



Stronger safety net for Hanford workers

Bill to help Hanford workers access workers' compensation benefits passes

OLYMPIA -- Every week it seems that there are new reports that workers at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation have been exposed to radiation, toxic vapors and some other chemical hazards.

Last month, demolition was halted at Hanford's Plutonium Finishing Plant after yet another spread of radioactive contamination. Some workers in portable offices at the plant well away from the plant's demolition zone, were warned to remain in their office trailers. Contamination was later found on the workers' cars and pickups. Last week, it was announced that the site's plutonium and americium contamination had spread as far as 10 miles away.

The bottom line is that these brave workers continue to be exposed to some of the most hazardous substances known to man, including many chemical and radiological hazards that are as yet unidentified, and the safety measures intended to protect them are inadequate. Despite this, when Hanford workers get sick they lack the same workers' compensation safety net that other sick/injured workers have because the burden of proof is on the worker to connect specific exposures to their disease — a virtually impossible task given the circumstances at Hanford.

Last year, Rep. Larry Halder (R-Richland) sponsored HB 1723 to enact a previous recommendation that Hanford workers' illnesses should be presumed to be work-related when they see workers' compensation coverage. This presumption would be similar to the one that already exists for firefighters, who are also exposed to toxic chemicals and vapors in their line of work. The bill passed the House on a strong bipartisan 69-29 vote last year,

but was killed by Senate Republican leaders. This year, HB 1723 passed the House again on an even stronger 76-22 vote, and with Democrats now in control of the Senate, it was finally brought to a vote on Jan. 25, easily passing 35-14. The bill now heads to Governor Jay Inslee, who is expected to sign it into law.

Congratulations to Halder, Sen. Karen Keiser (D-Kent) who sponsored the Senate companion bill, and the many Hanford workers and their advocates who pursued this legislation, especially Nick Bumpaous of UA Plumbers & Steamfitters Local 598.

Noncompetes must be restricted

Noncompetition agreements (or "noncompetes") are out of control and need to be regulated. These binding legal documents are used to restrict workers' ability to change jobs, ostensibly to protect their employers' trade secrets or their "investment" in

training employees. Recent research cited by the U.S. Treasury Dept. suggests that fully 18 percent of employees—nearly 30 million Americans—are forced to sign these non-negotiable agreements as a condition of hiring or continued employment, including 14 percent of workers earning less than \$40,000 per year.

Noncompetes are warping the labor market by prohibiting people from using their skills to seek employment elsewhere. They have prevented musicians from performing in cities or even states where they have recently played, physicians from opening their own clinics in rural communities, cosmetologists and barbers from opening their own businesses, and grocery store workers from seeking employment in the face of layoffs. Even sandwich makers at sub shops have been required to sign such agreements!



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The only remedy the currently exists for workers bound by unreasonable, overly restrictive noncompetition agreements is to challenge them in court. Few can afford to do so.

That's why the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO has called on the Legislature to regulate and restrict noncompetition agreements, while protecting legitimate intellectual property concerns of businesses. SB 6522, sponsored Sen. Marko Lias (D-Lynnwood) and Joe Fain (R-Auburn), restricts the use of noncompetition agreements while creating reasonable exceptions to protect businesses' intellectual property. It was heard in Senate Labor and Commerce last week and is expected to advance this week.

HB 1967, a similar bill sponsored by Rep. Derek Stanford (D-Bothell), passed the House unanimously last year but was never voted upon in the Republican-controlled Senate. In addition, SB 6526, sponsored Sen. Steve Conway (D-Tacoma), also restricts non-competes. The WSLC strongly urges action on this important issue in 2018.

WSLC Legislative Reception, Conference

Don't forget the WSLC Legislative Reception and Lobbying Conference in Olympia is **this Thursday and Friday, Feb. 1-2**. All union leaders, staff, and especially rank-and-file members are invited to attend these events and meet with their representatives and senators to discuss issues important to their unions and the state's labor movement.

The action begins Thursday night, Feb. 1 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. with the WSLC Legislative Reception at the Hotel RL Olympia. This is a great opportunity for union members to meet and mix with legislators, elected state officials, and agency directors and staff in an informal setting.

The following morning, Friday, Feb. 2, the WSLC Lobbying Conference begins at the hotel at 8:30 a.m. with a brief legislative lobbying training and review of the most pressing issues facing organized labor. Delegates will hear from Sen. Manka Dhingra, plus labor committee chairs, Sen. Karen Keiser (D-Kent) and Rep. Mike Sells (D-Everett). Then delegates will take buses to the Capitol to lobby their legislators on these issues. Buses will bring delegates back to the hotel for lunch and a quick debriefing, a legislative panel featuring Rep. Monica Stonier (D-Vancouver) and Sen. Rebecca Saldaña (D-Seattle), and will be finished by 2 p.m.

Click here to download a registration form. It's too late to preregister at this point, so if you plan to attend, please down-



load and complete the form and you can register at the door. A registration table will be set up Thursday from 1 to 4 p.m. in the hotel lobby, and registration on Friday opens at 7:30 a.m. Click here for more details about the events. If you have any questions, email Willa Hockley-Smith or call her at 206-254-4913.

Updates on Shared Prosperity Agenda

Here's a quick update on some committee and floor action on other bills from the Washington State Labor Council's Shared Prosperity Agenda, and where they stand at press time:

■ **ELECTRICAL APPRENTICESHIPS (SB 6126)** — This legislation supported by the IBEW requires completion of an apprenticeship program to receive a journey level electrician certificate of competency. It passed the Senate 44-5 on Jan. 25 and now heads to the House Labor and Workforce Standards Committee. It passed the House last year.

■ **KEEP WASHINGTON WORKING (HB 1985/SB 5689)** — Immigrants are integral to our state's thriving economy — as workers, small business owners, and entrepreneurs. By working with Department of Commerce, labor, business and immigrant advocacy groups can develop strategies collaboratively to help support the state's current and future industries, while establishing statewide guidelines that prevent unconstitutional detention and profiling. SB 5689 has advanced from Senate Labor & Commerce and will be heard in Senate Ways & Means at 3:30 p.m. this Tuesday, Jan. 30.

■ **FAIR CHANCE ACT (HB 1298/SB 6110)** — When formerly incarcerated persons have fulfilled their debt to society, they should be able to secure work. By "banning the box" and waiting until after an interview to ask about criminal history, they will have a fair chance to make their case to potential employers. HB 1298 advanced from House Labor & Workplace Standards and is available for a floor vote. SB 6110 will be also heard in Senate Ways & Means at 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 30 and advocates are strongly urging senators NOT to include language that preempts cities from establishing their own standards in this regard.

■ **BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL (HB 1508)** — Kids needs reliable, healthy breakfasts at the start of the school day to ensure they are ready to learn. By providing all of our school children adequate nutrition, we can start to close the achievement gap and ensure that kids experiencing poverty are not stigmatized. Passed the House 83-15, advanced from the Senate Ways & Means and is available for a floor vote.