BTMED news

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Clearing the Air about COPD

Photo courtesy of eLCOSH/Mt. Sinai

No one disputes that smoking is the major cause of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), the difficulty breathing that strikes so many Americans in their twilight years. A study by Duke University and CPWR researchers, however, reminds us that smoking is far from the only cause, and we still have a lot of work to do if we are going to protect construction workers.

Investigators compared the work histories of 834 BTMed participants with COPD to 1243 controls who did not. Workplace exposures to an unhealthy combination of vapors, gases, dusts and fumes (VGDF) accounted for nearly one in five COPD cases. Many workers with COPD had never smoked a day in their lives; one-third of these cases were attributable to workplace exposure.

A simplistic view of COPD in the workforce might lead employers to begin and end with smoking cessation efforts, but the evidence says otherwise. In construction, at least, occupational exposures remain a major cause of COPD in their own right, and we need to protect workers by getting VGDF under control. Speaking about the background of this research and its relationship to BTMed, Duke University researcher Dr. John Dement stated, "Many workers participating in the BTMed program have experienced work-related exposures that can increase the risk of COPD. The COPD study, funded by NIOSH, was made possible by BTMed participants volunteering to be interviewed about their lifetime exposures."

LEARN WHAT WE FOUND

We just completed a three-year study of COPD. Over 2,000 BTMed participants responded to a telephone interview. Now we want to tell you what we learned.

JOIN THE ON-LINE PRESENTATION

WHEN: Wednesday October 14, at 2 pm EDT (1pm CST/12pm MST/11am PST)

WHAT: Dr. John Dement will present his findings

HOW: Register now at www.cpwr.com/whats-new/news-events

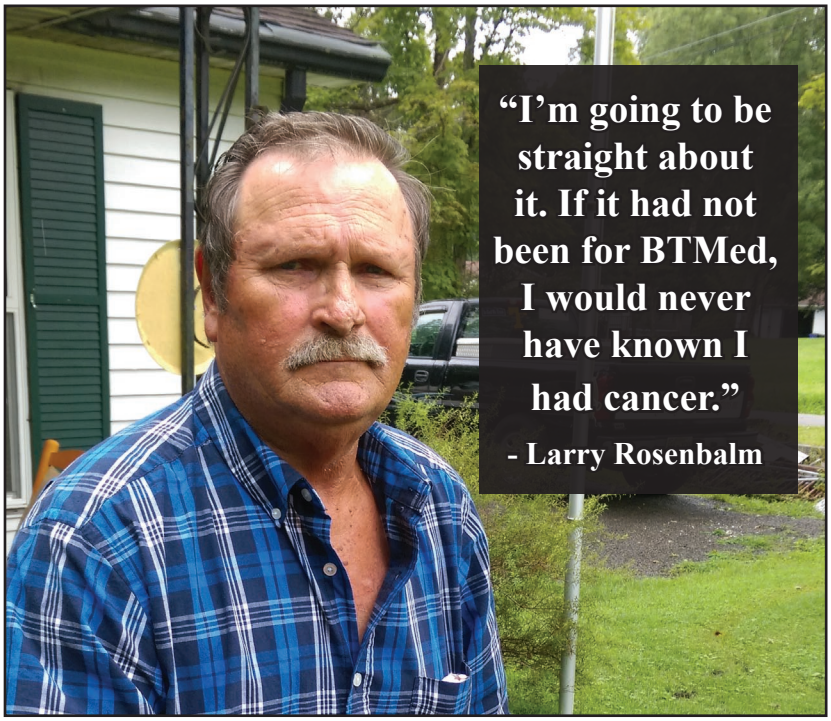
If you have questions, please call 301-495-8526

Two Different Workers, Similar Cancer

Two UBC members from Oak Ridge tell how BTMed's CT Scan program saved their lives

When asked what the most dangerous thing he remembers doing while working at the three Oak Ridge DOE sites, Larry Rosenbalm simply states, "Let's be realistic, it's all dangerous." A member of Carpenters' Union Local 50, Larry first stepped onto Oak Ridge's X-10 site in 1992, continuing to work on and off between X-10, Y-12 and K-25 through the late 2000's.

"I was at K-25 and I was being told constantly about how it was low-level radiation, nothing to be concerned about," he remembers. And most of the time, he probably had no reason to think of it differently. But some of his experiences on the site made him suspicious, like the day when he was asked to "double dress out" for a job, meaning he had to put on two sets of protective Tyvek suits instead of one. "I said, wait a minute, you don't double dress out for low-level radiation."



Stories like this constantly come out of DOE sites where construction workers were exposed to chemical and radioactive hazards that are only now becoming clear. Charles Sweet, a millwright with Local 50 who worked at K-25 for almost 30 years, remembers the site before Larry was even there. "We didn't have any respirators in the late 60's or early 70's," Charles recalls.

There is something else that these two UBC members have in common, besides both working at Oak Ridge. They have both been diagnosed with lung cancer, and thanks to the Building Trades National Medical Screening Program (BTMed), both cancers were detected early enough to treat.

Because Larry and Charles were both identified as being at higher risk for lung cancer, they were both offered a CT Scan. Charles, who went in for a free screening every time he was eligible, was diagnosed with lung cancer "as early as you could find it." Today, Charles is cancer-free, and being monitored to make sure he stays that way.

Larry, whose cancer was more advanced when it was found, was still able to shrink the mass on his lung with chemo. He remarks, "People see me today and they say you've got cancer? You don't look like somebody with cancer!"

Before their scans, neither worker had symptoms of lung cancer, but simply thought that it was a good idea to get checked out. "People walk around with cancer and don't know they have it until it's advanced," Larry continues. In a sober voice, he reveals, "I'm going to be straight about it. If it had not been for BTMed, I would never have known I had cancer."

Often, the results of a BTMed screening can be used to support a compensation claim under the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act (EEOICPA). EEOICPA provides compensation to workers or their survivors for illnesses caused by exposure to radiation or other toxic hazards during employment at a DOE site. Even though Larry and Charles are both waiting to hear back about their claims, it never hurts to have BTMed record your detailed work and medical history.

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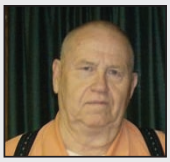

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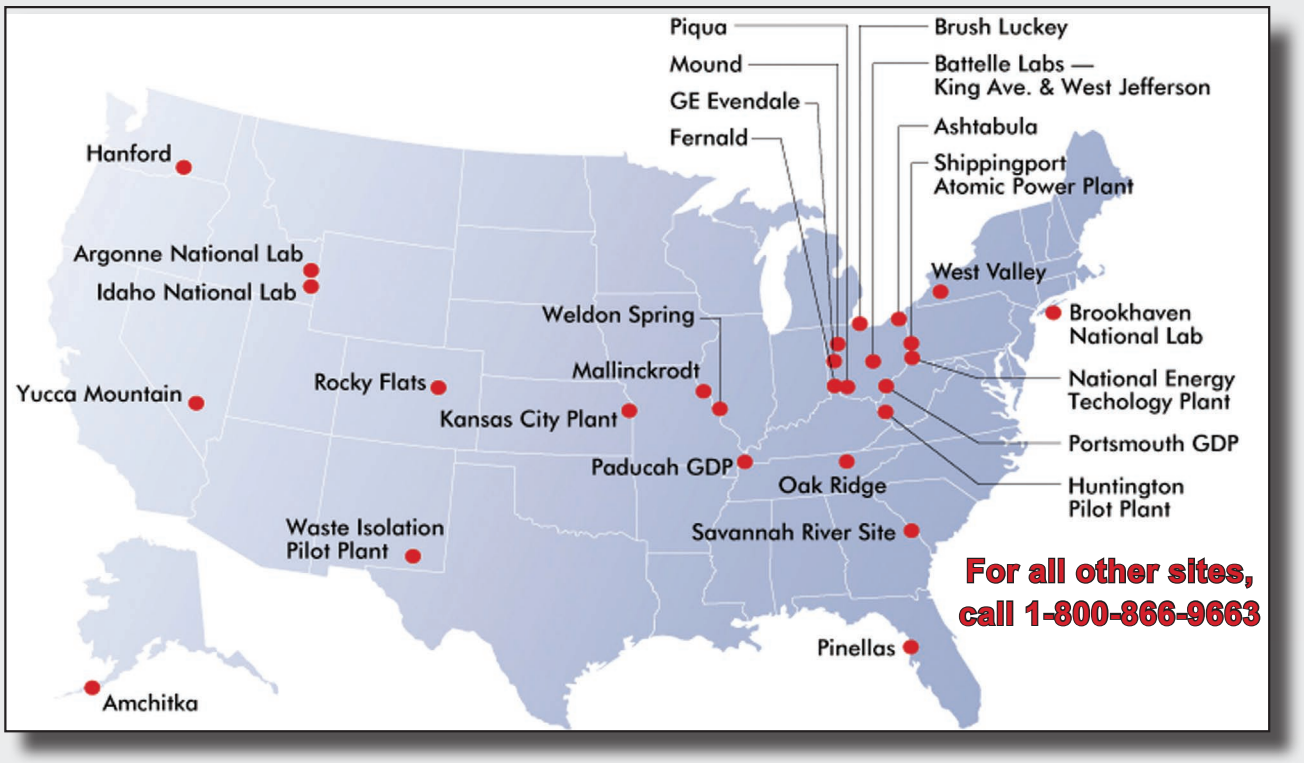

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WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR STORY

What stories do you have about working at a DOE site? We want to hear them! You may be featured in our next newsletter.

Email us at btmed@zenith-american.com
or call 1-800-866-9663.

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Has It Been Three Years Since Your BTMed Exam?

BTMed offers free re-screenings every three years to stay on top of illness with delayed symptoms.

"Once I saw the free screening was available, I got tested out to make sure I didn't have anything. Anybody who worked out there needs to do the same. You work around so many materials that you don't know how much your life's been cut short."

-Harry Carver, Ironworkers Local 709, Savannah River Site BTMed Participant

Do we have your email address?

Email is a great way for us to reach you and keep you up-to-date about BTMed. If we don't have your email address, please take a minute to share it with us.

Call 1-800-866-9663 or email btmed@zenith-american.com. Stay connected!

BTMED AT A GLANCE

OUR NUMBERS

- 32,000 occupational medical screenings
- 2,000 CT scans for early detection of lung cancer
- Over 200 clinics nationwide
- Every exam checked for quality
- 98% satisfaction rating

BENEFITS TO YOU

- Screening tailored to your work exposures
- Personalized service
- Improvement in health
- Peace of mind
- Information on compensation
- Help in making work safer for future workers