

From: [REDACTED]
Subject: Federal Board to meet over denied benefits for workers at radioactive sites
Date: Friday, May 07, 2010 11:56:04 AM

Advisory board will meet in Falls to listen to bids for denied disability benefits
Feds to hear local N-workers' claims
By Thomas J. Prohaska

NEWS NIAGARA REPORTER
Updated: May 07, 2010, 7:16 am /
Published: May 07, 2010, 12:30 am

Hundreds of local workers — or their survivors — who have been denied benefits for diseases attributed to handling nuclear materials will have a chance to make their case in person to a federal board this month.

"I've seen the frustration of the claimants. The claimants lost a lot, losing their husbands and fathers," said Joyce Walker, widow of a Bethlehem Steel employee who did nuclear work and died two years ago. "We just want the nightmares to be over."

Western New York's congressional delegation and New York's two Democratic senators announced Thursday that the Advisory Board on Radiation and Worker Health will meet May 19-21 in the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 300 Third St., Niagara Falls.

Time slots will be set aside for former employees of Bethlehem Steel in Lackawanna, Linde Ceramics in the Town of Tonawanda, Hooker Chemical in Niagara Falls and the University of Rochester.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, employees at those and other local plants worked on their companies' federal contracts to process uranium and other radioactive materials for defense and other government uses.

Years later, cancer and other diseases afflicted many employees, but the government resisted paying disability benefits and, in some cases, continues to do so today.

The reason is that records are inadequate or nonexistent, in the view of the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, which governs the compensation program. Workers whose diseases are shown to have been caused by nuclear exposure are to be paid \$150,000.

It's an all-or-nothing benefit package, said Theresa Kennedy, spokeswoman for Rep. Brian Higgins.

Walker said about half of 800 affected Bethlehem Steel workers have been denied benefits.

Higgins, D-Buffalo, and Reps. Chris Lee, R-Clarence, and Louise M. Slaughter, D-Fairport, along with Sens. Charles E. Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, are sponsoring legislation to place the local workers in a "special exposure cohort," which calculates their exposure to radiation based on the jobs they held.

The bill, which has not come to a vote in either chamber, is called the Ed Walker Memorial Act after Walker's late husband. Edwin A. Walker had bladder cancer and a weak heart when he died of a heart attack Jan. 27, 2008. "He put his heart and soul into this since 2002," Joyce Walker, 70, said Thursday.

The agenda for the advisory board meetings in the Falls sets discussion of the University at Rochester Atomic Energy Project for 11:45 a. m. May 19; Hooker Chemical at 3:15 p. m. May 19; Linde Ceramics at 4 p. m. May 19; and Bethlehem Steel at 1:30 p. m. May 20.

General public comments will be heard at 4:30 p. m. May 19 and 6 p. m. May 20.

"It was what my husband was trying to accomplish," Joyce Walker said. "It's been a long road. I'd like

to get on with what's left of my life."

tprohaska@buffnews.com

[REDACTED]

Public Affairs Officer

US Army Corps of Engineers, Buffalo District
1776 Niagara Street
Buffalo, NY 14207

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]