Paducah Local Hosts Fall Atomic Council Meeting

Members of USW’s Atomic Energy Workers Council (AEWC) held their fall meeting at Local 550’s union hall in Paducah, Ky., which included a tour of the cleanup work being done at the former gaseous diffusion plant.

Besides discussion over the Department of Energy (DOE), local union issues, robotics and the Worker Health Protection Program (WHPP), members heard a presentation by attorney, Julie Ford, regarding arbitration awards and fitness for duty.

At the suggestion of Local Union (LU) 12-369 member Bill Collins from the Hanford plant, the council decided to form an AEWC caucus for the Energy Communities Alliance (ECA) meetings in Washington, DC.

Besides being a vehicle to get the council’s voice heard in DC, it enables the group to create one-on-one relationships with DOE staffers, DOE appointees by the administration, Congress and congressional staffers involved in the nuclear sector.

AEWC decided to hold the caucus meeting/reception this spring in conjunction with the ECA meeting in DC, and proposed to fund the caucus with a 50-cent per capita increase.

Robotics

AEWC President Jim Key and Rod Rimando, DOE environmental management director of the Office of Technology, discussed the opportunities to use robotics for assisting—not replacing—workers in areas of high radioactive contamination.

“In some sectors, robotics is a job-killer, but that is not true in the nuclear sector,” Rimando said. “A robotic device will always require a human because of the nature of change in our work. Robotics in the nuclear sector is for doing our work safer and better.”

Workers would control the robots’ movements with I-pads, enabling them to be at an increased distance from a radiation source and not receive exposure.

The aging nuclear work force is prompting DOE to have workers wear exoskeletal suits to protect them from repetitive motion disorders, fatigue, muscle atrophy and the effects of aging.

USW Assistant Legislative Director Roxanne Brown said it is critical for the union to control the automation happening within the nuclear sector before it develops further without USW input.

“We are working on the next phase of nuclear operations; it is key we control this automation,” Brown said. “Maybe we can attract young people to work in the nuclear sector because they think it is cool.”
Local 1-689 on its Way to Becoming Regional Training Center for Atomic Workers

Local Union (LU) 1-689 President Herman Potter’s dream has always been to have an East Coast training center at the former Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion Plant cleanup site in Piketon, Ohio, that is similar to the Hazardous Materials Management and Emergency Response (HAMMER) Training Center at the Hanford nuclear reservation in Washington State.

“Twenty years ago the local union discussed moving into doing training and it grew from there,” Herman said.

“They’re the local union discussed moving into doing training and it grew from there,” Herman said.

“Through the years we gained a support system.”

This support includes the USWTMC, which obtains federal government grants to fund the local union’s health and safety training for its members, the community, DOE sites and other USW DOE sites; community leaders; vocational schools; the City of Piketon; contractors; DOE and federal legislators. Herman and Local 1-689 worked hard over the years to establish relationships with each of these groups.

“Ten or more years ago, me and one of the Pike County council members, Jennifer Chandler, had the idea of establishing a regional training center in order to encourage reindustrialization and bring companies into the site,” Herman said. “If DOE releases clean land on the site and there is infrastructure for re-industrialization, that puts us in a position to grow.”

The gaseous diffusion plant ceased operations in May 2001, and since then, workers at the former plant have been engaged in extensive environmental cleanup of the site.

Building Training Credentials

Herman said the local union began doing Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) training in 1989, and in the last seven years has conducted OSHA, safety representative and industrial hygiene training with the help of the USWTMC and contractors.

Marybeth Potter, a LU 1-689 member and training coordinator with the USW Tony Mazzocchi Center (USWTMC), said many of the LU 1-689 worker-trainers provide training for other USW-represented industrial and nuclear sites, DOE sites, as well as the community training. They also are considered OSHA trainers for the USWTMC and train other trainers.

In addition, the site has a robotics initiative and the local union is in the process of partnering with DOE, TMC and Sandia National Labs to conduct robotic safety training.

“I think we have a progressive local union. We push every opportunity we have to ensure work at this site by maintaining the quality and skills of our membership,” Herman said.

Local’s Training Helps Improve Unions’ Image

Local Union (LU) 1-689 decided to expand its health and safety training to the Piketon community several years ago, and it is paying off in employment opportunities for local residents and good press for the union.

“There is such a negative stigma about unions, especially at our site, because the employees make more money than the surrounding community. We thought if we do health and safety training for free at high schools, students would develop a more positive view of unions,” said LU 1-689 President Herman Potter. “This high school and community training gives students the certification they need to go into a job.”

Marybeth Potter, a LU 1-689 member and training coordinator with the USW Tony Mazzocchi Center (USWTMC), said the local mainly does 40-hour Hazardous Materials Management and Emergency Response (HAZWOPER) and OSHA 10-hour and 30-hour training at the local high schools, and also provides this training for the Communications Workers of America, other USW locals in other industries, the Ross County Safety Council and other county safety councils.

“We are getting good coverage in local media for our training,” she said.

Earlier this year the local saw a desperate need for more radiation control technicians (RCTs) at the Piketon site, and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Village of Piketon for free classroom space for RCT and future training. They also formed the Energy Industry Training Consortium (EITC).

The pilot RCT course began in September and ends in January 2018. Twenty RCT graduates will have the opportunity to get family-supporting work in their community at the site. The local hopes to hold another RCT class in the future.

“It takes time; it takes a lot of work. I’ve been lucky to have good, strong relationships at our site; good people in our local; and excellent people in our community to work with, such as Lathe Moore, adult education director of Pike County Vo-Tech school, and Jennifer Chandler, a Piketon city council member,” Herman said.

“I think we are a good model as a union, and a good model for how a union can interface with the community and contractors to encourage reindustrialization of a site,” he added.
Local Union (LU) 652 members, who handle the cleanup of the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) site, ratified a five-year agreement in May 2017, with the new cleanup contractor, Fluor Idaho LLC (Fluor).

USW members at INL remove and process radioactive waste and store spent nuclear fuel at the 890-square-mile site, located in the eastern Idaho high desert.

The Department of Energy (DOE) awarded the five-year, Idaho Cleanup Project (ICP) Core contract to Fluor in February 2016. The new contractor assumed responsibility on June 1, 2016 for work that was previously conducted by two contractors, Idaho Treatment Group LLC (ITG) and CH2M-WG Idaho, LLC (CW1).

### Major Contract Issues

Before the USW contract with CW1 expired in early May 2017, the union began negotiations with Fluor. Site access was a point of concern during negotiations. The Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD 12) is a common identification standard for federal employees and contractors.

LU 652 negotiators turned to Rick Fuentes, LU 9477 president at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, for contract language regarding HSPD 12. Consequently, the Idaho LU was able to get contract language for an appeal process and an accommodation provision for people who have an active appeal of an HSPD 12 denial.

However, since then, Fluor’s position has been that it cannot allow access—escorted or not—to a person who was denied a HSPD 12 badge, according to District 12 Staff Representative Gaylan Prescott.

“Fluor’s idea of accommodation is to place the person on an unpaid administrative leave until the appeal has been timely filed and final determination made, which takes about 45 days. “We grieved Fluor’s failure to provide escorted access, and we demanded to bargain over the change in badging/access. But those are ongoing disputes where the outcomes are very uncertain at this point,” he added.

The second major contract issue concerned Fluor’s desire for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to ensure the ICP unions would work with the contractor to accomplish work across the project. It was a delicate topic for the USW because of jurisdictional issues with the Operating Engineers who had a contract with ITG.

“In the end, an MOU was signed that, in our opinion, didn’t jeopardize our work jurisdiction boundaries,” said LU 652 Vice President Henry Littleford.

He said the remaining contract issues concerned clarification and cleanup of existing contract language, economics and contract term. The five-year agreement began May 6, 2017 and ends May 6, 2022.

The pay increase for the first year is 2.25 percent; 2.5 percent the second year; 2.75 percent the third year; 3 percent the fourth year and 3 percent the fifth year.

Littleford said the pay increase for the vast majority of members averages more than a dollar an hour for each year.

### Local 652 Faces New Challenges at Idaho National Laboratory

With a new contractor come new rules and practices. For USW Local Union 652 this meant encountering training issues and outsourcing. But despite the challenges, a LU 652 leader said Fluor Idaho LLC has been relatively easy to work with in the past 17 months it has had the Idaho Cleanup Project (ICP) Core contract.

LU 652 Vice President Henry Littleford said that when Fluor took over, it changed such systems as timekeeping and payroll, procurement and work control. These new policies caused issues the local union had to handle, he said.

Fluor assigned newly-trained employees to unfamiliar areas to execute what they learned and they made errors, he said. The contractor also did not tell employees when their training was due or had expired. He said workers also were not being scheduled to attend the required class or computer-based training.

“The result is that employees were performing work that they weren’t qualified or trained to perform,” he said.

### Possible Outsourcing

Littleford said the contract between the Department of Energy (DOE) and Fluor incentivized the contractor to reduce costs. Consequently, Fluor is reviewing many of the services it purchased from the site’s DOE Nuclear Energy contractor, Battelle Energy Alliance (BEA).

Fluor evaluated the bus service first and thought it could save money by contracting with a private entity. Littleford said the USW represents the mechanics who work on the buses, and outsourcing would cost them their jobs. He said this would negatively impact the community because subcontractors usually pay less and provide fewer benefits.

Another service considered for outsourcing was the Occupational Medical Program where the USW represents the onsite nurses, he said.

“Outsourcing has not happened yet, but our local thinks that the DOE’s Request for Proposal for the Core contract

(continued on page 4)
Local Works Hard to Resolve Issues

(continued from page 3)
was an attack on unions because it incentivized the contractor to contract work that will ultimately impact union workers,” Littleford said.

Resolving Issues

Fred Hughes, Fluor Idaho president and program manager, previously worked at the INL site. He meets every month with Littleford and LU 652 President Matt Chavez to discuss issues.

“Our experience is that if Fred tells you he will do something, he follows through,” Littleford said.

“In one of our discussions with Fred, Matt recalled how BEA purchased the functional capacity machine to determine a worker’s fitness for duty. Our local fought about the machine for almost three years with BEA and DOE. BEA’s former CEO had a plan to use the machine to ‘weed out the old, lame and lazy’—in his words.

“Since then, BEA hired a physical therapist to educate employees on how to avoid injuries, and the union workforce has been supportive and receptive to this program.

“Fred was very receptive to what we had to say. He had the physical therapist attend meetings and give presentations across the Idaho Cleanup Project. Hopefully, this will reduce the number of accidents and injuries we are having throughout the site,” Littleford added.

Canadian Atomic Workers Win New Contract; Living Standards Improved; Pension Issues Resolved

More than 500 USW Local Union (LU) 1568 members ratified a two-year agreement in late October with Canadian Nuclear Laboratories (CNL) at its Chalk River facility in Ontario.

The contract is retroactive to April 1, 2017 and includes a total wage increase of 3 percent and provisions to resolve pension issues created when the Canadian federal government privatized the former operator at the site—Atomic Energy of Canada Limited.

Under private sector operation now, the site is controlled by an international consortium of corporations, including SNC-Lavalin.

If the federal government proceeds with plans to remove CNL employees from a public service pension plan, the contract provides for a switch to the Canadian Energy and Related Industries (CERi) Pension Plan, a union-sponsored, multi-employer plan.

The agreement also improves contract language affecting issues like seniority, hours of work and disciplinary matters.

It also introduces new provisions recognizing the impact of domestic violence and mental health issues on the workplace.

Employees covered by the contract include technicians, technologists, information technology personnel and radiation surveyors.

USW Ontario/Atlantic Director Marty Warren congratulated LU 1568 members for reaching an agreement despite the challenging circumstances caused by privatization and the austerity policies of successive federal governments.

“Our federal government continues to make it more difficult for working people to improve their working and living standards and to protect their retirement security,” Warren said. “It is a significant achievement for our members at CNL to confront these challenges and to reach a new collective agreement that addresses these issues in their workplace.

“The work of USW members is a primary factor in the success of CNL operations and for Canada’s standing as a leader in the peaceful use and development of nuclear energy, science and technology.”