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This letter went out on Friday noon (9/29):

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NTEU Chapter 282
9415 Spruce Tree

Bethesda, MD 20814

September 29, 2000

To: Governor of Maryland
County Executives of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties
Maryland U.S. Senators
Maryland Congressmen for the 4th, 5th, and 8th Districts

The National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) Chapter 282 is the exclusive representative of Food and Drug Administration (FDA) bargaining unit employees in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Over the next eight years four thousand (4000) of us (bargaining unit employees) are slated to be moved to the White Oak Federal Research Center in Montgomery County, Maryland (formerly the Naval Surface Weapons/Naval Ordnance Laboratory). As you are an elected representative, we wish to share our primary concerns about the project with you and by doing so enlist your help in satisfactorily resolving them:

1. Chemical Contamination of the Site. The Navy chemically contaminated the site FDA will occupy so seriously that it has been deemed unfit for residential human habitation because of the residual toxins. The scope of the site clean up now in progress is not calculated to nor expected to return the site to a totally habitable state. In keeping with their health and safety mission, FDA professionals evaluate the potential human toxicity of chemicals in the nation's food supply and medicines every day to protect the American consumer. Understandably they would like a clean bill of health for their work site before they and their children (some in an on site day care facility) spend more than half their waking hours there.

On April 12, 2000 the union asked that specific measures be taken by FDA and the site developer, the General Services Administration (GSA) to minimize the risk of harm to FDA employees at White Oak. Among other things we asked that:

- a. Specific assessment for reproductive risk, developmental risk and neurotoxicity risk be performed because the FDA population includes significant numbers of pregnant women, and children on site.
- b. Risks assessments for endocrine disruptors be performed.
- c. Risk assessments be performed for day care children including adolescents inhaling volatile toxic chemicals escaping from the groundwater, accidentally ingesting surface soil and sediment, contacting surface soil and sediment, and incidentally ingesting

and contacting surface water.

- d. Risk assessments for particular FDA populations which do not constitute a substantial proportion of the general population such as Asian and African-Americans, but are heavily represented in the FDA work force be conducted.
- e. Risk to employees on the site during the on going clean up be evaluated.
- f. Alternative uncontaminated construction sites to which FDA employees could be relocated be identified and considered. We note that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asked GSA in 1998 to evaluate such sites and compare them to the present construction site, but none have been identified to date.

On August 16, 2000, FDA provided our union with GSA's July 17, 2000 reply to our requests. In short GSA declined to do any of the requested risk assessments and ignored the request to identify suitable uncontaminated sites. GSA essentially contended that by making the most conservative assumptions of risk there was no need to do any further assessments of any special characteristics of the chemical contaminants found, or in light of significant FDA minority employee groups that would be present on the site.

We do not question the GSA's commitment "to remediate the site in a proper and expeditious manner to allow for a safe environment for Food and Drug Administration's occupancy" or FDA's commitment "to assure that the White Oak site is completely safe for occupancy." FDA employees unfortunately know, however, only all too well from first hand experience the limitations of risk assessments of chemicals and that the best intentions are not always sufficient to overcome these limitations. Note for example, the recalls of the prescription drugs, Rezulin and Propulsid, after FDA had approved them.

As a physician (cancer doctor) I know that effective treatments are not available for many diseases, and that prevention is the preferred approach. When the government can do an even better job of ensuring a safe environment for it's employees, we urge that it be done. There are risks and remedial actions not yet completely delineated, e.g. the remedial action to eliminate PCB contamination, decontamination practices of the basement sump water to be employed during building construction and operation, engineering controls to mitigate exposure to employees during the clean up, etc.

We invite you to follow along with us the development and implementation of these remediation activities.

2. Facilities. FDA employees are concerned that the appropriated

construction budget may not provide a working environment conducive to the efficient conduct of FDA's consumer protection mission.

3. Transportation. As the White Oak Center is more than three miles from a Metro Station and convenient bus transportation is not available, FDA employees would appreciate all steps that can be taken to reduce commuting time including improved immediate access to the site. Lack of adequate public transportation forces employees to drive. Accordingly sufficient parking must be provided.

We look forward to working with you on this project.

Sincerely,

Robert Young, M.D., Ph.D.
President
NTEU Chapter 282

copies to: Washington Post

GSA

FDA