

an injury to one is an injury to all

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PHILAPOSE calls for more aid for OSHA, at a rally outside the site of oversight held hearings here in May. Story, page 3.

Come Meet, Talk and Vote

"Workers and Nuclear Power" will be the topic of the fall membership meeting on September 26 at 7:30 p.m. Nomination of officers for the Board and voting on amendments to the Constitution will take place at the meeting (see page 12).

Workers are invited to attend a clinic at 6:30 p.m. prior to the meeting to discuss the health and safety problems in their shops. The meeting will be held at the Clothing Workers Hall, 2115 South Street.

A 'Little' Union Pins Big DuPont Over Asbestos

For 28 years, Frank Baptiste has been a pipefitter at the Repauno duPont plant in Gibbstown, N.J. During that time he has worked around and breathed in a substance that until 1973 was the standard for pipe insulation: asbestos.

On Feb. 4 of this year he went to the company medical building for a routine X-ray and breathing test. DuPont called him back a month later and told him the X-ray machine had malfunctioned.

Just a few months ago Frank began to feel an ache around his rib cage, but guessed it was just a pulled muscle. Frank's doctor referred him to a specialist who promptly requested and examined the X-rays in his medical file at duPont. From these X-rays it was determined that Frank had had pleural thickening in his lungs for at least eight years and that now he had asbestosis, a disease of the lung tissue that can lead to cancer.

In an interview with the Courier Post, Frank Baptiste said, "I'm mad....They (duPont management) could have told me eight or nine years ago. Maybe, just maybe, there could have been something done."

Eight years ago no one told Frank or

Continued on Page 10

A Factsheet for
Public Employees
pgs. 5-6



N.J. Comp Bill
Imperils Rights
pg. 8

DUP 0810412

DuPont Pinned Over Asbestos

Continued from Page 1

any other workers at duPont that working with asbestos could lead to serious lung disease, but today the duPont management is taking the asbestos problem very seriously. There is a new company doctor and a new X-ray machine at the Repauno plant. Any employee whose X-rays indicate pleural thickening or other asbestos-related lung damage (and there are presently 28) is immediately advised to choose one of four outside specialists for further diagnosis, all at duPont's expense. Why this sudden and generous concern for employee health after so many years of neglect?

On April 16 of this year the Camden OSHA office fined the Repauno plant \$63,000 for improper handling and removal of asbestos, failure to record and inform employees of illnesses, and failure to provide medical records to investigators. DuPont has not yet paid the fine and is contesting the citation but until a final decision is handed down by the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission, duPont is paying a lot more attention to employee health.

A citation like the one issued to duPont does not develop overnight; it took nine months of investigations, interviews, samplings, and medical research by members of the Camden OSHA office and the Chemical and Industrial Union, an independent union and PHILAPOSH sponsor that represents about 300 Repauno workers.

Dave Watson, president of the union, is perhaps the man most responsible for precipitating the OSHA citations. Last June, he brought the asbestos problem to OSHA's attention during an inspection of the Repauno plant OSHA was conducting in response to a complaint about chemical fumes. According to Watson, the company managed to stall the inspectors long enough to clean up most of the asbestos, but they weren't thorough enough. OSHA collected its first bit of evidence against duPont and Watson began his battle to end asbestos-related hazards at Repauno.

A machinist by trade, Watson reads a

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OT John Way



enchymal fibrosity and mesothelioma as easily as he would a blueprint. "I had to educate myself," he said. "They (company lawyers) tried to make a fool out of me a couple of times...Now I know the language. I know what a tomagram is and what the difference is between carcinoma and mesothelioma."

On May 18, Watson got a chance to demonstrate his newly acquired knowledge of asbestosis when he testified before a U.S. House subcommittee on Health and Safety in Philadelphia.

In addition to working closely with OSHA, Watson and other union members are filing a third-party class action suit against all manufacturers who supplied asbestos products to the duPont plant. This is an increasingly common tactic by asbestos workers and their families locally and nationally.

Although much progress has been made in the past year, real resolution of the health problems of workers at Repauno is more complicated than educating oneself or filing OSHA complaints and lawsuits. Rather than face the meager income of compensation, many workers keep their health problems to themselves so they can retain their full working salary.

The Chemical and Industrial Workers is a small union without the political or economic clout of a large international union. Nevertheless, they have done a remarkable job in fomenting a positive change in Dupont's health policies.

-Bob Miller

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