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HEALTH

By JOHN F. BONFATTI

News Staff Reporter

11/10/2001

Representatives from a federal program looking to compensate workers who were involved in developing the country's nuclear weapons program will be in Amherst next week to help people who think they might be eligible to apply for the money.

Department of Labor spokesman Hal Glassman said there have been fewer claims for compensation in Western New York than there should be, considering there were 13 locations in the area that were involved in weapons production, dating as far back as 1943.

Under the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program, those who worked in plants involved in the nuclear weapons program, or their surviving spouses and children, are eligible for a lump-sum \$150,000 payment if they can show they worked at the plant during a certain period of time and can show evidence of certain cancers.

"People should understand this is not an adversarial situation," Glassman said. "We're not out to prove a claim wrong. We're out to prove a claim right. We are encouraging those who are eligible or think they're eligible to file a claim."

He said a team of counselors will be on hand from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday, and from 8 a.m. to noon Friday at the Hampton Inn, 10 Flint Road, Amherst, to help determine eligibility and to help workers or their survivors fill out the paperwork needed to start the claim.

People can stop in during those times, or call (800) 363-6993 to make an appointment.

Glassman said officials have tried to make application forms as simple as possible, adding that applicants need to bring a few items to help with the process.

First, they must show proof of identification and/or relationship (social security number, birth or death certificate, marriage license).

Second, they need to show, by pay stub, co-worker statement or some other means, that they or their spouse or parent worked at one of the plants during the covered periods, which vary from plant to

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plant.

The plants are: Ashland Oil, Linde Ceramics Plant and Seaway Industrial Park, Town of Tonawanda; Bethlehem Steel, Lackawanna; Electro Metallurgical, Hooker Electrochemical, Lake Ontario Ordnance Works and Titanium Alloys Manufacturing, Niagara Falls; Bliss & Laughlin Steel, Linde Air Products-Chandler Plant and Utica Street Warehouse-Linde Air Products, Buffalo; Simonds Saw and Steel, Lockport; and West Valley Demonstration Project, West Valley.

And third, they must present doctor's records indicating that the claimant suffered cancer caused by radiation or chronic beryllium disease.

Glassman said proof could be as simple as a piece of paper from a patient's medical files that shows a diagnosis of cancer.

If there is no such written documentation, but a spouse or worker was told by a doctor that there was cancer, Glassman said it's possible to have another doctor review the patient's medical records and file a statement suggesting a link between a claimant's illness and cancer.

"The Department of Labor has been understanding and compassionate with a number of scenarios that have come up," said Mary Brennan-Taylor, who has helped monitor the process as a staff member for U.S. Rep. John J. LaFalce, D-Town of Tonawanda. "We don't want people to be afraid of the process. It's a customer-friendly process."

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