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Former IAAAP nuclear workers learn about medical screening, compensation program

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Former nuclear weapons workers and their families were given the opportunity to learn about free health screenings and potential compensation opportunities during a town hall meeting Tuesday in Burlington.

Hosted by the U.S. Department of Labor, representatives from labor department, the Department of Energy, the Office of the Ombudsman and University of Iowa College of Public Health were on hand to discuss the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program and answer questions from the audience.

In the morning session, about 100 people gathered to learn about the program and share their experiences. About 20 people were present at the Comfort Suites for the evening session.

“Congress recognized that there were individuals who worked as contractors and sub-contractors for the Department of Energy in the production of nuclear weapons that were put in harms-way without their knowledge, often times,” said Rachel Leiton, director of compensation at the Department of Labor.

Created in 2000, about \$234 million has been awarded through the program to former nuclear weapons workers in Iowa for their work-related illnesses since the program’s inception.

Employees who worked on, or came in contact with, nuclear weapons at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant in Middletown between 1949 and 1974 are eligible for free medical screenings every three years, and may be eligible for the Occupational Illness Compensation Program.

Those eligible include: employees who worked directly with nuclear weapons production; guards on surveillance duty; laundry personnel who handled contaminated clothing; cafeteria staff; tradespersons; delivery and storage personnel; contractors, sub-contractors and IAAP employees involved in construction and maintenance; and those who worked in rail and storage yards, burning fields and demolition areas.

Free medical screenings for qualified former employees in southeast Iowa are offered by appointment in Burlington and Mount Pleasant.

The free screening includes a chest x-ray, pulmonary function test, beryllium lymphocyte proliferation test, and general laboratory tests.

A diagnosis of certain lung diseases or cancers could result in a lump-sum payment of \$150,000 plus medical expenses related to the condition. Any illness contracted due to exposure to radiation, chemicals, solvents, acids and metals while working with nuclear weapons could result in payment of up to \$250,000 based on an individual's level of impairment and/or years of qualifying wage loss because of their condition.

"This is not an easy task," Leiton said. "This is one of the very first workers compensation programs that actually looks at severe occupational illnesses ... this isn't trips and falls.

"I've been with this program since the beginning and I really care about it. I want us to be able to pay as many people as possible and I recognize there are challenges."

Of the more than 1,000 former IAAP workers screened since the program began, 4 percent were newly diagnosed with either skin or lung cancer.

"Something is going on here," said University of Iowa's Laurence Fuortes, director of the Burlington Atomic Energy Commission Plant Former Worker Program. "This population, not necessarily entirely specifically to your work place exposures at the plant, but this population has had more exposure to respiratory toxins.

"Some of that could be high explosives dust, some of that could be smoke from the firing pits, some of that could be from other jobs you've done. And a lot of that is probably tobacco," Fuortes said, citing the 47 percent of surveyed IAAP workers who tested positive for serious lung disease.

Each panelist who addressed the crowd during their presentation expressed the importance of reaching out to their friends and family members who worked at the ammunition plant, and encouraging them to participate in the program.

There are at least 1,000 people within an hour's drive of Burlington, Fuortes said, who are eligible for the program but haven't yet taken advantage of it.

For more information about the Burlington Atomic Energy Commission Plant Former Worker Program, call the toll-free number at (866) 282-5818 or visit their website at www.iowafwp.org.

The program is funded through the U.S. Department of Energy and administered by the University of Iowa College of Public Health.

Quote

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Rachel Leiton, director of compensation at the Department of Labor.



Ben Roberts/The Hawk Eye

People in attendance listen during a meeting regarding the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program hosted by the the U.S. Department of Labor and other federal agencies Tuesday at Comfort Inn and Suites in Burlington. Two more meetings will be held today and Thursday in Ames.



Ben Roberts/The Hawk Eye

A mural made on behalf of energy and weapon's workers in both Burlington and Ames is show during a special meeting regarding the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program hosted by the The U.S. Department of Labor and other federal agencies Tuesday at Comfort Inn and Suites in Burlington.



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Malcolm Nelson, Ombudsman for Part E of the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act (EEOICPA), speaks during a special meeting regarding the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program (EEOICP) hosted by the The U.S. Department of Labor and other federal agencies on Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2016 at Comfort Inn and Suites in Burlington, IA. Two more meetings of this nature will be held today and Thursday in Ames, IA.



Ben Roberts/The Hawk Eye

Rachel Leiton, Director of the Division of Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation (DEEOIC) speaks during a special meeting regarding the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program (EEOICP) hosted by the The U.S. Department of Labor and other federal agencies on Tuesday, Sept. 13, 2016 at Comfort Inn and Suites in Burlington, IA. Two more meetings of this nature will be held today and Thursday in Ames, IA.

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