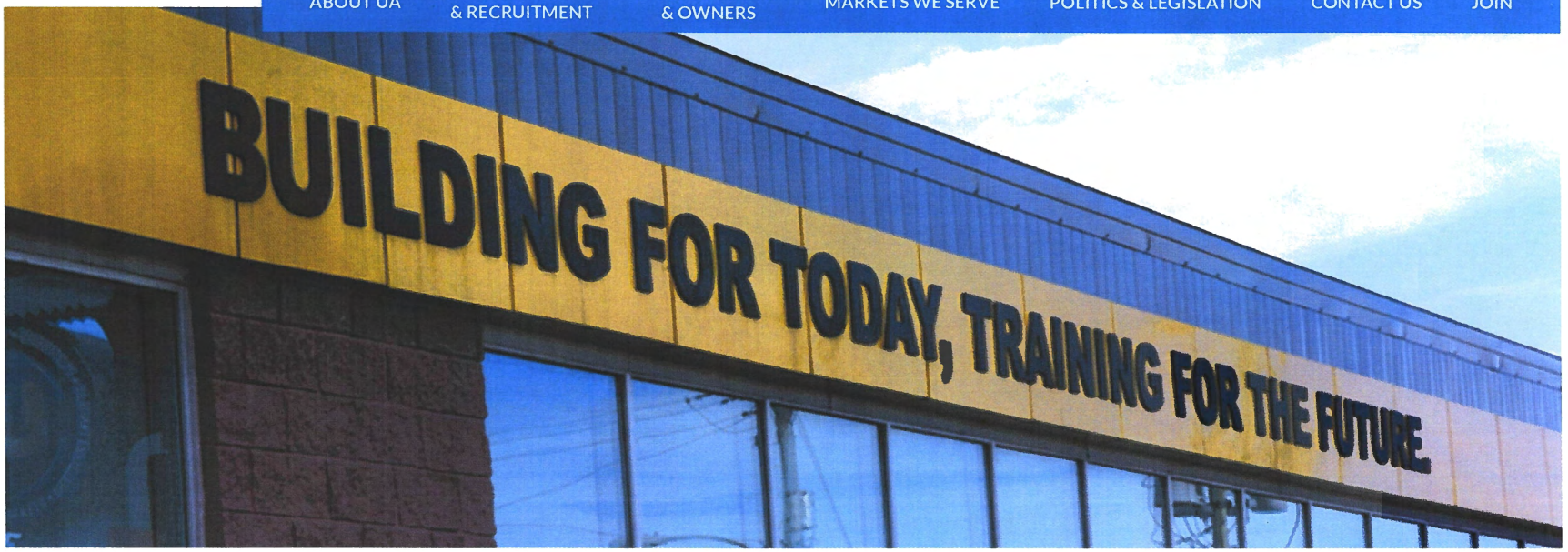

40-year member of U.A. Local 392 interviews construction workers from every trade in order to get them proper medical exam.

"Get this, in the early days guys would actually taste the green salt to tell if it was a good batch," said Dan Hennekes, a former pipefitter who spent 23 years at the Department of Energy's (DOE) Fernald site. "That's what we called enriched uranium powder, by the way. Green salt." The workers ate uranium.

That was back in 1982 when Hennekes began his two decades worth of work, which took him all throughout the site on jobs as dangerous as gutting an enrichment uranium reactor and then installing a new one. Over that period of time he saw safety standards grow to the point that they became a true priority for DOE and DOE contractors. These standards, however, took a long time to develop. "What really made a difference was when DOE started making

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safety standards a part of the contract. Once the wallet was involved, then contractors began to give it the attention it deserved."

While the safety standards put in place helped better protect future DOE workers, they still aren't failsafe and they certainly can't undo the exposures already suffered by thousands of construction workers who'd previously worked on a DOE site. That's where Hennekes comes in.

Since 2006 he has been a part of the Building Trades National Medical Screening Program

(BTMed) conducting work history interviews for construction workers who used to work at Fernald. He asks them questions about where they worked on site, what tasks they performed, and what materials they worked with. Hennekes then forwards this information so that it can be reviewed by the doctor who will be performing the medical exam.

"I was 36 years old when I started out at Fernald tearing up reactors. And even at that age I had no idea that we were being sent in to do jobs the plant people didn't want to do. So I know most of the guys feel the same way I do. We knew it was bad, but we didn't know how bad. That's why we all gotta get checked out to make sure nothing's wrong (with our health)."

Hennekes, himself, continues to go in for his BTMed screening when he becomes eligible every three years. He knows very well that exposures don't always appear overnight. Usually it takes years before those effects begin to rear their ugly heads.

"You know," Hennekes reflected, "there was this one guy eating that green salt and I asked him why he was doing it. He says to me, 'This stuff won't hurt you until way down the road. And I figure I only got five years left to live anyway so I don't have to worry about it."

But Hennekes does have to care about it. For himself. And for all his brothers and sisters who also risked their well-being the moment they set foot on a DOE site.

The BTMed has been providing these screenings to DOE construction workers since 1997 and currently serves 27 DOE sites. It is an easy process that consists of two steps: a work history interview and a medical exam.

In step one, a specially trained building trades worker like Hennekes or a work site expert conducts a work history interview to determine what exposures to hazardous material the former worker may have had and the types of illnesses that could result.

In step two, former workers receive a free medical screening examination to test for illnesses that may have developed from exposure risks, as well as other health problems. Following the exam, the participant receives a letter indicating any medical findings and indicates which

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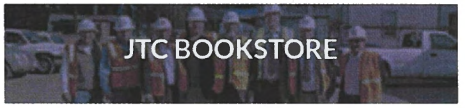

findings could be work related.

Many BTMed participants have discovered illnesses they would not have known were present and then gained access to government- funded benefits to treat those problems relating to their work at DOE sites. The screening program has enabled many workers to file a claim with the U.S. Department of Labor under the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act (EEOICPA). The EEOICPA offers workers medical coverage for the illness from the date the claim was filed and a compensation lump-sum payment.

If you have worked construction at a Department of Energy (DOE) site, please contact the Building Trades National Medical Screening Program at 1-800-866-9663 for more information on receiving a free medical screening.

Dan Hennekes and fellow pipefitter, Lou Doll, worked a combined 44 years on DOE's Fernald site and now manage BTMed's Fernald Outreach Office.

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