

DROWNING IN MANURE

Mourn Randy Vasquez, and fight for dairy workers' safety

Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO, is raising funds to help the wife and children of a dairy worker who drowned in a cow manure lagoon. The effort comes as its United Farm Workers (UFW) affiliate campaigns to improve safety at suppliers of Darigold.

The death took place Feb. 24 at River Ranch Dairy, in Mabton, Washington, between Yakima and Kennewick. Randy Vasquez, 27, was a milker on the night shift. At around 9 p.m., he drove a front loader out to feed the cattle. He was found at 4:30 a.m. the next morning strapped into the front loader sunk six feet deep in a manure lagoon.

According to the Yakima County coroner, Vasquez died of "asphyxiation due to inhalation of dairy waste water sludge."

The Washington Department of Labor and Industries is investigating the death.

On March 31, UFW held a demonstration and vigil outside Darigold's Seattle headquarters, demanding to know why the manure lagoon wasn't marked, lit, and



WSLC President Jeff Johnson (center) takes part in a March 31 demonstration by United Farm Workers outside Darigold's Seattle offices. UFW wants dairy worker safety improved so accidents like this never happen again.

fenced, and why the search for Vasquez didn't begin until the next morning's shift started at 4:30 a.m.

Dairy work is considered one of the most hazardous

occupations. Dairy workers breath foul air containing bacteria and manure dust for 10 to 12 hours per shift. They move quickly over slick cement floors. And they are frequently kicked and stepped on by 1,500-pound animals. WSLC says Vasquez is at least the 10th Washington dairy worker to die on the job since 2000.

He leaves behind a wife, 28-year-old Nubia Guajardo Ayala, and two children, two-year-old Jazzlyn and three-year-old Jayzaiah.

WSLC is asking union members to contribute to help them. Checks can be made out to the WSLC, with Randy Vasquez written in the memo line, and sent to Washington State Labor Council, 321 16th Ave. South, Seattle, WA, 98144. The donations and the names of the contributors will be sent to Vasquez' wife, Nubia.

In addition, UFW is asking supporters to sign an on-line petition calling on Darigold to work with the UFW to improve safety for dairy workers: <http://action.ufw.org/page/speakout/andy>

...Wah Chang

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on medical treatment, unaware of the program," Steffy said. "I think it's important they know about it."

The program's benefits are automatic for those who worked at Wah Chang in 1971 and 1972 and are diagnosed with cancer. For those who went to work

there after that, the U.S. Department of Labor uses a dose reconstruction formula to estimate whether a cancer is more than 50 percent likely to have been caused by residual radiation.

In the four years Wah Chang has been on the program's list, more than 200 former workers or their survivors have been approved for benefits, and the government has paid out \$29.8 million in compensation and \$1.8 million in medical bills.

Steffy learned that members of Local 6163's nearby sister local—USW Local 7150 at Albany Research Center—are also eligible. There, the issue is not radiation but beryllium contamination. Inhalation of beryllium dust or fumes can cause berylliosis, an incurable chronic fatal lung disease. So far, five workers at the Albany Research Center (formerly known as the U.S. Bureau of Mines) have been approved for benefits.

Steffy expects to meet with ATI president Tucker Redford May 4 to ask for company support for a mailing to all former workers, especially those who were employed at Wah Chang when it handled uranium.

The Linn-Benton-Lincoln Central Labor Council planned to honor Steffy for his work at an April 15 meeting, after this issue went to press.

Oral history workshop in Portland on May 9

The Oregon Labor Oral History Program of the Pacific Northwest and the Labor Education and Research Center (LERC) at the University of Oregon will host an oral history workshop Saturday, May 9, from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Oregon Historical Society, 1200 SW Park Ave, Portland. Registration is \$20.

The workshop, to be presented by Jim Strassmaier and Michael O'Rourke, will provide instruction on how to conduct an oral history interview, including how to get started, effective procedures, interviewing techniques, and standards for recording and preservation.

"This is an opportunity to contribute to preserving the history of labor and workplace in the Northwest," Strassmaier said.

For more information contact Strassmaier at 503-236-1094, or by email strassj@spiritone.com.



Retired Steelworker Garry Steffy

Bill would allow Oregon State Bar employees to unionize

SALEM — On April 8 the House Business and Labor Committee, chaired by Rep. Paul Holvey (D-Eugene), held its first hearing on HB 2565, which would allow members of the Oregon State Bar to organize a union.

The Oregon State Bar was established by the 1935 Oregon Legislature to license and discipline lawyers, regulate the practice of law and provide a variety of services to bar members and the public. The bar is not a state agency, but a public corporation, and state bar employees

are considered public employees. However, they are not included under the state's Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act, as workers eligible to unionize.

HB 2565 would change that, and allow state bar employees — most of whom are not attorneys — the right to form a union.

Oregon AFSCME Council 75, which lobbied for the bill, was optimistic the bill will move forward. There was no further action scheduled at press time.

FROM OREGON AFSCME E-LERT

Labor Council to host recognition dinner June 6

Mark your calendars for Saturday, June 6, for the Northwest Oregon Labor Council's annual Labor Appreciation and Recognition Night. The event is two-fold; it's a special evening honoring men and women identified by their peers for outstanding contributions to labor and their community, and it's a fundraiser for Labor's Community Service Agency.

The banquet will be held at Milwaukie Elks Lodge, 13121 SE McLoughlin Blvd. Dinner tickets are \$20 per person. Raffle tickets also will be sold.

The labor council is currently accepting cash and prize donations for the raffle, and nominations for persons to be recognized.

For more information or to order tickets, call 503-235-9444.

Washington CLUB golf tourney June 16-17

BREMERTON, Wash.—The Washington CLUB Charity Golf Classic will be held June 16-17 at Gold Mountain Golf Complex in Bremerton, Wash. This year's tournament has been moved up a day to accommodate the U.S. Open, which will be held at Chambers Bay in Tacoma June 18-21.

The CLUB—Contractors, Legislators, Unions and Business—has raised over \$1 million for charity and is celebrating its 15th anniversary.

For more information on how to become a CLUB tournament sponsor, or to register a team, contact Brian Remington at 206-432-9014 or e-mail him at: brian@golfcorpsolutions.com.