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Uranium plant employees in Superman's hometown on strike

Joshua J. McElwee | Aug. 11, 2010 NCR Today

The New York Times reported Sunday [1] that an Illinois town that houses a major U.S. nuclear processing facility connected to the cancer deaths of 42 employees is experiencing a labor dispute regarding health benefits for retirees.

According to the report Metropolis, Ill. -- named for the fictitious hometown of the comic-book character Superman and home of the plant -- has been roiled after Honeywell, the plant operator, locked out its 220 union employees.

The plant is responsible for converting milled uranium into uranium hexafluoride for nuclear reactors.

From the story:

> "We deal with hydrofluoric acid," said Darrell Lillie, president of United Steelworkers Local 7-669, which represents the union workers. "We make fluorine. This is bad stuff. The least we feel like we could have is good medical benefits when we retire."
>
> Honeywell rejects the notion that its facility makes workers more susceptible to cancer and maintains that its labor proposal would raise the average overall salary for employees. The company says that is fair given that the plant, which converts milled uranium into uranium hexafluoride for nuclear reactors, is projected to lose $20 million this year.

Honeywell is the same company that operates the Kansas City Plant, another nuclear weapons manufacturing facility that has come under controversy in recent months.

Currently a part of the Bannister Federal Complex, located about 13 miles south of the downtown area of Kansas City, Mo., that plant is responsible for the production and assembly of approximately 85 percent of the non-nuclear components of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. It is due to be relocated to a new, more modern facility beginning in 2012.

The modernization and relocation plans have caused Kansas City organizers to launch a campaign of nonviolent resistance aimed at bringing attention to the construction of the new nuclear facility.

NCR reported Friday [2] that one activist was sentenced to community service in federal court for having blocked the entrance to the nuclear weapons facility in June.

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Links:

[1] http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/09/us/09metropolis.html?_r=1
[2] http://ncronline.org/news/peace/hiroshima-day-marked-kansas-city-activist-sentencing