

Local & state

Labor edits its training manual

References to Freddy Krueger, Dr. Hannibal Lecter, called insensitive.

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The Labor Department said it has dropped flippant references to horror-movie characters Freddy Krueger and Dr. Hannibal Lecter from a training manual for a program to provide federal compensation and medical benefits to Cold War-era atomic workers suffering from cancer and other serious illnesses caused by on-the-job radiation exposures.

The department issued a prepared statement Tuesday, the day after a Dayton Daily News article drew national attention to the jokey nature of a manual used to train Labor staff, who screen claimants to the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program. The program covers some people who worked at Energy Department sites such as the Miamisburg Mound Plant.

Advocates for sick workers and their survivors said the efforts at humor showed an underlying culture of disrespect for claimants by Labor officials. Labor officials didn't return phone

calls seeking comment last week, but issued a statement after the story was published.

"The training material in question was prepared several years ago by a former contractor for internal use only," a Labor Department spokesman said in a prepared statement Tuesday. "Upon review of the material, we agree that the use of fictional characters with negative attributes could be perceived as insensitive.

"We believe the contractor used poor judgment given the nature of the program and we have removed the references in question from our training materials. We remain committed to serving our claimants, and an oversight of this nature does not reflect the values and principles by which we operate as an agency."

The Daily News story was picked up by a number of news outlets, including the Washington Post and CBS News.com.

The manual used hypothetical cases to illustrate situations screeners may encounter. In one case, a hypothetical claimant is named "Freddie Krueger," an apparent reference to the horrifically burned "Nightmare on Elm Street" villain. Serial killer Lecter of "Silence of the Lambs" appears as a hypothetical pathologist in the case of a dead worker. But hypothetical Labor employees are given neutral names like Jane Doe.

The program was established in 2001 after decades of denials by the Energy Department that its activities sickened workers.

The manual was obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request by Deb Jerison of Yellow Springs, who helps claimants navigate through the program.

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