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# Inside The Fishbowl

## Official Newsletter of NTEU 280

SEPTEMBER 2006 Volume 22 - Number 6

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NTEU CHAPTER 280 PRESENTS THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION SESSIONS...

**FLEXITOUR/4-10** – NTEU280 has worked hard to bring these options to our bargaining unit employees. We can help you figure out which work schedule may work best for you. Come learn all about the new work schedule options available to you! Dates: October 17<sup>th</sup> (Potomac Yard – [room to be announced]); October 24<sup>th</sup> (Federal Triangle – [room to be announced]) at noon.

**PARS** – NTEU National and NTEU280 have negotiated a PARS agreement that is fairer to employees and that will result in better employee/manager interaction and feedback. Come hear updated information about PARS before you receive your 2006 review. Know your rights as an employee as you head into your review! Dates: October 3<sup>rd</sup> at noon (Potomac Yard [North 4830]). November 7<sup>th</sup> at noon Federal Triangle – [room to be announced]).

**NRC PANEL MEMBERS TO SPEAK AT UNION MEETING** Three members of the National Research Council panel that issued a report last March on EPA's drinking water standards for fluoride will speak at a meeting of NTEU Chapter 280 on October 12 at 1 p.m. in 1153 EPA East. Drs. Hardy Limeback, Kathy Thiessen and Robert Isaacson, along with Dr. Paul Connett will speak on their work studying fluoride toxicity. A panel discussion and a question and answer session will follow. All Chapter members are asked to attend, along with any other interested employees.

**X-BYTES**

# Dwight Welch

## Executive Vice President

### Employee Illness in EPA's "Green" Building - What To Do If You Feel Ill/Looking into the Brownfield Remediation

NTEU Chapter 280 and OPP and OSWER Program Management have entered into an informal agreement for accommodating those employees who have experienced illness from working at EPA's new "Green" building at Potomac Yard. But first, for those of you not working at Potomac Yard and not getting the e-mail traffic on this subject, here's some of the history.

Soon after Crystal City employees moved into the Potomac Yard building complex, EPA Headquarter's Unions started receiving phone calls and e-mails from employees complaining of illnesses and irritations they were experiencing while at work. In response, AFGE 3331 President, Steve Shapiro, and I sent out a brief e-mail to all OPP and OSWER employees asking them to please inform the Unions if they were feeling sick and believed it was related to the building. We received dozens of responses.

On August 2, 2006, the Unions arranged a meeting between affected Potomac Yard employees and representatives of the Facilities Management and Services Division (FMSD) and the Safety, Health, and Environmental Management Division (SHEMD) of the Office of Administration and Resource Management (OARM). Approximately two dozen Potomac Yard employees attended this meeting. Not all affected employees were able to attend because of schedule conflicts and it is likely that there were others who were unaware that symptoms they were experiencing were related to chemicals or other substances originating from the building. Employee complaints ranged from mild eye, nose, and breathing irritations to severe illness requiring extensive medication in order for the employee to continue breathing. Many complained of solvent and other odors and construction being done during work hours. Still others complained of dust from nearby construction sites. I had entered the building through one tower, but exited from the other tower. As I left, I noticed a distinct solvent odor in the elevator lobby.

After that meeting, Dr. Cate Jenkins of OSWER conducted a ventilation survey of the Potomac Yard building. She noted a number of malfunctions including inoperable parking garage ventilation fans and doors which, being left open rather than closed, reduced the efficiency of the

positive pressure ventilation designed to keep the building from being infiltrated by outside dust and fumes. I forwarded Dr. Jenkins's report to EPA FMSD.

As a result of these interactions, Rich Lemley, Director of the Office of Administrative Services of OARM, and I worked together to institute a number of changes to improve the situation. For one, no more construction work is to be done in the building during working hours. In addition, the malfunctions noted in the ventilation survey conducted by Dr. Jenkins have reportedly been corrected. Finally, Mr. Lemley informed me that he asked the building management to keep the ventilation running continuously throughout the day every day for at least a week in order to purge the building of any off-gassing substances. Reports from employees seem to indicate that the odors have dissipated, so this remedy seems to be effective. In the event that you see construction taking place during the day, notice that fans are inoperable and/or that doors to the outside are open, or detect offensive odors and/or irritants, please let me know immediately.

Although on a number of occasions, I have requested that I be invited to attend meetings with the building owners and EPA management at Potomac Yard, these requests have been denied. On two occasions, I requested that soil from the grounds around the building be sampled in order to ascertain, for everyone's peace of mind, that this former Brownfield site was, indeed, properly remediated. Both of my requests for analyzing soil samples were denied. Without data to demonstrate that the Potomac Yard site was properly remediated, it is not completely clear that employee illness is not due to toxins from the site rather than poor indoor air quality due to building start-up/move in. While I hope it is the latter, I have not ruled out the former.

Meanwhile, union representatives tried to persuade EPA management to permit employees who are ill as a result of working at Potomac Yard to be immediately removed from the site and permitted to work at an alternate work location. Current procedures require that an employee provide medical documentation before being permitted to report to work at an alternate location. I proposed an expedited procedure by which affected employees could receive immediate relief from exposure to workplace chemicals and irritants by being permitted to work at home or in other EPA space before having to provide medical documentation of illness. In a written response from OPP's Marty Monell, apparently written by someone other than Ms. Monell, my initial request for this expedited procedure was denied. I say "apparently" because when I met with Ms. Monell after I received her written denial, Ms. Monell's response to my initial proposal was favorable. In the written response, I was informed that there were already plenty of procedures in place to deal with this situation, such as reasonable accommodation, medical flexiplace, and episodic flexiplace. I elevated the rejected request for an expedited process to grant immediate relief to employees who were suffering from the air quality at Potomac Yard to EPA Administrator, Steve Johnson. I received a written response from OARM Assistant Administrator, Luis Luna, reiterating that there is already a process in place to deal with employees experiencing illness while at the workplace as well as what I would characterize as

“canned verbiage” about how wonderful the Potomac Yard building is. Mr. Luna also discussed evidence, based on indoor air quality testing conducted before and after EPA occupied the Potomac Yard facility, that indicated that levels of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, particulates, Total volatile organic compounds, formaldehyde, and 4-phenylcyclohexene were all below OSHA-established occupational exposure limits. However, if solvent odors are so easily detected by so many who enter and work at the building, then the fact that the building is a green building that meets OSHA limits for the chemical substances tested doesn’t mitigate concerns about illness and irritation experienced by dozens of employees while at work.

### What to Do if the Building is Making You Sick

I was, however, able to come to an informal resolution with OPP’s Marty Monell and later a similar resolution with OSWER’s Renee Wynn on what steps you can take if you are experiencing health problems while working in the building at Potomac Yard. Your first step is to apply to your immediate supervisor for reasonable accommodation, medical flexiplace, or episodic flexiplace. Your immediate supervisor should either grant the accommodation or respond to you in writing within 15 days as to why your request is being denied. If you have a problem getting an accommodation, you should immediately report it to your Union and/or Marty Monell in OPP or Renee Wynn in OSWER.

Marty Monell and later Renee Wynn proved to be “Managers Plus”. In discussing the process and procedures to be followed, Marty’s compassionate idea was that the affected employee could work at home first and once removed from the irritating/toxic environment, come up with medical documentation after being removed. The idea was enthusiastically seconded by Renee Wynn later in a separate meeting.

Removing people immediately from the irritating environment. This is not only a compassionate idea, but a wise and sensible idea as well. Most people are not genetically predisposed to Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), but for those who are, with immediate removal, they will probably recover. If MCS is allowed to progress into more advanced stages, however, the life-long illness is often irreversible, causing years of suffering and sometimes even premature death.

### Is the PY Site Improperly Remediated?

Since EPA management has not provided me with irrefutable evidence to show that the soil on which the new building is built is no longer contaminated, I have some doubt about whether the Potomac Yard site was properly remediated. EPA management refuses to permit the Unions to take soil samples and have them analyzed. In addition, EPA Management has barred the Headquarter's Unions from attending meetings at which employee illnesses resulting from working in the building are discussed between EPA management and the building owners. (If invited, I would at least bring along a toxicologist.) Furthermore, whenever questions are raised about the site's history of chemical contamination, the responses have focused primarily on the attributes of the green building and some general information about investigations by government environmental agencies regarding cleanup of the Potomac Yard site

I am currently engaged in getting some of EPA's scientists to examine the remediation data. After the scientific reviews are completed, I will report back to the readership the conclusions of the scientific experts.

Again, it is my hope that the problems in PY are routine building startup/move-in problems. I have worked hard on resolving these problems and if you have any suggestions, please call me or send me a note. I would like to thank my colleague, Steve Shapiro, President of AFGE 3331, for all his help and expertise and for his cooperation in trying to address these problems. The Potomac Yard situation has united the Headquarter's Unions.

**How OPP Employees Can Include Information on Title, Letters, and Technical**

**Background in the EPA Locator Directory** Following the recent move to Potomac Yards, an OPP employee brought to NTEU's attention that the EPA locator directory lists titles (letters) for employees in the EPA Office of Research and Development, but not for other EPA offices. In partnership with OPP management, NTEU found that this information could easily be listed adjacent to the names of EPA employees who request it. For OPP employees, all that is required to have your title listed in the EPA locator data base is to send an e-mail request that includes your title to Betty Plummer of the ECS Team. Her additional contact information is listed below. If you have any problem, please contact Bill Evans of NTEU Chapter 280.

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**NINE EPA UNIONS SPEAK OUT ON FOOD QUALITY PROTECTION ACT ISSUE by  
Bill Hirzy**

(This is the first in a series of articles that will explain how and why NTEU Chapter 280 – and other EPA unions – engage in actions touching on programmatic issues that face the Agency’s employees in their day-to-day work.)

Last January, a Region 8 EPA toxicologist, with whom I had worked some years ago, telephoned me with concerns over whether EPA would adhere to the requirements of the Food Quality Protection Act with respect to re-registration of organophosphate and carbamate pesticides. Under the FQPA, EPA was required to complete re-registration actions on these and other pesticides by August 3, 2006.

Those concerns centered around requirements in the Act that a safety factor of ten be applied to risk control measures to protect children and unborn fetuses unless there is a complete and reliable data base showing that this age group is no more susceptible to the toxic effects of a pesticide than adults. (More details on specific concerns are given below.)

Why should NTEU Chapter 280 at Headquarters spend time on the concerns of a Region 8 employee? The reason is that those concerns about EPA’s decisions on re-registration of organophosphate and carbamate pesticides coincided with ones raised by headquarters employees in the Pesticide Office and those of the Agency’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) about OPP’s implementation of the FQPA.

In a recent report issued by EPA's Office of the Inspector General, *Measuring the Impact of the Food Quality Protection Act: Challenges and Opportunities*, issued August 1, 2006, OIG reported, "Although EPA had made progress in implementing the requirements of the FQPA, we found that OPP has primarily measured its success and the impact of FQPA by adherence to its re-registration schedule rather than by reductions in risk to children's health. The measures used by OPP generally indicate actions taken, instead of environmental or human health outcomes achieved. OPP lacks outcome measures to assess the specific impact of those actions on the health of children and others. OPP has recently taken steps to develop outcome measures, but significant challenges remain."

Concerns about the risk assessment on one of the organophosphates, malathion, were raised by Dr. Brian Dementi, recently retired EPA Headquarters Toxicologist and national OPP expert on that pesticide. NTEU Chapter 280 had been representing Dr. Dementi in his on-going disagreements with the Office of Pesticide Programs over how the Office was dealing with malathion risks under OPP's FQPA re-registration review. Dr. Dementi's concerns regarding OPP's risk assessment for malathion are manifold, including: (1) failure to adequately consider potential developmental neurotoxicity concerns because results of developmental neurotoxicity studies fail to show a no-effect level in young animals; (2) suspicious changes in EPA's carcinogenicity classification from an initial classification indicating malathion to have higher potential to be a carcinogen to a subsequent classification indicating malathion to have lower carcinogenic potential; and (3) failure to account for degradation of malathion to more toxic substances while in storage.

After the Region 8 toxicologist contacted me, I informed our Executive Board and received authorization to proceed with working with that person and Dr. Dementi on this issue.

Region 8 employees are represented by American Federation of Government Employees Local 3607. Late in 2005, the AFGE Council of EPA unions, at the initiative of Local 3607 President, Dave Christianson, asked the AFGE National President to submit comments on EPA's proposed Human Testing Rule, asking for a number of changes in EPA's policy. Since the AFGE unions had already weighed in on EPA/OPP activities, the Region 8 toxicologist and Dave Christianson thought another multi-union submission on this related matter could have a beneficial effect on EPA's compliance with the FQPA and, as a result, on public health. After several conversations among the unions and Dr. Dementi, a letter was drafted outlining the points the two toxicologists wanted to make. At this juncture, AFGE Local 3331 President, Steve Shapiro, joined the discussions because of concerns that some of his bargaining unit members were expressing to him about the pesticide re-registration decisions and the draft letter was modified to take these into account.

The coalition of EPA's labor unions have a weekly conference call during which issues of mutual interest are aired. At this weekly conference call, this subject was brought up for discussion. Several drafts of a letter from the unions to Administrator Johnson were circulated among coalition members, and finally three NTEU Chapters, five AFGE Locals and a Local of Engineers and Scientists of California signed on. One other AFGE Local later expressed support after the signed letter had been sent. The full text of the letter can be read on NTEU Chapter 280's website, [www.nteu280.org/currentissues](http://www.nteu280.org/currentissues).

The leadership of Local 3607's Dave Christianson was vital in crafting the letter and in securing other AFGE unions' support for it.

The essence of the letter is that EPA does not have a complete and reliable data base on the subject pesticides, especially regarding developmental neurotoxicity, and so ought not to proceed with re-registration without appropriate safety factors, and that too much emphasis on reaching consensus with the regulated community and the Department of Agriculture is resulting in pressure on staff to "go easy" on regulatory controls on these pesticides. The letter invoked EPA's Principles of Scientific integrity and also asked for adequate protection for farm workers and their children and for similar action on all industrial and commercial chemicals subject to laws that EPA administers.

The letter caught the attention of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) and Pesticide Action Network North America (PANNA), and these organizations saw to it that the letter came to the attention of the media. Articles on the letter have appeared in the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, Scientific American magazine and a number of other newspapers and trade journals. A broadcast on National Public Radio's *Marketplace* featured interviews on the letter, and other journalists continue to express interest in the subject. PEER's Executive Director, Jeff Ruch, said on the *Marketplace* broadcast that it was, "... unusual that the unions are taking on these issues of scientific integrity and intellectual candor, and it bodes well because it means that you have an effective way for the scientists to communicate with the people they actually work with, the American public." (Ed. Note: See the article immediately below and the article following that with its editorial remarks by Arthur Chiu and Bill Hirzy, and tell us what you think. We can withhold names from Letters to the Editor upon request, but we will not print items sent in anonymously.)

**BUSH DECLARES ECO-WHISTLEBLOWER LAW VOID FOR EPA EMPLOYEES —  
Repeal of Clean Water Act Protections by Invoking "Sovereign Stealth Immunity"**

For Immediate Release: September 4, 2006

Contact: Carol Goldberg (202) 265-7337

**(Editor's Note: A bargaining unit member asked NTEU Chapter 280 to include this news release in *Inside the Fishbowl*. Permission to include this news release was granted by the author, Carol Goldberg.)**

Washington, DC — The Bush administration has declared itself immune from whistleblower protections for federal workers under the Clean Water Act, according to legal documents released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). As a result of an opinion issued by a unit within the Office of the Attorney General, federal workers will have little protection from official retaliation for reporting water pollution enforcement breakdowns, manipulations of science or cleanup failures.

Citing an “unpublished opinion of the [Attorney General’s] Office of Legal Counsel,” the Secretary of Labor’s Administrative Review Board has ruled federal employees may no longer pursue whistleblower claims under the Clean Water Act. The opinion invoked the ancient doctrine of sovereign immunity which is based on the old English legal maxim that “The King Can Do No Wrong.” It is an absolute defense to any legal action unless the “sovereign” consents to be sued.

The opinion and the ruling reverse nearly two decades of precedent. Approximately 170,000 federal employees working within environmental agencies are affected by the loss of whistleblower rights.

“The Bush administration is engineering the stealth repeal of whistleblower protections,” stated PEER General Counsel Richard Condit, who had won several of the earlier cases applying environmental whistleblower protections to federal specialists. “The use of an unpublished opinion to change official interpretations is a giant step backward to the days of the secret Star Chamber.” PEER ultimately obtained a copy of the opinion under the Freedom of Information Act.

At the same time, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is taking a more extreme position that absolutely no environmental laws protect its employees from reprisal. EPA’s stance would place the provisions of all major federal environmental laws, such as the Clean Air Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act, beyond the reach of federal employees seeking legal protection for good faith efforts to enforce or implement the anti-pollution provisions contained within those laws.

These actions arose in the case of Sharyn Erickson, an EPA employee who had reported problems with agency contracts for toxic clean-ups. After conducting a hearing, an administrative law judge called EPA’s conduct “reprehensible” and awarded Erickson \$225,000 in punitive damages but the Labor Secretary overturned that ruling.

“It is astonishing for the Bush administration to now suddenly claim that it is above the law,” said PEER Senior Counsel Paula Dinerstein, who is handling Erickson’s appeal of the Labor Secretary’s ruling to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit based in Atlanta. “Congress

could end this debate by simply declaring that it intends that the whistleblower protections of these anti-pollution laws apply to the federal government.”

Congress is now debating Clean Water Act clarifications in the wake of a confusing U.S. Supreme Court decision (*Rapanos et ux., et al. v. United States*) handed down this June that muddies the extent of federal jurisdiction over wetlands. Unless Congress also resolves the Clean Water Act sovereign immunity question, scores of federal employee whistleblower cases may be dismissed or languish in limbo while the issue is litigated.

## **SECOND PEOPLES' ONFERENCE ON FLUORIDE CONFERENCE by Bill Hirzy.**

***Editorial Remarks remarks by Arthur Chiu and Bill Hirzy*** The material below is a summary by one of us (Bill Hirzy) of an article by Bette Hileman writing in the September 4, 2006 edition of *Chemical and Engineering News*, (C&EN) along with my own input as a participant in the conference. It appears in the *Inside the Fishbowl* as part of the series of articles on scientific integrity mentioned in the accompanying article on the multi-union letter to Administrator Johnson about organophosphate pesticides and the Food Quality Protection Act. We feel it is important to keep in front of EPA professionals the idea that they have a right and an obligation to, as our Civil Service oath says, “...defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic...” The way we do this is to fight against attempts by anyone to pervert or to ignore science as our Agency discharges its duty to administer environmental law. We feel it is important to keep reminding ourselves of this right and obligation as a matter of not only defending the Constitution, but also of defending the honor of the Civil Service.

The C&EN article is at this URL <http://pubs.acs.org/cen/government/84/8436gov1.html>

The Second Citizens' Conference on Fluoride was held at St. Lawrence University, Canton, N.Y., on July 28-30. It was organized by Paul Connett, chemistry professor emeritus at St. Lawrence and executive director of the Fluoride Action Network. Three members of the National Research Council (NRC) committee who wrote a fluoride report for EPA that was released in March 2006 spoke at the meeting as did other scientists and citizens. I spoke on the need for Congress to review several issues related to EPA's drinking water standard setting process and the national program of water fluoridation.

The NRC report did not directly address water fluoridation, but the NRC committee members who made presentations all pointed out how their work does indeed have implications for that

program. The NRC committee members who spoke were Hardy Limeback, Chairman of Preventive Dentistry at the University of Toronto, Kathleen Thiessen a senior scientist at SENES Oak Ridge Inc., Center for Risk Analysis and Robert Isaacson, professor emeritus of psychology, State University of New York at Binghamton.

Dr. Limeback spoke of his study of fluoride levels in bone from fluoridated Toronto (1,033 ppm) *versus* bone from un-fluoridated Montreal (643 ppm). He said the Toronto bones had changed architecture, were more brittle and showed reduced resistance to compression. He said that long term exposure to ingested fluoride at 1 ppm in drinking water altered dentin as well as bone and could increase fracture rates for both. (About half of ingested fluoride accumulates in bone, and, in children whose permanent teeth have not erupted, in teeth.) He also said that moderate dental fluorosis, which involves yellow or brown mottling of teeth from excessive fluoride exposure, is occurring at rates as high as 30% in some fluoridated communities. Teeth with moderate fluorosis have weaker dentin with increased tubule size, he said. "This may make adult teeth fracture more easily."

Dr. Kathleen M. Thiessen presented evidence that water with about 1 mg/L of fluoride or more presents potential risks to the thyroid gland. She said that the average adult exposure to fluoridated water results in dose rates of about 0.03 mg/kg/day, levels at which one sees thyroid effects in some individuals with deficient iodine in their diets. She pointed out that a low level of thyroid hormone can increase the risk of heart disease, high cholesterol levels, depression, and, for pregnant women, decreased intelligence of offspring. Infants fed formulas made with fluoridated water are also at special risk, she said "Speaking as a scientist, based on the information I have looked at, with fluoridated water, we're dealing with uncontrolled and unmonitored exposures to an agent that is known to have adverse effects."

Dr. Robert L. Isaacson, who is co-author with EPA toxicologist Karl Jensen of a seminal 1998 paper in *Brain Research*, said that his study showed fluoride at levels found in drinking water affects brain function in adults. He noted that fluoride impairs the brain's ability to perform signaling functions, with the consequence that "messages that are passed along the many pathways are likely to be incomplete or wrong." Fluoride disrupts the creation and breakdown of neurofilaments in the axons of neurons, and interferes with both primary and secondary signaling in the nervous system, he said. He explained that his work showed that fluoride may also increase the number of plaques and tangles in the brains of adults similar to the abnormalities found in Alzheimer's patients. He noted epidemiology work from China indicating the likelihood that exposure to fluoride in the womb and throughout early life lowers intelligence, decreasing the number of children at the high end of the IQ spectrum and increasing the number at the low end

Michael Connett, son of Paul Connett and Director of the Fluoride Action spoke on the flaws in the science used to justify EPA's registration of sulfuranyl fluoride as a fumigant for food stuffs. He pointed out as a major flaw EPA's reliance on the 4 mg/L drinking water Maximum Contaminant Level Goal (MCLG) to justify higher tolerances for fluoride required for sulfuranyl

fluoride's registration. That MCLG has now been shown by the NRC Report not to be protective of public health. He displayed calculations showing how this led to allowable reference doses for children and infants that are ten times higher than for adults, the exact opposite of what the Food Quality Protection Act calls for. (Also regarding sulfuryl fluoride, I cited in my presentation a letter that the union sent to the Office of Pesticide Programs on the subject asking that EPA rescind the tolerances related to sulfuryl fluoride use.)

In an attempt to have an exchange of views on water fluoridation, Dr. Connett invited William R. Maas, director of the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) Division of Oral Health, to the meeting, but he declined. You may recall that at EPA's Science Forum 2003 similar invitations to a number of organizations and individuals promoting fluoridation participate in a debate with Paul Connett were not accepted. Open discussion of the issue is not how fluoridation proponents conduct business.

**NEW LEADERS SEEK YOUR INPUT** As a result of the recent NTEU Chapter 280 election, many new faces are part of this Chapter's Executive Board. With these new faces come new ideas about the direction that our chapter should take. This Executive Board understands that our primary role is to serve the members of this bargaining unit. Most recently, members of the Executive Board successfully led negotiations and finalized the flexi-tour and 4/10 agreement. These negotiations take a lot of time and energy and the board believes that, to better serve this bargaining unit, we need your input in identifying the issues, activities, and programs you think are most important for the Union to champion on your behalf. While input for the union is normally only asked of dues-paying members, one of this Executive Board's goals is to increase the number of dues-paying members so that we can be more effective in serving members of this bargaining unit. With this goal in mind, we are asking our bargaining unit members to provide feedback about how you would like to see us prioritize our efforts. With your feedback and commitment to become a dues-paying member, we will be in a better position to make NTEU Chapter 280 the kind of union that you would be proud to be a part of.

The primary impetus for establishing a union chapter for professional employees of EPA headquarters in 1983 was that some professional employees in EPA felt pressure by their managers to prepare documents that ignored or distorted scientific facts in order to support predetermined environmental regulatory decisions. These brave individuals put their careers at risk and established the first union chapter for professional employees, Local 2050 of the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE), to protect employees from overzealous managers who appeared to be more concerned about advancing their own careers than protecting public health and the environment. One result achieved by our union was to establish a modicum of professional ethics for EPA, now known as the "Principles of Scientific Integrity". (For more information on the History of EPA's union that represents headquarters professional employees and on the principles of scientific integrity, refer to NTEU Chapter 280's website at

[www.nteu280.org](http://www.nteu280.org)). Since its inception in 1983, this union broadened its mission to focus on traditional workplace issues, such as protecting the rights of bargaining unit members, clarifying matters related to the workplace, and representing bargaining unit members in grievances.

To clarify matters related to the workplace, EPA and NTEU have negotiated a collective bargaining agreement covering employees in the professional bargaining unit. This collective bargaining agreement establishes procedures for employees and managers to follow regarding many workplace matters including, but not limited to, employee rights; rights of the employer; union rights; employee performance evaluation; personnel records and access to information; labor management relations; disciplinary actions; transit subsidies; and negotiated grievance procedures. This union also represents bargaining unit members in grievances, either through an informal process or, if that is not possible, through the formal grievance process. We have a high rate of success in resolving grievances initiated by employees in our bargaining unit. To find out more about the collective bargaining agreement and the grievance process, access our website at [www.nteu280.org](http://www.nteu280.org).

Since its formation, the EPA union to represent professional employees has worked hard to establish important employee benefits, such as:

- compressed work schedule
- transit subsidy
- flexi-place
- fitness centers
- numerous GS-14 positions
- non-supervisory GS-15 positions
- alternative work schedules (4/10 and Flexi-tour)
- on-site day-care facilities

Many other federal agencies do not enjoy these benefits. This chapter of NTEU has been a leader in making these benefits available to EPA employees in our bargaining unit.

To continue providing you with these benefits and protect your rights,

NTEU needs you to become an active member. It has been difficult to negotiate the benefits we have won without at least a majority of the bargaining unit as dues-paying members.

Many of you who enjoy these benefits tell us that the dues are too high and that you can still enjoy the benefits without paying dues. If you think the dues are too costly, please consider this. Dues are set by the NTEU national office, and a large fraction of money goes to run that office. The NTEU national office is an effective voice for federal employees that speaks to Congress, working every day for your maximum cost of living increases, for fair rules on contracting, and for your right to have union representation in your dealings with management.

In addition, becoming a dues-paying member permits you to have a strong voice in setting our chapter's priorities and goals. Only dues-paying members get to vote in chapter elections, to vote on this chapter's policies, and to ratify or reject negotiated agreements.

Enough said. We want to hear how you want us to serve you. Please let us know what direction you want NTEU Chapter 280 to take and how you suggest we prioritize our efforts. Your input regarding how you would like us to serve you will help us to establish our priorities. Regarding matters for which we represent you, in what order would you rank issues such as maintaining employee benefits, pursuing additional employee benefits, addressing environmental concerns that affect employees at the workplace, negotiating performance appraisal systems (i.e., PARS), and maintaining the principles of scientific integrity regarding chemicals regulated by the Agency, as well as other issues? What topics would you like to see us write about in our newsletter?

If you are interested in helping yourself and your fellow workers by joining us, please contact your local steward or any of us at the local office. Our phone numbers are listed at the beginning of this newsletter.