

Beryllium resource center coming to the site

During the Cold War, thousands of workers were employed in the nation's atomic weapons programs. The work was dangerous, and many workers may have been exposed to radioactive and toxic substances.

Recognizing that workers at these facilities may be suffering from illnesses caused by their work, Congress passed the *Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act* to compensate persons who have become ill as a result of work at atomic weapons facilities. The law became effective July 31, 2001.

Under this law, Hanford workers or their survivors may be eligible for \$150,000 if the worker suffered a radiation-related cancer or chronic beryllium disease. If the worker is still living, he or she is also entitled to medical coverage related to the covered disease. Workers who have tested positive for beryllium sensitivity are not entitled to the \$150,000, but are entitled to ongoing testing.

In addition, workers who suffer from illnesses caused by exposure to other toxic substances may be eligible to file with the U.S. Department of Energy Office of Worker Advocacy to have their files evaluated by a physicians' panel. The panel will determine whether it's as likely as not that the worker's illness was caused by workplace exposures. If so, the worker would be entitled to assistance with filing a claim for state workers' compensation benefits.

Resource centers were established around the country to assist potential claimants with the filing of claims. One such resource center is at 1029 N. Kellogg Street in Kennewick.

Beginning Jan. 22, a caseworker from the Kennewick office will be on site each Wednesday to assist and inform current Hanford workers. The caseworker will be in room 4 of the Learning Resource Center at the Volpen-test HAMMER Training and Education Center. Appointments may be scheduled between 10:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. every Wednesday.

For further information, or to schedule an appointment, call 783-1500. ■