

# Free medical screenings for workers at nuclear sites

TRI-CITIES, Wash. — Union construction workers who spent any time at all working at Hanford Reservation, or at any of the hundreds of nuclear weapons program sites in the U.S., are eligible to receive a free medical screening to see if they have been exposed to life-threatening ailments.

The free service is provided through the Building Trades National Medical Screening Program (BTMed), which started in 1996 in cooperation with the Department of Energy. BTMed serves union construction workers from 23 DOE sites, including Hanford, Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory in Scoville, and Amchitka Test Site in Amchitka Island, Alaska.

Mark Ayers, president of the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO, said BTMed expects to screen 2,400 workers this year. Overall, 16,000 workers (out of some 700,000) have been screened — with more than 3,000 of those having worked at Hanford.

“During the boom years of the 1970s and ‘80s, contractors and subcontractors at Hanford were calling for workers from all over the country,” said Sherry Gosseen, who administers the program at Hanford there through Zenith Administrators. “This program deals with current and former construction workers that have worked at Hanford and other sites.”

Gosseen said the BTMed program at Hanford has recommended referral for treatment of a medical condition to 2,680 of those who completed the first screening, and to 425 of those who completed re-screening.

“In all, we have found 5,716 medical conditions which war-

ranted a recommendation for referral,” Gosseen told the Northwest Labor Press.

For the three key indicators of occupational disease associated with work at Hanford, BCTMed has found that nearly 38 percent of participants with X-rays have lung abnormalities; more than 38 percent of those with breathing tests have decreased lung capacity; 66 percent of those with a hearing test have evidence of work-related noise-induced hearing loss, and 2.7 percent of those with a beryllium test have evidence of sensitization.

Ayers encourages all people who worked with nuclear energy to have a medical screening. “It’s a positive, very easy experience,” he said.

The free screening consists of two steps: a work history interview and a medical exam.

In step one, workers provide a work history interview over the phone to determine what exposure to hazardous material they may have had. In step two, if it is determined that there were exposure risks, the worker would make arrangements to receive a free medical screening examination at a medical provider near their home to test for illnesses that may have developed.

Following the exam, the participant receives a letter indicating any medical findings. If an illness is discovered, BTMed can steer the worker to government-funded benefit programs to treat the illness. Many workers who have undergone the screening program have been eligible to file a claim with the U.S. Department of Labor under the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act (EEOICPA).

EEOICPA offers workers medical coverage for the illness from the date the claim was filed, and a compensation lump-sum payment. In addition, the program will assist participants who want to file claims for workers’ compensation for any work-related problem.

Workers who have been screened are invited back for a re-screening three years later. Gosseen encourages workers to re-test. “We are finding significant newly-diagnosed disease in participants who receive a re-screening,” she said.

You may be eligible to participate in the BCTMed program if — You performed construction work (for either the prime contractor or subcontractors) at any time in the past at any of the following DOE sites:

- Hanford Reservation, Richland, Washington
- Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory (INEEL), Scoville, Idaho
- Amchitka Test Site, Amchitka Island, Alaska
- Rocky Flats Plant, Golden, Colorado
- Battelle Laboratories-King Avenue, Columbus, Ohio
- Battelle Laboratories-West Jefferson, Columbus, Ohio
- Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York
- Brush-Luckey, Luckey, Ohio
- Fernald Closure Project, Fernald, Ohio
- Kansas City Plant, Kansas City, Missouri
- Mallinckrodt Chemical Co, St. Louis, Missouri
- Mound Plant, Miamisburg, Ohio
- Oak Ridge, Knoxville, Tennessee
- Pinellas, Largo, Florida
- Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant, Paducah, Kentucky
- Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant, Piketon, Ohio
- Savannah River Site, Aiken, South Carolina
- Weldon Spring Plant, Weldon Spring, Missouri

— And you think you may have been exposed to any health hazards, including radiation, beryllium, asbestos, silica, mercury, cadmium, nickel, lead or other heavy metals, solvents or degreasers, or any other fumes, vapors or dusts, or noise.

— Or you or your doctor think you have had serious health problems as a result of your Department of Energy work, including anyone who has or has had cancer, serious lung disease or any other serious illness that you think could be caused by toxic exposures.

If you worked at Hanford, call Sherry Gosseen at the Hanford Outreach Office at 1-509-542-9347. If you worked elsewhere, call BCTMed at 1-800-866-9663 or go online for more information at [www.btmed.org](http://www.btmed.org).

## Unitus Credit Union busts CWA

Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 7901 — the union that represents workers at Qwest and AT&T — is asking unions and their members not to do business with Unitus Community Credit Union.

For more than 30 years, the credit union’s employees were members of CWA. Unitus — formerly known as Oregon Telco Community Credit Union — started as the credit union for telephone company employees. But in 2002 it changed its charter to open up membership to any resident of six Portland-metro-area counties. And in 2004 the credit union changed its name to Unitus. It grew to 65,000 members and \$700 million in deposits.

Unitus’ final union contract expired Nov. 1, 2006. In over a year of negotiations, management refused to budge from its demands for a pay scale based on “market” wages and “merit” bonuses.

In the end, said Local 7901 President Madelyn Elder, Unitus managers campaigned intensively for Unitus workers to vote out the union. Managers held anti-union meetings, distributed anti-union literature, and mailed employees a certified letter telling them how to quit the union. Union staff were only able to talk with

workers after-hours, and by visiting workers at home. Unitus management told workers they could call the police if union representatives came to their homes, Elder said.

“Management put out the word that, ‘All this conflict will go away if you get rid of the union,’” Elder said. “We kept telling them, ‘Yeah, but so will your contract. You’ll be at-will employees.’”

CWA filed several unfair labor practice charges against Unitus, but none were found to have merit by the National Labor Relations Board.

On Dec. 17, in an NLRB-conducted decertification election, the vote was 31 to 31. Because federal law requires that a union demonstrate majority support, a tie in a union election means a loss for the union.

“It was a real heartbreaker,” Elder said.

Now that Unitus is nonunion, CWA Local 7901 plans to withdraw deposits of about \$200,000 from the bank, and take its business to a credit union where workers are union-represented.

United Advantage Northwest Federal Credit Union has agreed to open up membership to CWA. UANW is the credit union for members of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 and

several printers unions, plus employees of about 60 companies. Workers there are represented by Office and Professional Employees Local 11, which also represents workers at IBEW and United Workers Federal Credit Union; UFCW Northwest Federal Credit Union; and Pacific NW Ironworkers Federal Credit Union.

Elder thinks several hundred CWA members also have accounts at Unitus.

Though withdrawing funds, CWA will keep its Unitus account open so that it can attend the credit union’s March 16 annual meeting.

The Oregon AFL-CIO has deposits of about \$425,000, which it placed at Unitus specifically because workers there were union-represented. Oregon AFL-CIO President Tom Chamberlain said the federation would withdraw the deposits whenever CWA requests it.

CWA’s boycott also has the backing of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, AFL-CIO, which voted to place Unitus on its “Unfair/Do Not Patronize List.”

Under federal labor law, CWA can request another election in a year’s time if at least a third of the workers still want to be union.



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