U.S. Department of Labor

Assistant Secretary for
Employment Standards
Washington, D.C. 20210

April 20, 2007

To the Nuclear Weapons Worker Community:

Recently, you may have seen news coverage alleging that the Department of Labor (DOL) and DOL officials who administer the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act (EEOICPA) program have sought to cut benefits to sick, deserving workers. As the Assistant Secretary who oversees this program, I want to assure you that these claims are false. I am deeply concerned that these media reports are misrepresenting the situation and causing you unnecessary anxiety. The Department always has been, and remains, 100 percent committed to administering this program fairly and effectively.

Since the EEOICPA program began in 2000, our staff has been working hard to process claims fairly and promptly. Our staff has made extraordinary efforts to help suffering nuclear workers and their families. From the beginning of the program, everyone involved – at every level – has been keenly aware that many claimants are ill, elderly, and have been awaiting not only compensation but also recognition of their sacrifice for a long time. Recognizing this, we have been, and will continue to be, committed to fulfilling our responsibility to all claimants, and we are proud to be involved in providing this public service.

Also, I want you to know about recent key actions we have taken to improve our service to you:

- Late last year, our claims staff recognized that many workers had received a decision that their illness was a result of exposure to toxic substances at a nuclear weapons site, and that they might be entitled to compensation for impairment or wage loss. However, many of these workers didn't apply for compensation. As a result, we had our Resource Center personnel contact every claimant who might be eligible for impairment or wage loss benefits, explain these benefits to them in detail, and help them request the benefits.

- In the past year, our program staffs have conducted more than 40 outreach meetings with workers and former workers. During these meetings, we have gathered information concerning processes, functions, and potential exposures at the nuclear weapons sites. This information helps us to better assist claimants in developing their claims of illness resulting from toxic exposures.

But, past actions mean very little if they are not matched by a claimant-service focus now and in the future. Our plans for continued improvements include:

- Conducting additional town hall meetings to receive claimant feedback – to help us improve medical benefits services and identify obstacles to workers requesting EEOICPA medical benefits reimbursements and/or impairment or wage loss benefits.

- Having our Resource Centers provide more hands-on assistance to claimants to obtain medical tests for impairment ratings and identify the potential for wage-loss eligibility.

- Making our website and publications more user-friendly, so you can get the information you need quickly and easily.

All of us on the DOL team, including myself, Shelby Hallmark (Director, Worker's Compensation Programs), and Peter Turcic (Director, Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation) want you to remain confident that the EEOICPA program is there for you and your family. We share a deep commitment to finding better ways to assist those who depend on EEOICPA's benefits. Please know that we will strive to do our very best to help those claimants who sacrificed their health for our nation's freedom.

If you have questions about the EEOICPA program, please call our toll-free number at 1-866-888-3322, or visit one of our eleven Resource Centers.

Sincerely,

Victoria A. Lipnic

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