

Labor News Digest

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S.O.S. Stress at Work: Cost of workplace stress is rising, with depression increasingly common

Working more and enjoying less? If so, you're not alone. A new study finds mental health in the world of work in peril. Employees report burnout, anxiety, low morale, and stress--all of which can mean loss of work. Employers report lower productivity, reduced profits and high turnover rates. And for government, this epidemic translates into higher health care costs and lower national income. This report looks at mental health on the job and what people can do about it.

In Finland, high unemployment, job insecurity, short-term contracts, and time pressure coincided with a marked deterioration in the reported mental well being of the workforce.

In Germany, workers dealing with "rationalization and the rapid introduction of technology," along with rising unemployment, suffered from stress due to increased time pressures and demands for greater quality and quantity of production.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, an array of new technologies and methods of work organizing stemming from rising productivity requirements is causing more cases of depression and work-induced stress.

And in Poland, major political changes leading to socioeconomic transformation "had serious ramifications for the labor market and for the mental well being of people in the workplace."

These findings are from a new report, *Mental Health in the Workplace: Introduction* prepared by the International Labor Organization (ILO). The report notes that while the origins of mental health difficulties are complex and the workplace practices and income and employment patterns differ widely among the countries studied, a number of common threads appear to link the high prevalence of stress, burnout, and depression to changes taking place in the labor market, due partly to the effects of economic globalization.

The study of mental health policies and programs affecting the workforces of Finland, Germany, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States shows that the incidence of mental health problems is increasing, with as many as one in 10 workers suffering from depression, anxiety, stress, or burnout, which lead, in some cases, to unemployment and hospitalization.

The countries were chosen not because they have inordinately high incidences of mental illness, but because they are emblematic of different approaches to workplace organization and welfare systems, embodying different types of legislation, health care, and approaches to mental health issues.

Disturbing Trends

Ms. Phyllis Gabriel, a vocational rehabilitation specialist and one of the main authors of the mental health study, expressed alarm at the widespread costs of these disturbing trends:

"Employees suffer from low morale, burnout, anxiety, stress, lost income, and even unemployment associated in some cases with the inevitable stigma attached to mental illness," she said. "For employers, the costs are felt in terms of low productivity, reduced profits, high rates of staff turnover and increased costs of recruiting and training replacement staff. For governments, the costs include health care costs and insurance payments as well as the loss of income at the national level."

The series of detailed country studies address such issues as workplace productivity, loss of income, health care and social security costs, access to mental health services and employment policies for the people with mental illness. The ILO undertook the study because, as Ms. Gabriel emphasized, "the workplace is an appropriate environment for educating individuals and raising their awareness of mental health difficulties in order to target mental health problems and prevent them from developing." The report estimates that anywhere from three to four percent of GNP is spent on mental health problems in the European Union. In the U.S., the national spending associated with treatment of depression ranges between \$30 billion and \$44 billion. In many countries, early retirement due to mental health difficulties is increasing to the point where they are becoming the most common reason for allocating disability pensions.

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Ten Things to Do Today

You say you don't have time to exercise. Don't think "exercise"--think "action." Standing is better than sitting, walking is better than standing. Include these activities in every day life.

1. Use the stairs, up and down, instead of the elevator. Start with one flight of stairs and gradually build up to more.
2. Rake leaves, mow the grass, trim a hedge, or pull weeds.
3. Sweep the floor, wash windows, or vacuum the carpet briskly.
4. Go dancing instead of seeing a movie.
5. Take your children to the park and play with them. Don't sit on the bench and watch.
6. Take an activity break. Get up, stretch, and walk around.
7. Park a few blocks from the office or store and walk the rest of the way. Or if you ride public transportation, get off a stop or two before and walk a few blocks.
8. Take a walk after dinner instead of watching TV.
9. Park at the back of the lot at the supermarket and carry your own groceries.
10. Hide your remote control and get up to change channels on your television.

American Heart Association

Union Gets Werthan Employee Reinstated With Full Back Pay, Benefits, Seniority

Howard Woods worked at Werthan Industries in Nashville, Tenn., for 26 years. He operated a tow-motor and enjoyed his job. Woods felt, however, that a union might help the employees, and he became part of an active group who spoke out in favor of a union at Werthan. The company took a dim view of Wood's activities and tried to make him into an example to scare the rest of the workforce.

Management fired Woods. The official explanation was "for violating company rules and regulations by leaving without permission."

Woods had crossed the street to get some keys from his automobile, which was parked in the employee lot across the street from the plant. Woods claimed he requested permission from a supervisor and that it was less than five minutes before the start of his scheduled lunch break.

He also claimed that often other employees did similar activity without any discipline. Management refused to reinstate him.

Immediately upon hearing of Wood's discharge, PACE filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) on behalf of Woods. PACE member-organizer Ben Brandon explained, "My main concern was to get him back to work. He has a family to support. I also wanted to show him that the union process does work, and that the company is not above the law. His speaking for the union is protected activity."

The company fought bitterly to keep Woods from collecting unemployment benefits, and forced the 50-year-old father of two into several hearings. It was during such a hearing with the Tennessee State Unemployment Office that Woods was able to make his case.

Brandon accompanied Woods to the hearings. Woods, assisted by Brandon, produced several workers from Werthan who had gone to their automobiles in precisely the same manner and were never disciplined.

The hearing officer agreed that Woods should receive his unemployment benefits. With car and rent payments in arrears, at least the unemployment check would provide food for his family.

Upon reviewing the same evidence from Woods and his coworkers, the regional office of the NLRB ordered Woods reinstated with all benefits, back pay, and seniority.

PACE Attorney Renata Dash clarified the situation, "This company has been working fervently for nearly two and one-half years to silence the voice and crush the spirit of their employees. In the difficult and prolonged battle for justice, it seems that the system recognized that the company went too far.

The diligent faith of the employees helped lead to Wood's reinstatement with full back pay and benefits. The union is pleased with the outcome of this case and remains optimistic that future decisions will render further victories."

"It's good to be back at work, especially this time of year," said Woods prior to the holidays. "I thank the union for their help."

Brandon said he believes Woods' triumph has given the workers at Werthan a much needed morale boost and has proved to some skeptics that the union is for and about the workers.

PACE International Union, PO Box 1475, Nashville, TN 37202.

Harsh Attack on Workers' Comp

On February 8, the Senate Commerce Committee will consider legislation making it more difficult for injured employees to be awarded workers' compensation by creating a rebuttable presumption that intoxication or unlawful drug use was the primary cause of a worker's injury or death.

This would shift the burden of proof in proving that alcohol or drugs contributed to an injury from the employer to the injured employee. If enacted, this legislation would place an impossible burden on injured workers or their families to prove that intoxication or illegal drug use did not cause an injury. We strongly oppose this legislation and urge union members to contact their Senators and ask them to vote "NO" on S-51.

New Jersey AFL-CIO, Labor Fax.

North American Labor Report

Canadian Cogeneration Plant

A Canadian Province's first major private power plant is expected to begin construction by the spring, having cleared administrative hurdles raised by forces opposed to electricity deregulation. TransAlta Corporation is now reviewing bids for engineering, procurement, and construction of what will be Canada's largest cogeneration facility in Sarnia, Ontario, says Grant Howard, project director.

The \$291 million project, planned for a vacant 25-acre site, is scheduled to begin operation in late 2002.

Wal-Martyr

Milwaukee union members rallied against the job-killing effects of Wal-Mart megastores and escalated a fight to stop the giant retailer's efforts to build more stores in their area. More than 300 union members marched to call attention to the loss of 250 jobs at Master Lock Company when Wal-Mart dropped the company's products and switched to an offshore competitor. The rally also featured former Wal-Mart employees and Mexican workers, who told how the global economy is leaving working families in poverty.

California Minimum Wage Victory

Unions and other community groups are celebrating winning a \$1 increase in the California state minimum wage. By unanimous vote, the Industrial Welfare Commission raised the minimum wage to \$6.75. Four years ago, California workers had to go to the ballot to win a minimum wage hike. But this year, labor mobilized thousands of minimum-wage workers, who signed petitions and presented testimony to the commission on the need for a raise in their pay.

Update on Metrication in Construction

A recent article in *Construction Metrication* newsletter gave an update on the current use of the metric system in building construction. Since Congress rescinded the year 2000 deadline for state metric implementation on federally funded highway projects, over 20 states have abandoned metric usage. Currently, 14 states continue to use the metric system in designing and building highway projects. In the private sector, there has not been a significant move towards using the metric system. The article noted that all major new buildings funded by the federal government are designed and built in the metric system. Total federally funded metric projects total \$10 billion annually.

New PLA Locks Up L.A. Area Airports Through 2010

The Los Angeles Board of Airport Commissioners unanimously approved a Project Labor Agreement covering the modernization of the Tom Bradley International Terminal at Los Angeles International Airport. The deal could potentially affect future major public construction projects at LAX, Ontario International Airport, Palmdale Regional Airport, and Van Nuys Airport through December 31, 2010. Under the agreement, wages and benefits will be established in accordance with locally negotiated labor contracts, as well as state and federal laws. The agreement prohibits work stoppages, slowdowns, or employer lockouts.

Toddle Out of Chicago

More than 300 union, student, and community activists rallied outside a union-buster seminar held at a downtown University of Chicago facility. The "How to Stay Union Free" seminar was held by one of the nation's most notorious anti-union law firms, Jackson and Lewis. The group's picket line forced participants to leave the conference through the back door, said Stewart Acuff, assistant director of the AFL-CIO's Midwest Region. Before the rally, more than 250 professors from UC and other universities signed a letter condemning the school for participating in the seminar.

Labor Museum Offers Labor History for Elementary Through High School Students

Dedicated to getting labor history into elementary through high school curricula, the American Labor Museum in Haledon, New Jersey, offers labor classes, as well as discussions on the contemporary issues facing working people and immigrants, for grades 3 through 12 this school year.

Class topics include "The Textile Industry in America, 1900-Present," "Paul Robeson: An American Hero 1898-1976," and "The Botto House," the actual meeting place for over 20,000 silk workers during the 1913 Paterson Silk Strike.

The museum also offers a free lending book, audio videocassette library, resored period rooms, and gardens. For further information, call the Botto House at (973) 595-7953.

Pension Terms Defined

401(k): Created by federal legislation. Lessens your federal income tax liability because your contribution for the 401(k) is deducted from your gross income before calculating the federal income tax. Companies traditionally match a percentage of employee contributions. A 401(k) does not give you a guaranteed sum of money each month when you retire. The money you receive when you retire is determined by how well (or poor) your investments perform. Therefore, a 401(k) is a good supplement to an existing defined benefit pension.

Defined Benefit Pension: With a defined benefit pension, you receive a guaranteed amount of money each month when you retire. Your company contributes a set amount of money, negotiated in your contract, to your pension while you are working at that company.

Roth Individual Retirement Account (IRA): You contribute after-tax dollars, up to a maximum of \$2,000 (single) and \$4,000 (married). The adjusted gross income reported on your federal income tax form has to be less than \$150,000/year (joint filers) or \$95,000 (single filers) in order to participate in Roth IRA. The interest earned is tax-free.

Labor-Management Professional Certification Program

The National Labor Management Association's Professional Certification Program will play a crucial part in bringing the labor-management cooperative process and the high-performance workplace concept into focus for a wider audience. We know through research that those in the workplace, whether in the private or public sector, are seeking the type of knowledge with standardization of training as is offered in the Labor-Management Professional Certification Program. Unlike other programs, the NLMA's emphasizes this training and information, assuring a standard of professionalism when dealing with labor-management and workplace issues. To date, labor-management or worksite consulting is a random event. Improperly trained and costly consultants can cause more damage by their advice than if they had done nothing. The situation is serious, and a verifiable standard of excellence must be sought and maintained. This is what the Professional Certification Program will achieve.

Basically, the Professional Program provides the graduate with the information, knowledge, and strategies--all through education and training in the labor-management cooperation and high-performance processes.

The Professional Certification Program is the most comprehensive source, to date, which combines the philosophies and the hard-action strategies to train leaders and union representatives to make this transition to the high-performance workplace within the realities of the collective bargaining environment. The program can even be offered onsite.

The course is presently available in three different and distinct venues to appeal to a wide range of attendees. First, the course itself is available on compact disc with Internet backup for testing and evaluation, and it will be available in hardcopy for those who do not have computer skills or access to a computer or the Internet. Second, the course will also be offered at select regional sites during the year, through cooperative efforts with larger companies who will schedule the program onsite, at various times during the workweek. Third, the course will soon be offered at regional colleges throughout the country. The committee of professionals, union presidents, and work-class experts in high-performance and labor-management cooperation who tested the program agreed that the following course structure was excellent and was the only compilation of its kind presently available.

Don't Miss the Opportunity

We never know what challenges await us in the workplace of the 21st Century. Not only do we deal with conflict, overhead, waste, production goals--we generally have to handle these all in one day! The modern global workplace requires advanced, constantly-changing skills and knowledge, which must meet the highest level of standardization and thoroughness. No single person, union, company, or even an organization, could readily gain access to the wealth of knowledge, which this complete Learning System comprises.

Five years in the development, with exhaustive research and expert contributors, this compilation of state-of-the-art information is now available to qualified persons from management, labor, government, and education.

This program offers superior training, assuring the standard of professionalism needed to master intense workplace, production, financial, and labor-management issues. Heavy emphasis is placed on the tools of continuous improvement necessary for changing an organization from the traditional workplace of the past to the streamlined, efficient, high-performance workplace of the 21st Century.

Issues such as quality, continuous improvement, teams, the involvement of personnel, high performance, participative problem-solving techniques, TQM, QCD, Kaizen, JIT, the achievement of world-class status, and labor-management cooperation are all covered in detail, and all within the realities of the collective bargaining system.

Who Can Benefit?

- Company Owners and Management
- Union Presidents, Leaders, and Workers
- Human Resource Professionals
- Mid-Level Managers and Supervisors
- Educators and Government Officials

Certification--Learning System--The Five Certification Modules Are:

- Evolution of the American Collective Bargaining System
- Theory and Practice of Labor-Management Cooperation
- Teams and Participative Problem Solving
- Developing the High-Performance Workplace
- Assessment, Measurement, and Evaluation Methods

These learning modules were written by a panel of leading experts in their fields, amassing over a century of experience collectively. In addition, a prize-winning team of professional writers and graphic artists put together the most visually compelling and educationally astute learning vehicle available.

For more information on the program, please contact the National Labor Management Association, P.O. Box 819, Jamestown, NY 14702-0819. Phone at 800-967-2687 (Office Hours 9 to 5 E.S.T Weekdays) or e-mail to: nlma@nlma.org.

Labor Turnout Influenced Election 2000

Without the labor movement's massive voter registration drive, dissemination of information on the candidates' positions and unprecedented get-out-the-vote efforts, Election 2000 would have been a cakewalk for anti-worker candidates. Voters from union households composed 26 percent of the electorate on Election Day. Their influence in the election is especially notable since only 50.7 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots.

Union families voted nearly 2 to 1 for Al Gore. African-Americans voted 10 to 1 for Gore--a statistic that is not unsurprising giving the massive NAACP campaign to get-out-the-vote. With Gore's lead in the popular vote, a majority of voters said, "No," to George W. Bush and his conservative agenda of tax cuts for the wealthy, privatization of Social Security, and turnover of Medicare to the HMOs.

Union members' influence in the election also extended to the House and Senate, where their votes eroded the Republican majority to the point where it will be difficult to get anything passed that hurts workers. "I hate to throw in the towel and say business can't accomplish anything in this environment," said Patrick J. Cleary, vice president for human resources at the National Association of Manufacturers, to *Business Week* magazine. "But whatever we achieve will be fairly minor."

Gridlock in Congress also means it will be difficult for Bush to privatize Social Security, push through large tax cuts, and enact school vouchers. But that does not mean that union members can sit back and watch the fray unfold for the next four years.

Voting power has shifted to those with higher incomes. More than two-thirds of people in America with incomes greater than \$50,000 vote, compared with one-third of those with incomes under \$10,000. As a result, politicians have reduced taxes on corporations and the wealthy, while increasing the tax burden on working families.

Also, public spending on the government services and institutions most needed by non-affluent families has shrunk. One million more people each year are becoming uninsured and unable to afford health care.

Our elected officials are not addressing these subjects, but we can force them to do so--especially the "New Democrats" who pay heed to their conservative corporate benefactors than their labor base--by organizing support for these issues with our community and religious allies.

We passed OSHA in 1970 during a Republican Congress and presidency. We can do so again with other workers' issues if we organize a mass movement for support.

By Lynn Baker, PACE Associate Director of Communications, PO Box 1475, Nashville, TN 37202.

Updated Medicare Publications

New Medicare handbooks for 2001 are being delivered to beneficiary households. The handbook has important information about your Medicare benefits, Medicare plan choices, and Medicare plans in your area. In addition, the new handbook has information on private fee for service plans, several new questions and answers, and an improved Medicare health plan cost and benefits page. If you don't receive a copy of *Medicare & You 2001* in your household, or if you need additional copies, call 1-800-MEDICAR.

The Health Care Financing Administration also has a number of recently updated Medicare publications available. You can pick up a copy at your local Social Security office. Or you can download many of them from the Internet at www.medicare.gov. Here's a rundown:

- *Medicare Prevention Services* has updated information about covered preventive services including certain cancer screening tests, bone mass measurement, diabetes monitoring, and inoculations.
- *Your Medicare Benefits* explains Medicare's Part A and Part B benefits including preventive services that are covered. It also lists contact numbers for more detailed information.
- *Do You Need Help to Pay Health Care Costs?* Has information about what help is available for paying health care costs. It also includes the latest income levels to qualify for help.
- *Medicare Appeals and Grievances* explains Medicare's appeals and grievance processes.
- *Medigap Policies and Protections* explains Medigap policies and what they cover, as well as Medicare beneficiaries' right to buy Medigap policies when their health coverage changes.
- *The 2000 Guide to Health Insurance for People with Medicare* has information about Medicare supplemental insurance, including how to purchase and use Medigap insurance, as well as other private health insurance.
- *Medicare Savings for Qualified Beneficiaries* has information about help with paying Medicare costs. It also has the latest income levels to qualify for help.

S.O.S. Stress at Work: Cost of workplace stress are rising, with depression increasingly common

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Five Country Examples

Among the major findings of the report, which warns that the costs of mental health disability are rising, is a pattern of increasing personal and mental health problems among the working age populations of all the countries studied. For example:

- In the U.S., clinical depression has become one of the most common illnesses, affecting one in 10 working age adults each year resulting in loss of approximately 200 million working days per year;
- In Finland, over 50 percent of the workforce experiences some kind of stress-related symptoms, such as anxiety, depressive feelings, physical pain, social exclusion, or sleep disorders; seven percent of finish workers suffer from severe burnout, leading to exhaustion, cynicism and sharply reduced professional capacity. Mental health disorders are the leading cause of disability pensions in Finland;
- In Germany, depressive disorders account for almost seven percent of premature retirements and depression-related work incapacity last about two and a half times longer than incapacity due to other illnesses. The annual volume of production lost because of absenteeism related mental health disorders is estimated at over five billion annually;
- In the United Kingdom, each year nearly three out of every 10 employees experience mental health problems, and numerous studies indicate that work-related stress and the illnesses it causes are common. Depression, in particular, is such a common problem that at any given time one in every 20 working-aged Britons is experiencing major depression;
- Public health statistics in Poland indicate growing numbers of people--especially individuals suffering from depressive disorders--receiving mental health care, a trend which can be related to the country's socioeconomically transformation and resulting increases in unemployment, job insecurity, and declining living standards.

Is progress being made?

The ILO report sees progress in coming to terms with mental health issues in the workplace in all the countries studied. It notes, for example, that "in the U.S., employers of all sizes are beginning to recognize that depressive disorders often constitute their highest mental health (medical) and disability cost. A large number of employers understand the relationship between health and productivity and are improving their management strategies by developing and implementing programs supportive of work/family life issues."

Finland, the report notes, has actively started to address mental health issues, both at the national and international levels, adding that "the culture of mental health promotion is evolving in the workplace; the Finish concept of work ability is not just about promoting employees' physical health but also about mental health in healthy work organizations."

In Germany, which already enjoys strong institutional and government supports for mental health services, corporate health promotion is becoming a higher priority and successful stress reduction programs have been underway for many years. These programs include "relaxation procedures, role-playing and behavioral training to increase self-confidence and improve interpersonal skills."

In the United Kingdom, employees' and employers' organizations play an active role in mental health issues, and the government and institutional response to the issue is generally proactive. Some companies have already developed mental health policies for the workplace. Analysis of existing policies have defined certain key elements of good practice, the report notes, adding that "the most fundamental step for organizations is to recognize and accept that mental health is an important issue and show commitment to mental health promotion."

Mental Health in the Workplace: Introduction. Prepared by Ms. Phyllis Gabriel and Ms. Majoritta Limatainen. International Labour Office, Geneva, October 2000.

Planet Work

A review of trends and developments in the world of work

New Labor Market Issues

In the United States, some companies--especially small businesses--are actively recruiting mothers with small children. Allowing them time off for child-related matters creates strong loyalty to the company, which is considered priceless in the midst of a 30-year low unemployment rate and a job market in which workers can readily change jobs. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the number of working mothers with children under three years of age rose 9.5 percent to 5.3 million between 1990 and 1999. But the pool of such workers appears to be drying up; during the 1980s, the number rose 47 percent.

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News Briefs

AFL-CIO Endorses Boycott of Nonunion 'Sound of Music'

The AFL-CIO has added the boycott of Troika Entertainment of Rockville, Md., and its national tour of *The Sound of Music* to the nationwide list of AFL-CIO endorsed boycotts.

The boycott was launched by the Actors' Equity Association (AEA), the union for professional stage actors, which points out that Troika, the show's tour producer turned aside the union's overtures for an Equity contract for actions involved with the tour.

Troika reportedly is paying most of the show's 30 actors little more than a third of Equity's minimum rates, a very low per diem and providing no paid health benefits or pension payments.

In addition, Equity has brought charges against one of the touring show's stars, Barry Williams, for violating the union's constitution by working in the show. Williams is best known for playing Greg Brady on the popular 1970s TV comedy, "The Brady Bunch."

The union also is conducting informational picketing at several of the theaters where the performances of the touring production are scheduled.

Contract Ends 5-year Lockout, Boycott at Crown Petroleum

Members of Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical & Energy Workers, Local Union 4-227 at the Crown Petroleum refinery in Pasadena, Tx., have ratified a new labor agreement with the company.

The pact brings to an end a 5-year lockout of the workers from their jobs and a multifaceted union campaign against the company that included a boycott of its products and filling stations.

Robert E. Wages, executive vice president, directed the settlement talks, called the return of PACE members to the refining "a great victory" and expressed thanks that "peace has been declared by both sides."

President Boyd Young said the union members are returning to work under a contract that provides essential guarantees and protections. "It is time to put rancor aside and work with Crown to improve the operation of the refinery and its environmental compliance," he added.

Local 4-227 President Mack Hickerson expressed heartfelt thanks to "the thousands of labor, civil rights, religious, and environmental activists who rallied around our cause and gave life to our campaign."

United Farms Workers Ends Grapes Boycott

Pointing out that many of its goals have been met, the United Farm Workers of American (UFW) has called off the 16-year boycott of nonunion California table grapes.

"Caesar Chavez's crusade to eliminate use of five of the most toxic chemicals plaguing farm workers and their families has been largely successful," said UFW President Arturo Rodriguez in announcing the boycott's end.

Three of the pesticides--Dinoseb, Parathion, and Phosdrin--"are gone," Rodriguez wrote, adding that a fourth, methyl bromide, is scheduled to be banned by the year 2005, and severe restrictions have been place on use of the fifth, Captan.

Rodriguez made the announcement in a letter to the St. Louis-based National Farm Worker ministry, an arm of the National Council of Churches.

In addition, he wrote, "it is not fair to ask our supporters to honor a boycott when the union must devote all of its present recourses" to organizing a bargaining. In the past six years alone, Rodriguez pointed out, the UFW has won 20 union-representation elections and bargained 24 new or first time contracts with growers.

AFL-CIO, 815 16th St., Washington, DC 20006.

Are You Exposed to Beryllium on the Job?

OSHA estimates that more than 50,000 industrial workers may have job exposures to beryllium, a metal that causes chronic beryllium disease (CBD) lung cancer: Health and Safety Director Dave Ortlieb urges each local at potential risk of beryllium exposure to submit a request to your employer for information on whether beryllium is used, in what applications and that all exposure data be provided to the local union. There is a form letter you can use for your request. It goes as follow: *Letter to Employers*

Dear Mr./Ms _____:

This is to request information on the use of beryllium in the plant. This local union would like a list of locations where beryllium is used and a copy of any industrial hygiene monitoring data for beryllium. If beryllium was used in the past, please indicate when it was discontinued and what it was used for. Access to this information is guaranteed under the Hazard Communication Standard 1910.1200, the Access to Exposure Records Standard, and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). We would like this information within the next 15 days.

Sincerely,

Local Union Official

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Are You Exposed to Beryllium on the Job?

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Chronic beryllium disease (CBD) primarily affects the lungs. CBD may occur among people who are exposed to the dust or fumes from beryllium metal, metal oxides, alloys, ceramics, or salts. CBD usually has a very slow onset. Very small amounts of exposure to beryllium (less than .2ug/m3) can cause the disease in some people. For a complete copy of the *Hazard Information Bulletin*, go to the OSHA web site at www.osha.gov and type in "beryllium" next to search. Click on the first title, "Preventing Adverse Health Effects from Exposure to Beryllium on the Job." You also can get a copy from your OSHA area office.

Body Mechanics and Pain Control

Body mechanics is the science of using your body wisely. Knowing about body mechanics can help you if you suffer from arthritis. Arthritis causes pain, inflammation, and stiffness of the joints. When we feel pain, the natural tendency is to stop moving. But the less we move our joints, the stiffer they become and the more pain we feel. The solution is to learn to move in a way that protects the joints. That's body mechanics.

Here are some body mechanics dos and don'ts from the Arthritis Foundation.

Standing:

- Do practice good posture by imagining that a straight line connects your ears, shoulders, hips, knees, and heels.
- Do hold your shoulders back.
- Do stand with feet slightly apart or with one foot in front of the other to maintain balance.
- Don't lock your knees. Bend them slightly instead.
- Don't give in to the urge to slump. Standing up straight is the most efficient and least stressful position for the body.
- Don't stand unassisted for long periods. If standing becomes painful, lean against a wall or support yourself by putting one foot on a stool.

Sitting:

- Do make sure that your spine is stable and supported when you sit.
- Do try placing a pillow or a rolled-up towel behind your back for support.
- Do use a book stand or book rest when reading to prevent neck strain.
- Don't sit on a stool or a chair that doesn't have a back if you can avoid it.
- Don't sit in low chairs if you have trouble getting up and down because of pain in your hips or knees.

Lying down:

- Do use a neck pillow or a rolled-up towel to avoid stress on your neck muscles when lying on your back.
- Do use a large pillow or several smaller pillows around your body to support your arms and legs.
- Don't use pillows under your knees when lying on your back.
- Don't try to get out of bed in one movement. Instead, sit up first, wait a moment to steady yourself, then stand up.

Lifting and carrying:

- Do use the palms of your hands instead of your fingers to grip objects.
- Do crouch down and bend your knees when picking up an object. Use your knees to straighten up.
- Don't lean over to pick up an object, then straighten by using your back.
- Don't lean forward when carrying something so that the object doesn't touch your body.

The Ironworker, 1750 New York Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20006.

Articles?

Do you have an idea, strategy, or point of view about *Labor News Digest*? If so, let us know.

Fax us at (716) 665-8060, or e-mail to njalmc@cecomet.net. We'll consider your article for publication.

Planet Work

(Continued from page 6)

Microcredit

Can microcredit help people help themselves and be profitable at the same time? Yes, says a new report from Opportunity International, a U.S. based private humanitarian organization. The Opportunity International company, which provides microcredit to the working poor in the form of small, collateral-free loans, says it distributed \$43.8 million in 1999, representing 196,266 loans to 176,147 clients in 25 developing countries, and that this money created 276,886 jobs. The organization said that fully 96 percent of those loans were repaid on time and at the market rate of interest.

Working Conditions

In the United States, truck drivers who are fast asleep at the wheel, or nearly so, kill or injure an average of 56 people everyday. In a U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) survey, 28 percent of drivers reported falling asleep at the wheel at least once during the preceding month, and the DOT says that driver fatigue is a factor in an average of 755 fatalities and 19,705 injuries per year. Both experts and truckers agree that the underlying cause is the decline in profits since the industry was deregulated in 1980, leading to a 30 percent decline in the median earnings of long-haul truck drivers, who now much work longer hours--above the legal maximum--to earn their former salaries.

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