

Tories propose 'scoundrels' charter' to tackle workers' safety

Tory proposals look to let construction firms self-police on health and safety issues

Unions and campaigners have accused the Tories of putting workers' lives at risk with a "scoundrels' charter" which would let construction firms self-police on health and safety issues.

Under Tory proposals firmed up this week by shadow business spokesman John Penrose certain businesses would be allowed to carry out their own safety audits and refuse access to safety inspectors.

The proposal is a key plank of the party's policy paper Regulation In The Post-Bureaucratic Age, which the party has said it is determined to force through if it comes to power at the pending election.

But construction union Ucat and campaign group Families Against Corporate Killing (Fack) said that the proposals were deceitful, ignorant and stupid and would lead to more workplace deaths.

The policy paper stated that firms would "be able to arrange their own externally audited inspections" and if they passed would "be able to refuse entry to inspectors [from the Health and Safety Executive]."

The proposal has been described as a scandalous sop to the Conservatives' friends in big business and a betrayal of workers' rights in a country which already has a poor record on the issue.

Ucat general secretary Alan Ritchie said: "This proves that the Tories cannot be trusted with workers' safety.

"If implemented this will effectively end independent safety inspections and will lead to a greater number of workers being maimed and killed at work.

"The ignorance and the stupidity of the Conservatives is staggering. Safety on construction sites, where many different companies are working at any one time, can change rapidly.

"Under these plans if workers or members of the public had safety concerns the HSE would be prevented from acting until an accident occurred."

Fack spokeswoman Hilda Palmer, said: "This is a scoundrels' charter.

"It won't work and is based on entirely flawed models from the US and previous Tory administrations. This is the system which led to Enron, Madoff and now Lehman's.

"We need to get back to basics. Strict and fair enforcement and increased roles for trade union safety reps.

"Everything they are planning to do is extremely dangerous and will be a waste of yet more money and even more lives.

"People must be made aware of what the Tories are trying to do. They must vote for their lives or they might not live to regret it."

Both Fack and Ucott pointed out that a report into workplace deaths by former head of Acas Rita Donaghy and presented to the government last year had opposed any such move, arguing that inspections should be increased.

The government has yet to respond to the report, which has led to fears key recommendations may be watered down.

The Star contacted Conservative central office for comment but they did not respond.