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Celebrating survival

Former IAAP workers meet for lunch, update on compensation program.

By CHRISTINIA CRIPPES
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Nearly half of the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant's retired employees who have gotten involved with the Former Worker Program have passed away during the past 10 years.

Laurence Fuortes, project director for the Burlington Atomic Energy Commission Plant Former Worker Program at the University of Iowa College of Public Health, said that sad statistic is why it's so important for those who have survived to get together each year and celebrate.

"That's really why we do it is to celebrate our survival," Fuortes said of the luncheon that more than 200 former workers and their families gathered at the Memorial Auditorium on Thursday to attend. He said it's also to remember those who have passed away each year.

While the turnout more than filled the banquet room's main floor, it also was clear many attendees were not former workers but rather their children and spouses.

Sue Wilson and Amy Allen, both of Burlington, for example, attended the luncheon on behalf of their father, Edward McDade, to find more resources that can help with his increasing medical bills.

"We don't want to give up," Allen said.

Wilson added, "The bills have reached thousands and thousands of dollars."

McDade, who was unable to attend the luncheon Thursday due to his illnesses, worked at the plant between the years of 1956 and 1996.

Wilson said McDade qualified for the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program for his diagnosis of colon cancer. The nearly 85-year-old McDade since has been diagnosed with skin cancer and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, or COPD.

As recommended by U.S. Department of Labor claims manager Daniel Wright, Wilson said she has filed additional claims to the EEOICP for those new diagnoses. But Allen said the COPD diagnosis was denied, and Wilson said she was not aware the new cancer would qualify.

Wright recommended many times during a presentation to the crowd that any time a EEOICP beneficiary gets a new diagnosis, they should file a new claim.

Wright said the compensation program only covers medical expenses that relate to the diagnosis or disease for which the person originally qualified. A checkup related to one's lung cancer, for example, will be paid for by the compensation program. An unrelated rash will not.

But Wright said new diagnoses often either are a result of the employee's time at the plant - especially for another cancer diagnosis - or a complication of the original diagnosis. He said, for example, certain kinds of diabetes are a result of steroid use, which may be a treatment a doctor recommends for the

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first condition.

Wright spent an hour and a half before lunch talking to the beneficiaries and their families about the coverage and caveats of the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program.

Most of his answers, once someone becomes a beneficiary, were affirming certain activities or certain treatments or certain medical devices were covered under the program. But he also said many were dependent on first getting authorization from the Labor Department before making the purchase or going in for the treatment.

He also said there are options for reimbursement if a former worker chooses to use a physician or treatment not enrolled in the program, but it could cost some out-of-pocket money and cause delays in getting reimbursed.

By a show of hands, about a quarter of the attendees were current beneficiaries, and another quarter were working through the process.

Fuortes' Former Worker Program at the University of Iowa offers free screenings to former IAAP employees who believe they have an illness as a result of their work. The screening program can be reached by calling (866) 282-5818 toll-free or by visiting www.iowafwp.org.

Claimants can call the Denver resource center toll-free at (866) 540-4977 or the Cleveland District Office toll-free at (888) 859-7211.

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