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TUC Fire Safety Guide For Trade Union Safety Reps and Activists:

To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

The TUC has published new fire safety advice for trade union representatives following the Grenfell Tower fire in London last June and after consideration by the TUC Union Health and Safety Specialists Committee.

There are between 15,000 and 20,000 fires in non-residential buildings every year in the UK. Last year 2,000 of these fires were in industrial premises, more than 5,000 were in shops or similar commercial sites, while almost 2,000 were in schools or hospitals.

Union Health and Safety Reps have a key role to play in fire safety and should challenge employers and managers to take all aspects of fire safety, including prevention, as more than just a 'tick-box exercise' and one that looks at all aspects of fire safety, including prevention.

The new guidance sets out the law around fire safety, explains what is required from a thorough fire safety assessment, and looks at how to implement fire safety policies that will prevent and protect workers.

There's also a useful checklist for Safety Reps on what to look out for in terms of fire safety when they carry out their workplace inspections.

Workers in high-rise office blocks will have particular concerns about fire safety following the Grenfell Tower fire. If not managed properly, high-rise buildings pose additional risks in terms of their construction and escape routes. The guide argues that fire procedures must be reviewed to reflect this.

Union Safety Reps can check managers are receiving information and advice on the company fire policies. And if the building has any form of cladding, Reps can press employers to ensure that both the materials, and also the way they are installed, are independently tested and checked.

The guide will help Reps familiarise themselves with the latest law on fire safety, help them carry out better workplace inspections, and work with managers to devise policies that will genuinely prevent and protect workers from fires.

Fires in the workplace are, like any other risk, preventable, yet every year there are thousands of fires and, in the last year 21 people died in these fires. Another 71 died in the Grenfell Tower Fire disaster.

Fire safety has two main parts. The first is ensuring that fires are prevented and the second is to ensure that if a fire happens there are procedures in place to enable it to be quickly identified and dealt with and, at the same time, ensure that all workers and members of the public are not put at risk.

Employers often see fire safety just in terms of having the procedures in place in the event of a fire and forget about the first part, which is taking action to prevent fires.

As we saw from the Grenfell Fire disaster in June 2017, fire safety is not just about ensuring the proper fire drills are in place and having enough fire extinguishers, it can be about how we design, construct and maintain the buildings in which we live and work.

Yours sincerely



Dave Joyce
National Health, Safety & Environment Officer