

# Inspectors fault beryllium safety at Hanford Nuclear Reservation

By MARIAN WANG

No one said cleaning up a Cold War-era bomb factory was without its hazards. But weaknesses in a program to protect workers from a toxic metal may have exposed them to avoidable risk, according to a newly released report by the Department of Energy (DOE).

These findings confirm prior reporting done by ProPublica, which pointed out lapses or gaps in beryllium testing at the site and beryllium training for workers at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington state. At Hanford and at other nuclear cleanup sites around the country, thousands of addi-

tional workers have been hired, thanks to billions in federal stimulus funds.

The report cited "management weaknesses," namely a perception among some managers that recently diagnosed cases of disease are a result of past exposures. It also said that the sites of potential beryllium contamination are not always identified.

From the DOE report, released June 2: "[T]here continue to be newly-diagnosed cases of beryllium sensitization and CBD among current and former Hanford workers. New cases of sensitization and CBD are not necessarily the result of deficiencies in the current pro-

gram, because a newly-discovered case could be the result of a past exposure.

Nevertheless, because of the weaknesses in the recent and current implementation of [Chronic Beryllium Disease Prevention Program] controls (e.g., inadequate facility characterizations known areas of contamination that are not well controlled) and the ongoing discovery of new sources of beryllium, the possibility that new cases are resulting from recent exposures cannot be ruled out."

Beryllium was used for decades in the production process for nuclear weapons, and its legacy of contamina-

tion still lingers in the dust at many old plutonium processing sites.

The report pointed out that air sampling shows beryllium levels are low, and the use of protective equipment has helped workers limit exposure. But as ProPublica has reported, even breathing minuscule amounts of beryllium dust can trigger chronic beryllium disease in some people with sensitivities to the metal, and when it does, the consequences can be deadly.

The report also faulted the site's medical contractor for not doing a required analysis of cases of beryllium sensitivity or chronic beryllium disease

discovered in the past two years. Such analysis could have helped determine whether additional protective action was needed to ensure the health and safety of workers.

According to The Associated Press, more than 160 workers have been diagnosed with sensitivity to beryllium or with the disabling and potentially fatal disease, which gradually robs victims of lung capacity.

Tom Peterson is one former Hanford worker who has the disease. He called the Department of Energy's report "very positive," but said that implementing the inspectors' recommendations for fixing the program will be "the hardest job of all."

"It's probably one of the best reports that I have seen," Peterson said. "Man, I just hope it works. That's the bottom line. We owe it to the workers to take care of them so they don't have to worry about being exposed, and the ones that are already exposed, we have to take care of them."

*(Editor's Note: This article was reprinted with permission from ProPublica, an independent, nonprofit online newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest. Marian Wang can be reached at marian.wang@propublica.org.)*

## LERC to host Summer Institute for Union Women July 6-10

The 29th Annual Western Regional Summer Institute for Union Women will take place at Reed College in Portland July 6-10.

The Institute offers a mix of training, cultural events, and team-building exercises for union women, designed to strengthen their leadership skills and build their knowledge about the challenges facing the labor movement in the 21st century.

National AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler will be a keynote speaker at the plenary session July 7 at

7 p.m. Joining her will be Angie Schira of the British Columbia Federation of Labour and Mary Beth Maxwell from the U.S. Department of Labor.

The plenary is open to the public. Core courses throughout the week include Politics Matter — What's at Stake for Working Women?; Building an Economy that Works for Workers; Effective Leadership Skills; Building Power Through Our Members and Allies; Effective Communications — Finding Our Union Voice; and Negotiating for Work Family Balance in

Tough Times.

Six-hour workshops are Singing for the Union; The Art and Noise of Street Heat; Storytelling to Build the Union; Women in Labor History; Generational Unity to Build a Stronger Movement; One World for Justice — Local Action to Support International Solidarity; Survival Strategies and Support Networks in Non-Traditional Jobs; and Racial Justice — Breaking Through the Barriers that Divide Us.

The Institute is co-sponsored annu-

ally by the United Association for Labor Education. This year the event is co-hosted by the University of Oregon Labor Education and Research Center and the Washington State Labor Education and Research Center at the Evergreen State College.

Women members, stewards, officers, and staff from any private or public sector union are invited to attend.

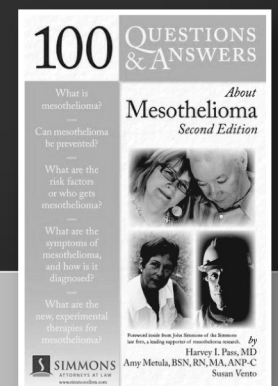
For more information, contact Helen Moss at 503-412-3722; or by e-mail at: hmoss@uoregon.edu.

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