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The Decade of Job Safety

DEFENDANT'S
EXHIBIT

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General President S. Frank Raftery has proclaimed the coming years as the "Decade of Job Safety" for IBPAT and, certainly, there are few areas of concern more pressing for our Brotherhood and each individual member than occupational health and safety.

Our Brotherhood has been in the vanguard of those struggling for and supporting meaningful safety and health laws. But that work is just a beginning; there's a great deal left to be done—on the state and national level—and the gains made in recent years must be protected from those who would weaken those safety and health standards now on the books.

If gains are to be made, it's going to require hard work and diligence by your own Brotherhood and the understanding of legislators at the local and federal level. One legislator keenly aware of occupational health and safety is Rep. David H. Obey (D-Wisc.), a member of the Labor-HEW Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee.

Congressman Obey recently spoke before the Society for Occupational Safety and Health in Washington. What he had to say, THE JOURNAL believes, points up the need for concerted action at all levels to halt the dangers the work site has for our physical well-being. This article is excerpted from that speech.

One Congressman Shows Of Great Needs

I know that many Americans are vaguely aware that smog causes health problems, that there may be some health problem with asbestos. Some of them have just last month noticed reports about potential carcinogens being found in some communities' water supply. More have probably heard about some vague problem being associated with vinyl chloride. But mostly these bits of information are—to most Americans—a series of unrelated messages, of uncertain importance.

The problems are:

- That life expectancy for men in this country has actually been declining for over ten years now;
- That a steadily increasing portion of Americans of all ages, of both sexes—those who don't smoke as well as those who do—are dying of lung, liver and bladder cancer;
- That perhaps 80 to 90 percent of those cancers are induced by environmental factors;
- That certain non-malignant diseases of human organs most directly affected by environmental impurities are killing more Americans each year;
- That certain groups of workers are contracting some of those diseases at a rate many times that of the population at large;

• That the production of many chemicals is growing almost geometrically (petrochemical production, for instance, has increased by more than 200 percent since 1945);

• That the long latency period of 20 to 30 years between the first exposure to a dangerous chemical and the occurrence of irreversible disease means that it may be several decades before we have a true understanding of what those chemicals have done to the nation's health;

• That something as innocuous as freon—supposedly inert—appears to gather in the upper atmosphere, break down ozone and allow increased penetration of ultraviolet rays, which could cause thousands of additional cases of skin cancer each year by the 1990's.

You know, individual citizens—if they are suspicious or concerned—can take individual action to minimize potential consequences. They can stop smoking. They can cut down on their drinking. They can wear respirators if they work with asbestos, and if they know it is important. They can close their windows when the summer air is dirty in a big city.

But by and large, they have

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Workers Aware of Job Safety

Workers Around World Meet on Job Hazards

Trade union leaders around the world are focusing on the potential threat to worker's health posed by the use of polyvinyl chloride (PVC).

Trade union leaders from 16 countries have launched a campaign to eliminate completely the threat of cancer from PVC to workers—particularly in the plastics industry. It is similar to the campaign kicked off by our Brotherhood at its 23rd General Convention in September 1974.

The campaign was charted at a conference on occupational health hazards at which leading American and European medical experts met with union representatives.

as 20 percent in some of those same communities.

But today funding for that research in EPA is \$2 million less. Instead of 736 people working on the problem, there are 636.

The National Institute for Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) had a budget of \$31 million in fiscal year 73 with a staff of 248. NIEHS researchers working in a wide range of areas have found serious potential hazards in such industrial chemicals as halo ethers and in chemicals found in everyday consumer products such as, for instance, the hundreds of toxic substances being poured into common plastics.

And, despite the increasingly clear warning which such discoveries present to concerned scientists, the response at the Office of Management and Budget—which has learned to determine price much more easily than value—has been to cut NIEHS funding by \$2 million

and to reduce the authorized staff by 15.

But the best example of the government's failure to respond to the chemicals question is the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Initially, a staff of over 1100 people and a budget in the neighborhood of \$70 million was planned for NIOSH. By January of 1973, a total staff of 660 had been built.

The last two years have brought us terrifying revelations concerning vinyl chloride, operating room anesthetics and inorganic arsenic. But NIOSH's staff stands today at 565—down 14 percent in less than two years.

The budget for NIOSH submitted by the Administration this year called for the organization of 14 criteria packages by NIOSH on occupationally dangerous chemicals. Our committee reminded the Administration that just two years ago Secretary of HEW Elliot Richardson had suggested a minimum of 55 to 60 criteria packages each year be prepared by NIOSH, and we increased funds for NIOSH and NIEHS by 25 percent in the Labor-HEW Appropriation bill. The President has said he will sign the bill.

But if you think that this means we have turned the corner, you're dead wrong. In an area when strict fiscal restraint is a matter of overriding national concern, there is no assurance that these gains can be sustained either in terms of the Administration's willingness to allow the appropriated money to be spent or the Congress' willingness to provide increases for these agencies in coming years while other federal programs are being cut back.

Now, as part of its inflation-fighting package, the President's budget analysts are preparing to ask the Congress to accept a \$7 million cut in NIEHS which would prevent the agency from getting any of the increases contained in the Labor-HEW appropriation and, in

what comes. They really have a limited range of choices in determining what risks they will take because (thanks to modern technology) and 20th century American abundance, so many chemical agents are "just there"—asbestos fibers from brake linings in city air or in drinking water; arsenic from neighboring chemical plants; and on and on, and on.

You know, one job of government is to respond collectively to problems which cannot be responded to individually. In this case, by funding significant, comprehensive medical and scientific research to at least determine the magnitude and nature of the problem. But even as these revelations have made the hazards more apparent in the scientific community, the reaction of the government has in some cases actually diminished. For instance: In 1973, 736 people in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had a budget of \$50 million were searching chemical contaminants in the water supply. Since then, concern over the danger posed by chemicals in drinking water has diminished. Preliminary studies suggest the possibility that in some communities the chlorine used to purify drinking water may be reacting with pollutants in the water to form carcinogens which may explain excess cancer rates as high