

Building Trades to train members as disaster responders

BEND — Building trades unions are taking steps to better prepare their members to respond to disaster situations in Oregon.

Jack Gilchrist, a retired officer of the national Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO and now a consultant for the Center to Protect Workers Rights (CPWR), said his organization has trainers available throughout the United States to train construction workers who can respond to a disaster as skilled support personnel.

Gilchrist was speaking here at the annual convention of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council Aug. 29-31.

"Worker training after 9-11 was too little too late," Gilchrist said, referring to the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, where scores of construction workers joined firefighters and police at the center following the collapse. But with no real plan in place, many workers put themselves in harm's way.

CPWR has developed a program with assistance from federal agencies to train workers to avoid hazards related to confined spaces, electrical work, construction, hand and power tools, heavy equipment operation, slips, trips and falls, mold, water contamination, respiratory, chemical and

biological hazards, and animal and insect bites.

The training program is based on lessons learned at the World Trade Center and Hurricane Katrina.

Upon completion of the program, construction workers will be issued a dispatch card that will allow them to respond to a disaster.

"All union workers should be trained in disaster relief," Gilchrist told convention delegates.

Bob Shiprack, executive secretary of the OSBCTC, said he and John Mohlis, executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council, have shown the CPWR video to officials from Oregon Homeland Security and fire departments. "They were very impressed with what they saw. We will be doing some training on disaster response very soon," he said.

The concept is simple: If an emergency responder — most likely a fire department — calls for massive aid to resolve a disaster scenario, the call will go to the local building trades executive or his or her designee. A prepared call list will go into effect, with the building trades making the contacts.

"Prior to this, local unions will have prepared their members by offering basic command and safety classes, simply so that the craftsman can be

used in the most expeditious, effective, and safe manner," Ron Murray, a business agent for Plumbers and Fitters Local 290, told the Northwest Labor Press.

Murray, a former fire chief and emergency medical technician, has been assigned to coordinate the emergency disaster plan for Local 290.

"Whether electricians, iron workers, plumbers or steamfitters, building trades' professionals will be the backbone of the next disaster response," Murray said.

Oregon has more than a dozen trainers available to deliver the disaster training course.

"Only organized labor has the ability and the desire to mobilize the needed experts in times of dire need," said John Endicott, business manager of Local 290 and vice president of the OSBCTC. "The events at the World Trade Center proved that it was organized labor that came to the aid of the firefighters and community."

In other convention business, Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain asked building trades unions to take on a bigger role in the upcoming mid-term elections.

Chamberlain said last year's split in the national AFL-CIO and the loss of three of the state's largest union affiliates has left a void in the labor federa-

tion's get-out-the-vote program. Two Service Employees unions once affiliated with the Oregon AFL-CIO provided nearly half the volunteers used for phone banking and leafleting union members to get to the polls.

In the May 2006 primary, the best membership turnout of any affiliate was only 45 percent. "If we do that in November, we will lose," Chamberlain said.

The labor federation's top priority in November, Chamberlain continued, is re-electing Gov. Ted Kulongoski. He urged union officials to contact their members through mailings and workplace fliers to encourage them to vote in November.

Delegates took action on three resolutions. They supported continuation of a \$2 per member per month assessment to fund Oregonians to Maintain Community Standards. The fund is used to promote union construction and political action on ballot measures affecting the construction industry.

Delegates also endorsed a request by Iron Workers Local 29 to repeal a sunset clause in House Bill 3010. The bill, passed by the 2003 Legislature, adopted new safety rules relating to steel erection. The bill contains a sunset provision effective Jan. 1, 2008.

Delegates rejected a resolution seeking legislation that would require

all contractors on public works projects that do not provide health insurance to pay into an individual health savings account, to be determined by the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries. Delegates decided that pension laws and other legal issues warranted a more thorough investigation before pursuing legislation.

Elizabeth Lauderbach and Tyler Paradis were recipients of OSBCTC's annual scholarships.

Lauderbach, whose father, Richard, is a member of Operating Engineers Local 701, received \$750. She is attending Central Washington University.

Paradis, whose father, Lester, is a member of Local 290, received \$500. He is attending the University of Portland.

The awards were presented by Donald Rainer of Ferguson Wellman Capital Management Inc., which has funded the scholarship program along with the building trades council for the past 20 years.

Winners are selected by the sitting governor based on an application and short essay. This year 60 students applied.

CORRECTIONS

In a Sept. 1 profile of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, the Northwest Labor Press incorrectly reported that FMCS mediators serve as arbitrators. Actually, FMCS provides a list of private arbitrators when management and labor are unable to resolve a contract grievance.

An article in the Aug. 18 issue of the Northwest Labor Press incorrectly named a member of Portland Public Schools Custodian Civil Service Board. The member's name is Thurman Riggs.



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