



# WEC@WORK

News from the NJ Work Environment Council

Dec/Nov 2010

Safe, Secure Jobs  
and a Healthy,  
Sustainable  
Environment

## SAVE THE DATE!

An Evening with  
David Michaels  
Asst. Secretary of  
Labor, OSHA

Tuesday  
March 15, 2011  
7:00 p.m.

Rutgers Labor  
Education Center  
New Brunswick,  
NJ

More information  
will be available  
in January.

## Union Fights Toxic Misting of Ambulances

In a case with national implications for whether health care workers and patients can be treated like guinea pigs to discover the health effects of toxic chemicals, a New Jersey union of emergency medical services workers is battling Monmouth-Ocean Hospital Service Corporation (MONOC) to stop its toxic micro-misting of ambulances. The disinfectants used in the micro-misting have sickened approximately 100 union members and may have endangered patients traveling in the ambulances, according to the Professional Emergency Medical Services Association of New Jersey (PEMSA-NJ), Local 4610 of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), the union representing most MONOC employees.

When workers initially developed symptoms, they did not connect their health problems to the ambulances. Even staff performing micro-misting had not been provided information on the disinfectant's health hazards. It was not until union leaders saw a May 2009 press release from MONOC advertising the micro-misting system that they began to suspect that medical symptoms could be linked to disinfectant exposures. The symptoms - migraines, sinus, respiratory, skin and bladder infections, nausea, diarrhea, gastroesophageal reflux disease, and esophageal ulcers - did not occur when MONOC used normal methods of disinfection. After October 12, 2010 when MONOC was ordered by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's Pesticide Control Program (DEP) to stop micro-misting ambulances with the first disinfectant, Zimek QD, they began micro-misting with a second disinfectant, Sporidicid. According to the union,

workers then became more acutely ill with respiratory symptoms, pulmonary edema, and anaphylactic shock. At this point, union leaders concluded that the micro-misting was at fault. The union maintains that at least ten workers are seriously ill, including six who are unable to work. They are also concerned about children getting sick from residues carried home on their parents' work clothes. Union President Deborah Ehling prepared a fact sheet that her members have provided to their physicians to help inform them of the disinfectant's adverse health effects.

PEMSA-NJ is fighting on several fronts. They filed complaints with DEP, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). While investigations by these agencies continue, union leaders worry that employee exposures and health problems continue, as well. President Ehling, a registered nurse, certified emergency nurse, and mobile intensive care paramedic, told WEC, "EPA is investigating not only MONOC but also Zimek Technologies, manufacturer of the micro-misting system. EPA is coordinating with OSHA, which is reviewing medical records of affected employees. We expect OSHA to enforce their Hazard Communication and personal protective equipment standards. We also want OSHA to use the General Duty Clause to cite MONOC for knowingly exposing their employees to serious physical harm from the micro-misting." OSHA cited MONOC in 2009 for violations of its Bloodborne Pathogens and Compressed Gas Standards.

The Zimek Micro-Mist System converts liquid disinfectant into

negatively charged, respirable, dry, micron-sized particles, coating ambulance surfaces and entering its ventilation system, exposing workers and patients transported in ambulances for up to three hours. Micro-misting ambulances for disinfection is not medically necessary because normal disinfection methods, such as disinfectant wiping, are effective in preventing communicable diseases.

"The risks of the micro-mist method of applying disinfectants are not yet fully understood but are unfortunately becoming clearer", said WEC industrial hygiene consultant Eileen Senn, one expert assisting the union. Senn said, "It is possible the micro-misting creates particles, even nanoparticles, more toxic than normal fogged particles." PEMSANJ's fight may well have importance beyond New Jersey since the Zimek technology is being aggressively marketed worldwide by the company, based in Tampa, FL, to health care facilities, fire and police departments, and the private sector, for use indoors and in vehicles. MONOC claims that the micro-misting is safe in their communication with employees and others.

For more information, visit: [www.njwec.org/NovDec10.cfm](http://www.njwec.org/NovDec10.cfm). This article was written by Eileen Senn, WEC Industrial Hygiene Consultant.

## Use NJ's Highly Rated Hazardous Substance Fact Sheets

Workers, safety and health experts, emergency responders, and health professionals in New Jersey, the nation, and the world have found that the *Hazardous Substance Fact Sheets* issued by the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) to be an extremely valuable information source and often far more complete and accurate than MSDS's written by chemical producers. Now Miriam Weil, a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell, interviewing lab employees, rated several sources of toxicity information. The NJ fact sheets rated an "A" in all areas and beat all other sources. The fact sheets are so useful that the United Steelworkers Health, Safety, and Environment Department developed an iPhone app for them. Search USW in the iTunes app store.

Each quarter, the DHSS Right to Know Program uploads new or revises existing fact sheets. They are available at [www.nj.gov/health/rtk](http://www.nj.gov/health/rtk). You can also obtain them on a CD by calling (609) 984-2202.

They are prepared for substances on the *New Jersey Right to Know Hazardous Substance List*. There are more than 1,600 fact sheets and about 800 have been translated into Spanish. The fact sheets are prepared on single substances and contain information on health hazards, exposure limits, personal protective equipment, proper handling, first aid, and emergency procedures for fires and spills.

## Advice on Cancer Clusters

Advice on how to handle worker concerns about possible job-related cancer clusters appears in the December issue of the *NJEA Reporter*. The article includes tips on identifying cancer clusters and how to deal with obstacles to address this concern. Although the article, "Cancer clusters difficult to prove" was written for school staff, the advice is applicable to any workplace and any union, including actions that can be taken by a health and safety committee. Go to [www.njea.org](http://www.njea.org). Choose "Issues and Political Action", then "Health and Safety." Scroll down to "Health and Safety Articles".

## 2010 WEC Reception

Congratulations to WEC's 2010 Annual Awards Celebration Awardees for their contributions to the labor and environmental movement: Senator Frank Lautenberg; the Fredon Education Association, Fredon Board of Education, and Fredon Parents Against the Lines; Coalition for Healthy Ports; and Harriet Rubenstein of Health Professionals and Allied Employees. WEC also awarded a WEC Service Award to Jane Nogaki for her years of service on the WEC Board. Special thanks to the 2010 WEC Reception Sponsors: Platinum sponsor – NJEA; Gold sponsor – IBT Local 877; Silver sponsors – IBT Port Division and HPAAE; and the countless others who made the 2010 Awards Celebration successful!

Visit [www.facebook.com/njwec](http://www.facebook.com/njwec) to see photos from the event. If you would like to see all of the sponsors of the event, contact Debra Coyle McFadden at [dcoyle@njwec.org](mailto:dcoyle@njwec.org) for a copy of the 2010 Awards Reception Ad Journal.

## Christie for President?

WEC held yet another thought-provoking membership meeting titled, "Chris Christie for President?" on Thursday, December 9, 2010. Invited speakers gave brief updates on Governor Christie's policies on education, energy, environmental justice, chemical safety and security, and labor. The updates were followed by a lively discussion of the issues and how WEC and our allies can best defend against the attacks on the regulations and policies that have long protected workers, communities and the environment. Special thanks to our speakers.

## Free Training Available from WEC

In 2010, WEC trained 400 workers and managers at facilities that use high hazard chemicals like chlorine and ammonia through our *Preventing Chemical Accidents* training project on process safety management. The training led to workplace changes, including safer chemical storage, better electrical "lockout-tagout" procedures, enhanced emergency communication systems, and updating work procedures. WEC's *Safe Work, Safe Care* project reached over 250 workers and managers at hospitals and nursing homes. One outcome of WEC's training is at Camden's Cooper University Hospital. A Safe Patient Handling Committee set up by the Health Professionals and Allied Employees with management now provides ongoing training. With new equipment and this training, lifting related injuries have decreased.

In 2011, WEC will continue to provide health and safety training for high hazard industries and will expand our work to reach more workers about their basic rights under OSHA. Contact us today to set up training for your union or organization!

## Get the Latest Info and Action Alerts!

WEC@WORK is a bimonthly publication that highlights our work and issues that concern our members. "Like" the NJ Work Environment Council on Facebook to get updates and action alerts from us and our allies, information on upcoming events and related issues!

Support WEC with a tax-deductible contribution!

Thank you to all our supporters for making 2010 a successful year! With your help, WEC will continue to bring together labor and environmentalists to fight for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment in the upcoming year.

Please consider giving a special year-end donation to show your support for WEC and the blue-green movement. All contributions to WEC are tax-deductible! Donate now through our secure website at [www.njwec.org](http://www.njwec.org).

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Back issues of *WEC@WORK* are available at [www.njwec.org](http://www.njwec.org). Rick Engler & Denise Patel, Editors. WEC is an alliance of 70 labor, environmental and community organizations working together for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment. WEC Staff: Rick Engler, Director; Debra Coyle McFadden, Assistant Director; Cecelia Leto, Project Coordinator; Denise Patel, Campaign Organizer. Staff are members of USW or CWA.