

PRESS RELEASE

DOE Sick Workers' Advocacy Groups Form National Alliance

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Craig, CO - Three advocacy groups, (CHE, UNWW, GOSW), engaged in the effort to reform the Energy Employee Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act of 2000 (EEOICPA), have agreed to form a national alliance, the Alliance of Nuclear Workers' Advocacy Groups (ANWAG).

The purpose of ANWAG is to protect impacted nuclear workers and citizens by presenting a unified voice of our membership to ensure government accountability, public education and participation on nuclear industry and defense operations issues, including cleanup, community and worker health and safety, waste management, benefits protection for retired workers, environmental justice and whistleblower protection.

In October 2000, Congress passed EEOICPA. This historic, bipartisan legislation was to compensate, in a timely manner, workers made ill from working with radiation, beryllium and toxic substances inside nuclear weapons factories operated by the Department of Energy (DOE).

"The implementation of EEOICPA is a disaster. Very few of the claims have been paid. Taxpayers' dollars have been wasted. This alliance is a wakeup call to Congress that reforms are needed now.", said Terrie Barrie of GOSW, who represents survivors from 12 different states. "We regularly trade information on the status of the program and keep close contact with our legislators. The nice thing about this alliance is that the individual groups will remain autonomous, so they may address problems that are site specific."

CHE is the lead workers' group that made the EEOICPA happen. Harry Williams, of CHE said, "The sick workers do not trust DOE, who poisoned them with reckless disregard for their health and safety. DOE's initial offering of a compensation bill in early 2000 was horribly inadequate. DOE has mismanaged their part of implementing the law and has created a bureaucracy wasting millions of taxpayers' dollars, while only compensating a few. Subtitle D (other toxic exposures) has a minimum seven-year backlog of claims. Therefore, DOE should have **NO** role in its implementing the law, other than to provide records. CHE pushed for this from the very beginning. The ill workers deserve better treatment and let's not forget their service to our country. ANWAG is a way for the DOE sick worker community to speak with one voice."

"While sick, dying claimants are awaiting an apology with one hand, they are being slapped in the face with the other.", states Denise Brock, Founder/Director of UNWW. "When this law was enacted, it was to provide compensation to those who were made ill during their employment to these facilities. It was to be in a timely, uniform manner. Obviously, this has not been the case. This law may have been enacted with the best of intentions, but by sheer observation, it has many flaws that need immediate remedy. ANWAG is going to continue to grow, trade and disseminate information and become more vocal in defense of the many sick, ailing workers and their surviving family members."

Some issues ANWAG is currently addressing are:

- * "Willing Payor". Some sites have no payor as they have been abandoned and the contractor gone.
- * Equality and fairness of compensation has been an issue from the beginning.
- * The Department of Health and Human Services still has not issued a required rule that will allow workers to petition to become a member of the Special Exposure Cohort (SEC).

* "Dose Reconstruction" is a process of building a case for cancer based on flawed, inadequate or non existant radiation records and site records.

EEOICPA instructed the Department of Labor to pay a lump sum of \$150,000 and provide medical benefits for workers at Rocky Flats, Oak Ridge and other sites who contracted cancer from exposure to radiation or were stricken with chronic beryllium disease. The law also directed the DOE to assist workers with state worker compensation claims for occupational illnesses connected to exposures to toxic chemicals, heavy metals and asbestos. For toxic substance claims DOE is required to utilize a panel of physicians which is selected by the National Institute of Safety and Occupational Health (NIOSH) to review the illnesses and determine whether an illness arose from employment at a DOE facility. If the panel rules in favor of the claimant, then DOE is required to instruct their contractors and subcontractors not to contest the claim with the state worker compensation program. Legal costs cannot, by law, be reimbursed by the DOE for the costs of contesting the claim. NIOSH is responsible for dose reconstruction for cancer claims. If a dose reconstruction is not feasible, then claimants can petition to become a member of the SEC and receive the lump payment of \$150,000. To date, the final rules for this petition has not been published.