

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) SEC Worker Outreach Meeting for General Electric-Evendale

Meeting Date: Tuesday, July 13, 2010, 10:00 a.m.

Meeting with: International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) Local 912, officers and retirees

Location: United Auto Workers Local 647 Union Hall, Evendale, Ohio

NIOSH Team:

Peter Darnell, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Division of Compensation Analysis and Support (DCAS), Health Physicist

Mike Kubiak, Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU), Health Physicist

Mark Lewis, Advanced Technologies and Laboratories International, Inc. (ATL), Senior Outreach Specialist

Mary Elliott, ATL, Technical Writer/Editor

Proceedings

[Redacted] of International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) Local Lodge 912 (*hereafter Worker #1*) opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. He asked the attendees to introduce themselves. Six attendees identified themselves as either current union officers or retired members of IAMAW Local Lodge 912.

Worker #2 stated that he is the [redacted] for Local Lodge 912. He explained that both [redacted] and another relative had worked at the plant during the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) contract period. [Redacted] is suffering from cancer and his relative is deceased.

Worker #1 stated that [redacted] worked at the plant during the 1960s and is being treated for [redacted] cancer after losing [redacted] to cancer.

Pete Darnell stated that he is a health physicist with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). He explained that NIOSH performs dose reconstructions for Part B cancer claims under EEOICPA. Mr. Darnell stated that NIOSH was established by the President of the United States in 1974 to conduct research in occupational health and safety.

Mary Elliott stated that she works with Advanced Technologies and Laboratories International, Inc. (ATL), the contractor that assists NIOSH with worker outreach activities. She stated that she would be taking notes to prepare minutes of the meeting. Ms. Elliott asked for permission to record the meeting, explaining that the recording would be used only to aid in preparing an accurate account of the meeting. She stated that participants' names would be redacted from the final minutes according to NIOSH Privacy Act policy before the minutes are posted on the NIOSH Web site. Ms. Elliott added that participants' personal information on the sign-in sheet would also be kept private and secure in accordance with NIOSH policy.

Mr. Darnell asked the attendees to identify themselves as they spoke so that Ms. Elliott could attribute their statements in case NIOSH needed to contact them for additional information.

Mr. Darnell stated that the workers from the GE facility who performed contract work for the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) between 1961 and 1970 are eligible to file claims for cancer under Part B, as well as claims for illnesses related to toxic chemical exposure under Part E.

Worker #3 stated that he is [redacted] of IAMAW Local 912. He was active on many committees and in union safety and health matters for 35 years before retiring in [redacted].

Mark Lewis stated that he had been active in the union representing workers at the Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant for 30 years before working as the Senior Outreach Specialist for ATL. He thanked the attendees for taking time to attend the meeting.

Mike Kubiak stated that he is a health physicist with the Oak Ridge Associated Universities (ORAU) Team, a contractor providing support to NIOSH.

Worker #4 stated that he began working at the GE facility in 1964 and worked there many years before retiring.

Worker #5 stated that he serves as [redacted] for Lodge 912. He hopes to get information to pass along to other union members.

Worker #6 stated that he went to work at GE in 1969 and retired in [redacted].

Mr. Darnell stated that NIOSH is interested in getting additional information about the “Air Force Plant” that operated in Buildings C and D from January 1, 1961 through June 30, 1970. NIOSH has a great deal of data but is lacking important information about health and safety controls and radiation protection during that time. NIOSH is looking for specific information from workers:

- To identify the radioactive materials that were used during the operations in Buildings C and D;
- To determine the extent of building security in areas where the radioactive materials were used (NIOSH knows these materials were sent site-wide); and
- To identify a specific group of employees who worked in Buildings C and D during the time period.

Mr. Darnell stated that specific information would help NIOSH to do more accurate dose reconstructions. He explained that NIOSH had initiated a Special Exposure Cohort (SEC) petition for the Air Force Plant because there is not enough information to perform accurate dose reconstructions. When NIOSH presented the SEC petition evaluation report to the Advisory Board on Radiation and Worker Health (ABRWH or “the Board”), they asked NIOSH to talk with former workers to get more information about the contract period. It is important to get information that will make the dose reconstructions more accurate so that workers with non-SEC cancers may have a better chance to get compensation. He showed the attendees the list of the 22 specific cancers that are automatically compensated under the SEC.

Worker #1:

It will be hard to say who worked in Buildings C and D. Many workers from both unions moved throughout the plant. Many radioactive parts were machined in Development Machining Operations (DMO) in Building 500. It will be difficult to contain the SEC class to C and D. The

engines were put together in Development Assembly, which was also in Building 500. They also traveled through Building C to Building 800 to Building B.

Worker #3:

I don't know how many buildings there are out there, but I worked in every one of them, from one end of the plant to the other. As far as safety goes, the company really didn't put safety measures into practice until the 1980s. That's when we got on them to make some changes. I was a pipefitter out there. We worked in 275-pound steam, 300-pound air, 90-pound air, fuels, beryllium, asbestos, and chemicals. The unions had to push for safety practices and equipment. We have seen a lot of people die over the years. It was only through the efforts of the unions that we got them to do anything to improve the safety situation for all the workers, both hourly and salaried. I appreciate that NIOSH has done so much to help with that over the years. I will help you any way that I can.

Mr. Darnell:

Do you remember ever wearing a radiation badge?

Worker #3:

Yes, we had to wear radiation badges. The company sent the badges away to be read. We didn't always get the readings back. The workers didn't have too many places to go to get help in the old days. I'm glad it's changing. I am happy that NIOSH is involved.

Worker #2:

I don't think they wore the badges until they wanted to open Buildings C and D back up.

Worker #4:

I don't think so either. They only started making us wear radiation badges after *[name redacted]* complained about the situation.

Mr. Darnell:

Do you remember when that happened?

Worker #4:

I went to work in B Building in 1964. I am also a pipefitter. We took care of all the engines and the flow meters. If you were in the Maintenance Department in 700, then you went to every building. Even when I was still in B Building, I had to go to C and D for equipment and fixtures, and bring them back up to Building B. We had to dig all that stuff out of it. We weren't wearing masks or monitoring tags. We unlocked those buildings (C and D), and stumbled around until we found what we were looking for.

Worker #1 to Worker #4:

When did the workers start wearing the dosimeters? I think that probably didn't happen until the late 1970s or 1980s.

Worker #4:

When I hired in, I was going into C and D, and even when I went into Maintenance in 700, we never wore masks. We used to mix asbestos in buckets to pack and wrap all the joints and pipes. I have asbestosis.

Mr. Darnell:

I think it's a good idea to talk about any of the hazards that you had in the plant, but I don't want to mislead you. NIOSH can only work with the radiation information. Under EEOICPA Part E, workers can apply for benefits for other illnesses.

Mr. Lewis:

Call the DOL Resource Center with any questions about Part E. We brought that information with us, too.

Worker #2:

In the early 1980s, one of my coworkers in the lab (EMTL) was exposed to beryllium and became ill. He eventually died. He used permasetts (?) to treat different metals and they would grind on those.

Mr. Darnell:

EEOICPA includes survivor benefits for family members of deceased workers. NIOSH only deals with the Part B radiation claims.

Mr. Darnell:

You mentioned that you had to go through locked doors to get into Buildings C and D. Could anybody go into those buildings?

Worker #4:

Anybody could go in there. Not all the doors were locked. If I was going into a special area to test the engines, I had to go in there to get flow meters. The whole building was not locked up, just certain areas where they kept things that we needed. You could start in Building B, then C and D, and go right straight through.

Mike Kubiak:

During the 1960s, was there a physical boundary between the Air Force Plant (Buildings B, C, and D) and the rest of the plant?

Worker #4:

I don't recall any fences during that time. That was later, when they were going to tear down C and D.

Worker #2:

They laid a lot of people off in 1973 when they closed those buildings down. That is when [redacted] were laid off. A lot of those people were hired by GE Aviation, so they came up into the other part of the plant – lab workers, electricians, pipefitters, you name it. That is when they put up the barrier. Then they opened the [Air Force Plant] area and started sending people back in there again. We went in to get pumps and motors and move them into Building B Test.

Worker #5 to Worker #2:

Are you saying that it was a storage area then?

Worker #2:

There were test cells there. They sent us down to get parts and equipment. It was locked up and you had to get the keys to get the equipment.

Worker #4:

When we moved into Maintenance in 800, we had satellite areas. Our satellite area was Building C. Our shop was C. We would go from there all the way to 300 series. There is no place in GE that pipefitters and maintenance didn't go. We were sent everywhere.

Mr. Darnell:

That is what we heard during our meeting with the United Auto Workers (UAW) retirees. Do you recall if there were any areas that were marked off for the storage of radioactive materials?

Worker #4:

I don't remember

Worker #3:

I represented workers at Fernald, too. They had to wear dosimetry badges. When I found that out, that is when we asked for badges for workers from Lodge 912 and others. The company did not offer anything until we asked for it. We wanted safety measures to help the workers who might be sick or injured or even killed.

Worker #4:

There were a lot of workers who became ill with cancer and other illnesses while they were still in Buildings C and D. We knew that they were sick, but we still had to go in there. Our shop was in Building C. [Name redacted] was my foreman at that time.

Mr. Darnell:

Did they ever do training and tell you what you were working on or about any of the materials?

Worker #4:

No.

Worker #5:

The training didn't happen until the last ten years

Worker #6:

It was before that, because I retired 13 years ago.

Worker #3:

The company didn't provide safety equipment for any of the workers until the unions insisted. There were no radiation badges or PPE in the old days – no coveralls, nothing.

Worker #4:

We took our work clothing home to wash.

Worker #3:

That affected everybody in the house.

Worker #2:

The dosimeters weren't given to everybody. They were only given to certain workers in certain areas. That was probably in the 1980s.

Worker #4:

There were plenty of people who worked in C and D who got cancer while they were working and died young. They knew Buildings C and D were "hot."

Mr. Darnell:

Do you know where NIOSH might find any exposure or work records for work during the Air Force Plant period?

Worker #1:

[Name redacted] was in Environmental Health and Safety. He was supposed to be their guru for radiation in Buildings C and D. You would have a difficult time getting the records. He was company.

Worker #4:

If you got the names of all the people who worked in C and D, I would bet that 98% of them are dead now.

Worker #5:

About 15 years ago, I got into beryllium in DMO. They brought us several old engines from storage. They wanted us to scrap them. We used a plasma cutter to cut them up. I believe that we got into a beryllium gearbox. When we sent it to the scrap yard, the alarm went off. [Name redacted] took us up to Fernald for testing. That was in the 1980s, long after the time frame that you're talking about. Nobody checked the old engines for radiation until after the alarms went off. Then it was a big problem. There are still safety issues.

Mr. Darnell:

I used to work for the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) at Fernald. I recall reading about that. I wasn't actually at Fernald when it happened. What you were exposed to was thorium, not beryllium. The detector that you went into at Fernald would have been very good at detecting the radiation that the thorium emitted.

Worker #5:

That's it. I remember now. It was thorium. That is what the company told us.

Worker #1:

Some forms and some letters have been sent out from the Department of Labor (DOL). My [redacted] got one. There was a long list of companies in the greater Cincinnati area. They wanted to know if the letter recipients had worked at any of those companies. Is this the same program?

Mr. Darnell:

NIOSH works for DOL in the program. DOL doesn't have personnel with the expertise to look at the radiation exposures. ORAU and ATL are contractors in the program.

Worker #1:

Are these cancers listed here the only ones you are talking about for Part B?

Mr. Darnell:

Part B covers all cancers. The 22 cancers on the list are the only ones that are eligible for compensation under the SEC. Dose reconstructions are not done for those cancers if the SEC is approved. If we don't have enough data, it is more difficult for claims for the non-SEC cancers to be compensated.

Worker #1:

He needs to fill out his paperwork and send it back. I told him not to fill it out until I came to this meeting to hear more about the program.

Mr. Darnell:

EEOICPA is actually a DOE program that is administered by DOL. DOE provides the records to DOL, and then DOL gives the information to NIOSH to do the dose reconstructions. You can compare NIOSH to archaeologists. We go out and dig for the records and talk to people who did the work to get the information that we need.

Worker #1:

How did DOL get the names to send these records out?

Mr. Lewis:

GE was not included in the program in the beginning. DOL probably researched the records to find out who worked there.

Mr. Darnell:

I don't think DOL actually knew which workers did what until they started investigating. Once they identified the sites, they contacted the sites and the unions that were involved, as well as specific human resources at the sites. That is how the information gets out to the workers.

Worker #1:

We have some active union members with cancer. They have pursued claims through DOL, and they are trying to take on the company because of their illnesses. The company contacted DOL because the Air Force Plant was owned by the government. That lets GE off the hook.

Mr. Lewis:

The nature of this law is to take the responsibility for compensation off the company. The government is responsible for paying the compensation. The law states that the compensation is in lieu of compensation from a tort action against a company.

Mr. Darnell:

NIOSH cannot offer advice.

Worker #5:

Does the law cover illness from chemical exposures?

Mr. Darnell:

Those illnesses are covered under Part E. Part B is just the radiation part.

Do you know of any other way that other workers were excluded from going into the Air Force Plant area? If anyone had a reason to go in, were they allowed to enter the area?

Worker #1:

They had a cafeteria in there.

Worker #5:

As long as you had a badge, you could go anywhere in the plant. It was on the main floor, near Gate 4.

Mr. Kubiak:

Was that in the area that was called the Mezzanine?

Worker #6:

That was in Building D. They had gates set up in Buildings 100 and 200 so you couldn't get in there. That was in the 1970s. The cafeteria wasn't open until later.

Worker #4:

I can't remember any of that stuff being locked down. They had restrooms in there.

Worker #6:

The Machine Apprentice Shop in D was locked. You couldn't get in there unless you had business in there. That was in 1968.

Worker #4:

We used to pitch horseshoes between Buildings B and C during lunch.

Mr. Darnell:

We have covered all of the questions that I wanted to ask you. We are willing to do individual interviews if anybody wants to do one.

Mr. Lewis:

Do you know of any incidents, accidents, or events that stand out in your mind?

Worker #6 to Worker #3:

Did you work at the plant when it was Wright's?

Worker #3:

No, I didn't work there when it was Wright's. Wright's was in charge when it was one of the biggest plants in the world.

GE had cells all over the place. There were 41 in 500, about 40 in 302. In B and 300, there are all kinds of test cells. Plant Maintenance and Construction (PMC) was in charge of all of it. Worker #4 worked all over the plant because it was part of his job.

Worker #4:

We had PMs (plant maintenance work orders) in C and D. We went all over.

Worker #5:

I have a question about the mailings. The only information we have is our seniority list. Those have the hire dates and the exit dates, but it doesn't give the employees' work locations. There are between 300 and 350 workers from the timeframe.

Mr. Darnell:

Right now, NIOSH can't limit it to a building because you said there were no controls.

Mr. Lewis:

Jackie Sensue at the DOL Portsmouth Resource Center sent out the mailing to UAW members. She offered to do the same for your organization. Her contact information is on the sheet we were talking about.

Worker #3:

You might be able to get some of the answers you're looking for from the plant Medical Department. They have a list of everyone who has ever been in the hospital. They paid the bills through the company's insurance. That might be the best place to get information. Any illness will be in those records. The unions didn't get copies. I always told the union stewards to make detailed reports of every accident for the records. The company has all that.

Worker #4:

When you went to Medical, you had to give your name, badge number, supervisor, and work location. If you told them 700 Maintenance that would cover every place, but if you worked in B, C, or D, that is what you would tell them.

Mr. Darnell:

NIOSH does not get medical records until DOL sends us the claim. GE has told NIOSH that the records for Air Force Plant 36 for the period from 1961 to 1970 were transferred to England when that part of the company was moved there. The records are supposedly in England. If you hear differently, or know something about that, we need to know. We cannot get the records from England at this time.

Mr. Darnell thanked the attendees for their time and adjourned the meeting at approximately 10:55 a.m. Mr. Lewis also thanked the attendees for doing their part as Cold War veterans.

Materials Distributed During the Meeting:

- NIOSH Fact Sheet: Dose Reconstruction
- NIOSH Fact Sheet: Probability of Causation
- NIOSH Fact Sheet: Technical Documents Used During Dose Reconstruction
- Contact Information for DOL Resource Center, Portsmouth, Ohio (printout from DEEOIC Web site)