

Feds urge companies to adopt AIDS guidelines

If you're working for a company that has not adopted a policy on AIDS in the workplace, you're not alone. In spite of warnings from legal associations, insurance companies, and state and federal agencies, most employers continue to ignore AIDS policy until they are suddenly faced with the situation.

While the federal government continues to mull a national AIDS policy (Reagan believes there are sufficient existing laws to protect the infected against discrimination), the federal Office of Personnel Management wants private

companies to implement their own plans to deal with employees who contract AIDS.

In a recent letter to 1,000 CEOs throughout the country, OPM urged industry managers to take "corrective or disciplinary action" against workers who threaten or refuse to work with fellow employees infected with AIDS.

U.S. West Communications, your phone company, is miles ahead of most Northwest employers in dealing with AIDS in the workplace. More than one-third of all their employees have completed a company AIDS orientation, and the remainder will receive company guideline talks soon.

U.S. West president of operations Andrew

Smith is candid in his views on the subject. "AIDS leaves a trail of fear and uneasiness," he told a recent Seattle Rotary Club meeting. "It can easily immobilize a workforce."

Smith said he recently heard that only 5 percent of companies in the region have AIDS-education programs. He explained that he hadn't always realized the gravity of the situation, and that he couldn't think "beyond the lifestyles" of those most frequently afflicted. The turnaround, Smith said, came when he learned that several employees — good employees — at U.S. West were dying of the illness.

"Last year an employee was found dead in

his apartment," Smith related. "He died of an AIDS-related illness. And nobody knew." Apparently the worker was afraid to tell anyone. Smith speculated how "very scared and alone" the young man must have felt.

Another employee took a different route. He told his supervisor and co-workers. They visit him in the hospital, and U.S. West has allowed him to work part time and more recently in his home.

The U.S. West model AIDS program is based on three principles: help the AIDS patient, prevent the spread of the disease and educate employees.

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... **Between the Lines** ...

BY JACK RILEY

AIDS no campaign issue this time around

It is understandable that gay activists are frustrated this presidential election year. AIDS and its accompanying civil rights questions did not become major campaign issues. In fact, they didn't become issues at all.

That's especially disconcerting when major public-opinion polls predicted less than a year ago that AIDS was considered a major political issue by the general United States population. One poll even suggested that AIDS would become the campaign issue of 1988.

Although the Democrats and Republicans have dissimilar views on the finer points of civil rights and responsibilities, both parties generally agree that federal efforts to find an AIDS cure need to be stepped up, that the sick need to be treated like anyone else with a major illness, and that outright discrimination against those afflicted must be prevented.

The two parties disagree as to how many tax dollars should be spent and to what extent the federal government needs to protect individual rights. Bush and Dukakis believed they had little to gain by doing battle over those differences.

Part of the failure of AIDS to emerge as a campaign issue is the cooling of public hysteria over the disease and the acceptance that a cure cannot be found overnight. As the death toll mounts, though, AIDS will continue to gather momentum as a political item. If the next administration — Republican or Democrat — does not show a sincere effort to address the problems that gays and straights face as the disease escalates, then it will become a major issue.

One minor liberal political party, the New Alliance, has been working on the strategy that it can draw enough votes away from Democratic presidential nominee Mike Dukakis to effect a Bush victory. The party, which bills itself as women-led, black-led, and concerned about gays, lesbians, the homeless and unemployed, believes that Bush would last only one term in the White House and that both parties would have to field candidates in 1992 who would be forced to speak to its various issues.

The only problem with the New Alliance strategy is that we cannot afford another four years with a Republican in the White House.

The New Alliance aside, history and reality dictate that the Democratic Party will provide the safest and fastest vehicle to address problems heaped on minorities and the poor. In four more years of Republican leadership who knows how many more people will suffer at the hands of the GOP social and economic policies that have traditionally favored the rich, the powerful, the white and the male?