Dragon, Karen E. (CDC/NIOSH/EID)

From: Patty Hess <iluvmy4@aol.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 24, 2012 11:06 PM
To: NIOSH Docket Office (CDC)
Subject: Victims Compensation Fund Written Comment
Attachments: Doc1_____.doc

Attached please find my comment on the upcoming advisory committee meeting

Patricia Hess

PATRICIA HESS
83 Duck Pond Road
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January 23, 2012

NIOSH Docket Office,
Robert A. Taft Laboratories
MS-C-34
4676 Columbia Parkway
Cincinnati, Ohio 45226

Dear WTC Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee:

I have a story that should be told, in fact, that needs to be told. My name is Patricia Hess and I am a widow. I lost my husband Robert Hess on May 2, 2010. We had been married for 18 years and we had four wonderful children together. Our daughter Kimberly - now 18, our twin sons Robert & Brian - 13, and our joyful youngest Connor – 11, were the pride and joy of Rob's life. The hole left by his absence is still gapping and, while not nearly as raw, each of my children suffer the loss of their father in their own way and as a parent, I struggle each day to help them overcome their trauma.

Like every other New York City Fireman, Rob responded on the morning of September 11, 2001. To be honest, I had thanked God every day that he was not among the first on site or our family would not have had him to love for all the years after that horrible day. He arrived at Ground Zero just after the collapse of Tower Two and remained on scene for the next 20 hours. He was there to witness Building Seven crumble to the ground and he returned to the site for weeks afterward to help in the rescue and recovery efforts. He remained with the 4th Battalion, 1st Division and on site at the World Trade Center until May 2002. We lost many fine people that day, many friends, and Rob carried that loss with him in the ensuing years. And while he may have survived that tragic day, I lost my husband to 9/11 as surely as if had been killed in the collapse of the towers.

Rob had been a New York City Fireman for almost 25 years. He worked his way up through the ranks, achieving the grade of Lieutenant. He loved the FDNY. It was his second family and he was proud to serve the city he had called home. I was the wife of a New York City Fireman and so I was always prepared for the worse; that call in the middle of the night, the knock on the door by men dressed in blue with somber faces. It was a reality I dealt with, always prepared for the worse and praying for the best each time I heard about a terrible blaze or about a fireman killed in the line of duty. However, I never expected to watch him develop symptom after symptom - breathing difficulties and chest pains - because he had always been in excellent health. That all changed after 9/11.

You should know that Rob always understood the risks of his profession. He also recognized that the World Trade Center disaster was unique. That is why, when the World Trade Center Monitoring Program began, Rob registered right away. Over four years time he was routinely

screened for any emerging health issues, including semi-annual cat scans of his lungs. In Feb 2010, when he went for the first of his two annual scans, it was discovered that he had a carcinoid tumor in his right lung airway. On April 23 he went to NYU hospital to have it removed, along with 2/3 of his lung. We were told it was a fairly routine surgery and, while we knew it was the end of his career as a fire fighter, we had every confidence in the doctors and the outcome. Four days after the surgery Rob began having difficulty breathing. It was determined he had pneumonia and he was placed on a respirator. On Sunday May 2, despite heroic efforts from the medical team at NYU that went on for nearly 35 minutes, my husband died at 6:07 P.M. of coronary arrest. His death, from complications of lung cancer, is attributed by the New York City Fire Department Pension Bureau to his service during the response to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.

And now, with the scientific advisory committee set up by Congress with the passing of James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act, poised to issue a recommendation on whether to include some types of cancer, I think it is important to remember the cost, both personal and financial, that many first responders and residents of downtown New York have suffered because of ill health created by exposure to the toxic fumes and dust from the rubble of the towers. One can only question what the long term impacts will be on the health care systems in the tri-state area.

The James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act was passed to help ensure that other people - fathers, mothers, sons and daughters - are given the same care and chance at life as my husband Robert Hess was. While one can never really understand why someone survives or not after a life altering surgery, the fact of the matter remains that the monitoring program helped to identify the cancer and gave Rob a fighting chance. Every first responder as well as the people who lived and worked surrounded by a cloud of toxic dust, and every man and woman who spent months doing cleanup at Ground Zero should be given this same opportunity. I only pray that our nation learned from its past and doesn't repeat the mistakes they made in responding to the Agent Orange crisis. We must recognize that that toxic cloud has made people sick, it has killed. We cannot wait to add in conditions piecemeal, like we did for our Vietnam Veterans, many who died before their disease was added to the list of "accepted" conditions. Is this how we want to treat the victims of the World Trade Center attacks? I hope and pray it is not!

My husband never hesitated to answer the call to duty; he served with pride and honor. He valued what he did and he brought value to the FDNY through his presence. My family is left with a void. My children will not have their father at birthdays and graduations. Our holidays will be less joyful without his booming laughter. My daughter will not have her father to walk her down the aisle on her wedding day. And me, well I will go to sleep at night with an empty space beside me and an even emptier space in my heart. Honor my husbands sacrifice and include cancer under the James Zadroga Act.

Sincerely,

Patricia Hess
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