on trains and the London Underground (LU). The RMT said its members on Southern Rail will take further strike action over Christmas and the New Year as part of a long-running dispute over the imposition of driver-only operation. The union is fighting to ensure that there is a second safety critical member of staff (a guard) on services. The dispute looked

set to escalate as drivers' union Aslef balloted its Southern Rail members for industrial action last month. The RMT held a day of action for its Safer Scottish Trains campaign last month, calling for the Dutch company Abellio to be stripped of its ScotRail franchise. The union says the company is "plundering £1 million a month in profits", draining away funds that could be invested in staffing, services and safety.

In addition, 85% of RMT LU platform staff, and a similar proportion of Piccadilly Line drivers, have voted for strike action over safety concerns, while the TSSA is balloting its members for strike action over a "worrying and rapid decline in safety standards". The TSSA highlighted the axing of essential safety and security-critical staff, including dedicated CCTV monitors and station evacuation staff.

SAFETY - REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

The TUC's Disability and work — a trade union guide to the law and good practice, says that in many cases, reasonable adjustments can be made that will eliminate or minimise any risk. It provides examples, including guidance In the event of the need to evacuate a building: ■ for workers with mobility impairments, a simple "buddy" system where someone else agrees to assist the disabled person to evacuate the building may overcome any problem; and ■ flashing lights alongside sound alarms would serve to alert workers with hearing impairments. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) also provides best practice examples showing practical steps, including involving the disabled worker, to promote disability equality when managing health and safety. These include the case of a machine operator on shift work who developed epilepsy. The employer involved both her and, with her consent, her GP in seeking solutions. They found the worker was more likely to have a seizure if her sleep pattern was disrupted, so a move to day shifts gave her a regular work pattern and she was better able to manage her condition.

■ More examples and links to further resources can be found on the HSE website at:

www.hse.gov.uk/disability/index.htm

CWU - STRESS APPROACH

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has been working with the Royal Mail Group (RMG) on introducing revised guidance on stress for employees. This aims to ensure that employees get early support if they are overwhelmed and in distress. The union says that through a new approach, the CWU and RMG recognise work-related stressors as a potential hazard to health and are jointly committed to managing work-related stress in a proactive manner. A stress toolkit is now located on a new specially-constructed intranet Stress page on the RMG "Health and Wellbeing" intranet site, forming the basis for an online stress tool. The toolkit comprises: ■ a preventing and managing stress guide; ■ a stress flow chart; ■ a guided conversation for stress (individual stress risk assessment); and ■ an online stress tool (through the "Feeling First Class" website using the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Stress Management Standards Risk Assessment Indicator Tool (www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/pdfs/indicatortool.pdf). The HSE has identified six key areas (or "risk factors") that can be causes of work related stress: ■ the demands of the job; ■ control over work;

■ support from managers and colleagues; ■ relationships at work; ■ role in the organisation; and ■ change and how it's managed. The RMG approach is focused on a "two level" stress approach: ■ the individual stress risk assessment (guided conversation for stress); and ■ the Online Stress Tool using the full HSE indicator tool questionnaire to measure "population-based stressors" and assess all the staff in a workplace. More information is on the CWU website at: www.cwu.org/media/news/2016/october/10/world-mental-health-day/

Health Risks - Restrictions on Foreign doctors

Foreign doctors The doctors' BMA union has rounded on health secretary Jeremy Hunt's pledge to make the health service "self-sufficient" in doctors, warning that restrictions on overseas staff poses a major risk to the NHS. The BMA said promises to increase medical students by 1,500 a year from 2018 will fail to plug the gap resulting from European doctors potentially having to leave the NHS owing to the UK's vote to exit the EU. Currently, more than a quarter of current NHS doctors are from overseas. BMA council chair Mark Porter said the government should be focusing on creating a health service that supports and nurtures those wishing to apply to work in the UK and those already here.

Disability-related sickness top issue

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the union reps responding to the TUC's 2016 Equality Audit said that disability-related sickness absence was the number one equality issue they dealt with at work. The finding comes from a TUC study published on the first day of Disability History Month. Disability-related sickness absence was the top equality topic in both public and private sectors, and in all regions and nations of the UK except London. Reps told the TUC that disabled people can have higher or more frequent rates of sickness absence, but that workplace policies were not adjusted to account for this. They said more work was required to ensure managers had adequate training to manage disabled workers.

Most disability-related sickness absence can be more effectively managed through better policies, implemented in partnership with staff unions, says the TUC Reasonable changes to the working patterns of disabled members of staff — such as being able to work flexibly or work from home and to have time off for medical appointments — would minimise disability-related sickness absence and discrimination.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said: "Disabled people deserve a fair deal at work.

Employers can do much more to remove the barriers that prevent disabled people from working.

Adjusting working patterns, open communication with staff and good equality policies all help.

"Unions are working hard to win decent pay, opportunities to training and promotion at work for disabled people. I would urge all disabled people at work to join their union, to make sure they get their voice heard and their interests represented."

Five top tips for union reps supporting disabled people at work are: • bring disabled workers together to discuss workplace policies and suitable adjustments; • suggest disability awareness training for managers and union reps, • ensure effective reasonable adjustments — such as working from home, flexible working arrangements, changes to IT and software and adjustments to any duties — are in place for disabled workers; • ensure disability-related absence is part of the sickness absence procedure; and • negotiate paid disability leave, separate to sickness absence.

www.tuc.org.uk/equality-issues/disability-issues/disability-related-sickness-ab-sence-biggest-workplace-issue-union