

JOBS



Georgia-Pacific Coos Bay: Another Oregon lumber mill closes for good

Georgia-Pacific abruptly closed its Coos Bay lumber mill April 11, permanently laying off 107 employees, including 94 members of Machinists Local Lodge W261. The mill made two-by-fours and other lumber sold at Lowe's and elsewhere. A four-person skeleton crew remains on site until the property can be sold.

Georgia-Pacific told the union the closure was a result of the high cost of logs, the low cost of lumber, and an out-of-commission swing-span railroad bridge that forced the company to ship lumber by truck instead of rail.

Georgia-Pacific's union contract with Local Lodge W261 had no provision for severance pay, but because of the federal law known as the WARN Act, workers are entitled to 60 days pay as severance. Union officers also met with the company to discuss terms of the closure, and Georgia-Pacific offered severance pay beyond that: the equivalent of 40 hours of pay per year of service — but only for those with 16 years or more of seniority.

Machinists District Lodge W24 directing business representative Noel Willet said severance of 40 hours per year of service — for all workers — is the standard in the wood products industry. Georgia-Pacific's severance offer was subject to a ratification vote of members that took place after this issue went to press.

Because international trade was also at least a partial factor in the closure, the union is also applying to the U.S. Department of Labor for Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA). Local Lodge W261 President Don Turner, a general maintenance operator at the mill, said he expects Georgia-Pacific will cooperate on the TAA application. If the Labor Department certifies that foreign trade contributed to the closure, laid-off mill workers will be eligible for extended unemployment benefits, relocation assis-

tance, and retraining subsidies.

Willet said the union hopes to help steer laid-off members to other union-represented mills. Oregon AFL-CIO staffperson Mark Warne has been assigned to help laid-off mill workers access benefits they're entitled to.

Georgia-Pacific, one of the world's largest wood products companies, is a subsidiary of Koch Industries.

The closure of the Georgia-Pacific mill leaves Local Lodge W261 with about 530 members at a dozen other local employers, including Weyerhaeuser forest crews, city workers in Elkton, Reedsport, Winston, and workers at Koontz Machine and Welding in Coos Bay.

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