

# ...Workplace health major issue for ATU

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of thing bus drivers might want to report.

"We decided to see if there was any evidence of that in terms of bus operator seats needing to be switched out," Stoner said they found that over the course of the previous year, there had been about 30 maintenance reports showing seats being replaced because of urine. "Drivers are so mortified they don't admit to it," Stoner said. "But it's a serious health and human dignity issue."

Stories trickle into the union about drivers urinating and defecating on themselves, wearing adult diapers, or having to get off the bus and urinate in the bushes.

Some drivers try not to drink very much during their shift, so they won't have to use the restroom. Such voluntary dehydration starves every organ in the body of water and is quite dangerous long term.

"Your whole body is functioning with insufficient water," Stoner said. "Then when you do start to drink, it takes a long time to fill up those organs before it ever gets to your bladder. So people may think they have a big bladder, but that's not really what's going on."

Truckers can face similar difficulty using a restroom, but many have enough privacy in their cab that they can urinate into a bottle.

Employers say bus drivers can stop any time and run into a McDonald's or other public accommodation to use the restroom. But that can be embarrassing, and passengers get angry when they're made to wait. The union wants employers to build breaks into the schedule, and make sure there are restrooms available.

"Throughout the industry it's a problem," said Local 757 President Jon Hunt. "Drivers have a uniform on, and they're being scrutinized by the public all the time, so they never get a break unless they're in a lunchroom behind a closed door."

"If you pull a bus over when you have passengers who are trying to make a connection, they don't see that as you pulling over to use restroom. They think you're off screwing around."

The problem can be worse among paratransit bus drivers, who transport the disabled. They have no designated break built into their route, because they have no fixed route: Dispatch continues to build their route while they're driving. And they often have passengers who can't be left alone on the bus while drivers take a bathroom break.

Some agencies are better than others. For example, the union hasn't heard bathroom break complaints from drivers at Salem Area Mass Transit District. But at TriMet, the state's biggest transit agency, it's a constant battle. Shifts can run 10 hours, and traffic can make buses late to arrive at transit centers where drivers might have a chance to take a bathroom break. So both the employer and drivers need to insist that breaks are taken.

It has become a mantra in the monthly union newsletter: "Take your breaks." It's not that the union is encouraging sloth, as some managers may think — it's about keeping members healthy.

OR-OSHA is looking into whether employers are enabling sufficient bathroom breaks, Stoner said, and seeking voluntary compliance.

"In a way, the most we've accomplished is to make people more aware of it," Stoner said.

Stoner thinks employers are doing better at providing restrooms and scheduling breaks since the union started making the complaint. ATU took up the issue with Oregon Labor Commissioner Dan Gardner, and expects the new commissioner, Brad Avakian, will also help enforce the law requiring breaks.

"It's expensive and they're reluctant to do it," Hunt said, "but the only way it's going to work is for employers to have more buses, more bodies, so they can build breaks into the schedule."



BOB KIMES



MIKE POLLOCK

## UA apprentice coordinator Kimes retires; Pollock hired

Bob Kimes has retired as apprenticeship coordinator for the Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 Training Center after 17 years at the helm.

Succeeding him is Mike Pollock. "I have watched apprenticeship change the lives of approximately 2,000 apprentices in the 20 years that I have instructed or been a coordinator," Kimes said. "We have accomplished a great deal, but there will always be a great deal more to accomplish."

Kimes said it is a responsibility of all journey-level plumbers and fitters to help train apprentices. "It's part of the deal, dating back to the craft guilds and beyond," he said. "No educational model is as effective as our apprenticeship, which has worked, literally, for centuries. Take your job as a trainer seriously. Our future depends on the job you do."

Kimes is a graduate of the plumbers apprenticeship program, starting in 1978 as a member of the former Plumbers Local 51. He served as assistant training coordinator for nearly five years before being hired coordinator in January 1991.

Pollock has been the assistant coordinator for nine months. He spent 10 years as an apprentice instructor in the heating, ventilating, air conditioning/refrigeration field. From 2003 to 2007 he worked as a general foreman for Alliant Systems. Prior to that he worked for two years as operations

manager for Interstate Mechanical and five years as project manager and then as service manager for Fullman-Kinetics.

As apprenticeship coordinator, his duties include managing construction and maintenance projects for training center facilities, curriculum development and managing daily operations.

In addition to Tualatin, Local 290 owns training facilities in Salem, Eugene, Redmond, Medford, Coos Bay and Eureka, Calif. It also conducts training classes in Astoria, Brookings, Klamath Falls and The Dalles. There are currently 416 apprentices training to be fitters and plumbers.

Pollock has hired Marci Wichman as assistant training coordinator. She is a graduate of the training program, after spending 14 years working in the medical industry. She has been a journey-level fitter for eight years.

Another new hire at the training center is Chris Baier, who will be a welding shop instructor. He succeeds Mike Jurkiewicz, who retired.

For more information about the UA Local 290 Training Center, call 503-691-1997.

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## Record crowd attends #290 safety seminar

A record 320 members and spouses of Plumbers and Fitters Local 290 attended the 11th annual Donald Dunn Memorial Safety Seminar last month at the union's training center in Tualatin.

Dunn was a member of the union and an apprenticeship instructor who died in a ladder mishap while working on a job in Salem. His wife sued, and used some of the settlement money to start a safety seminar for her husband's co-workers and their families. The fund has since run out of money, but the program was so popular that the training center continued it.

This year's theme was "The Workers' Compensation Process." Featured speakers included Brenda Rocklin, chief executive officer of SAIF Corp.; Robert Sinclair, associate director of occupational health psychology at Portland State University; and Jennifer Flood, workers' comp ombudsman for the State of Oregon.

Local 290 members get eight hours toward their continuing education credits for attending the seminar. Last year, the training center paid members \$575 for completing 24 hours of continuing education during the year.

Members also had an opportunity to get a free health screening and chair massage, as well as lunch, provided by the Plumbing & Mechanical Contractors Association.

## Ombudsperson can help with workers' comp questions

SALEM — Have you been hurt on the job? If so, call Oregon Workers' Compensation Ombudsperson Jennifer Flood in Salem for guidance in the complex world of the state's workers' compensation insurance system.

The ombudsman's staff can provide straight answers at no charge in the areas of workers' comp claims, appeal rights, claims deposition agreements, claim closures, determination orders, reconsiderations, aggravation rights, conflict resolution and informal mediation.

Flood can be reached at 1-800-927-1271.

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