

6-12-91

C. Span

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I'm writing because I watch the show, and its very interesting to see that someone in Washington has some concern about this world. To think that life could be so simple. But its not.

(I want some help.) I was told by Social Security that their holding back ^{my check} ^{cause} they claim an overpayment. When I went back to work, I reported everything. I was found without fault & did report everything, and their still keeping my check. They have no right to keep money that I've worked hard for.

Plus when I reach the medical end result. I'll have to live on S.S. \$512.00 a month. Theres just no way I'm going to do that. I've been injured on the job at General Electric; it takes

me all day to write this letter.
Enclosed are the articles.

I have a question? are there a
bill in Congress waiting to be passed
on job related injuries? I've just
about ruined my hands at H.E.

The article was in the Rutland Herald,
Barre Times Argus, Burlington Free
Press and Channel 3 News. I'm also
doing this to help other people who
are injured. I am angry to think
that these factories can play with
an employee's life. I have felt
suicidal because of all this.

H.E. denied this as being job
related, cut my checks off
numerous times, delayed my treat-
ment. Sent me to all kinds of Drs.
for a 2nd opinion. I've been to
15 medical people. I am permanently
damaged. Please help me with
this.

Respectfully,

Encl:

Published in the
Rutland Herald
5-16-91

Work-Related Illness

I would like to thank Yvonne Daley of the Rutland Herald, VOSHA, Robert McLeod, Channel 3 News and the employees who are injured from carpal tunnel and Raynaud's, from working at General Electric who stood by me to bring this injury to the attention of the public and the suffering involved.

We were never, and I repeat, never, told we would get this disabling injury. As also quoted by other injured employees.

If conditions were being changed in 1987, I did not know about it. G.E. would not have been cited. I signed a four-page list of names, given Tylenol, hand, wrist-bands. Which did not help. The damage was done.

I was also told by the nurse when I called in May '89 that I should come in to see the plant doctor. He called the nurse in, "look at her hands" was told, what are you doing holding the blade the wrong way or other remarks, to say it was my fault.

Put on Procardia, couldn't breathe very good from taking this medication. Got out of G.E., had the operations and continue to suffer.

Was also told by G.E. nurse when I signed the list of names of injured employees "that G.E. better start doing something about this," reported December '87.

[REDACTED]
Rutland

5-15-91

Burlington
Free Press

GE Rutland faces fines for injuries

OSHA cites disorders from repetitive motion

The Associated Press

RUTLAND — General Electric Co. is facing state fines for having an environment where employees could develop carpal tunnel syndrome and other repetitive stress injuries.

[REDACTED] of Rutland, who suffers from carpal tunnel syndrome, is credited by some with bringing problems to the state's attention so that working conditions could be improved for other workers.

Robert McLeod, manager of the Vermont Occupation Safety and Health Administration, said the agency issued a proposed fine of \$1,400 and a citation to GE last month.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is an occupational disorder that affects workers who perform repetitive manual tasks that require constant flexing and extension of the wrists. These repetitive motions might cause tendons of the wrist to swell, resulting in a pinching of nerves. This produces numbness, pain and tingling in the hands.

This is the first time a Vermont company has been cited for a work place hazard of this sort, McLeod said.

GE will have to institute manufacturing changes that would ensure workers were not subjected to as much vibration and pressure on their hands.

The citation is seen as a small victory by [REDACTED] 47, who worked at GE from 1986 to 1990 and the most outspoken of a half-dozen employees who are embroiled in disputes with GE over compensation for carpal tunnel syndrome.

[REDACTED] is considered physically disabled because of carpal tunnel syndrome and a disorder known as Raynaud's syndrome, according to medical records.

Surgeons have operated on both of [REDACTED] hands, and she wears braces to keep her hands stationary.

Raynaud's syndrome causes numbness and a narrowing of blood vessels in fingers and toes, which makes it hard to keep hands and feet warm.

[REDACTED] has been unable to work and has been receiving worker's compensation for more than a year.

"There's a lot of activities I used to do that I can't do anymore," she said. And where am I going to get a job when I can't use my hands?"

Published in Rutland Herald.
5-14-91 Burlington Free Press
Barre Times Argus & Channel 3
News.

Syndrome

Continued from Page One

brought about the demand from the state that GE take steps to improve working conditions.

The proposed fine and citation were issued last month by the Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration. GE can appeal the citation, and McLeod said GE officials indicated Monday that they were considering doing so.

GE officials said Monday they had no comment at this time but would respond later.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is an occupational disorder that affects workers who perform repetitive manual tasks that require constant flexing and extension of the wrists. Under adverse conditions, these repetitive tasks cause tendons in the wrist to swell, resulting in a pinching of nerves. This in turn produces numbness, pain and tingling in the thumb, index and ring finger.

This is the first time a Vermont company has been cited for this type of work place hazard, according to McLeod. He said GE would have to institute manufacturing changes that would ensure that workers were subjected to less vibration and less pressure on their hands and wrists.

The issuance of the citation is viewed as a small victory by [redacted] 47, who worked at GE from 1986 to 1990 and has become the most outspoken of a half-dozen employees who are currently embroiled in different disputes with GE over compensation issues relative to carpal tunnel syndrome.

According to medical records, [redacted] is now considered physically disabled because of carpal tunnel syndrome and another disorder, Raynaud's syndrome, as a result of her work at GE.

She says she first brought her condition to the attention of company nurses in 1987 and, ever since, has experienced a series of frustrations and humiliations. She says company officials first downplayed her condition and, as her symptoms worsened, suggested her problems were in her head rather than in her hands.

[redacted] has had both her hands operated on and must wear braces on her hands at night to keep them stationary. She also is supposed to use periodically a machine that will stimulate circulation in her wrists and hands, but she says she has developed other problems from repeated usage of the

machine.

The other problem she faces, Raynaud's syndrome, causes numbness and an inability to keep her hands warm in winter. According to medical documents, when exposed to cold, the fingers and toes of someone with Raynaud's syndrome suddenly narrow, causing blood flow to the chilled body parts to shut down. Something as simple as taking a jar out of the refrigerator can cause problems, but Luther says the main problem is winter in Vermont.

Because of these two conditions, she has been unable to work and has been receiving worker's compensation for more than a year. Last week she was evaluated at the Spaulding Rehabilitation Center in Boston, where she will begin a series of treatments in the coming weeks. But [redacted] says doctors at Spaulding have given her little hope of improvement.

[redacted] thinks her condition would be less painful in a warmer climate, but her three grown children and grandchildren live in northern New England and she doesn't want to forego contact with them.

In the meantime, she's living on \$365 a week disability pay but has lost the insurance and other benefits she received at GE. And with too much time on her hands and the poor prospects of getting other work, she says she has become discouraged.

"What's the sense in living?" asked [redacted] Monday. "There's a lot of activities I used to do that I can't do anymore. And where am I going to get a job when I can't use my hands?"

[redacted] story is similar to that of six other GE employees interviewed for this story. But only [redacted] and another woman, [redacted] 37, were willing to give their names.

Other employees said they were concerned that they would not be hired back by GE if a job that required less physical strength and mobility opened up. Others feared they would not be hired by other area employers if they spoke out against GE, the area's largest employer.

All the employees said they had no warning that they could suffer permanent physical disability from repetitive tasks. [redacted] said she encountered pain after working for GE for

more than two years. She began working for GE, doing tasks that required lifting, shaping and swinging activities, in 1985.

She had two operations to relieve symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome in 1987, but her condition did not improve. She was placed on worker's compensation in January 1988, returned to work part time last fall, and worked her last day this past April 11.

She had to quit, she says, because she was being moved to a job that her doctors did not want her to perform. "This has made me a nervous wreck. What can't I do? Just about everything. I love to fish. I can't anymore. I can't play basketball with the kids. I can't even write a letter.

"And I've had to give up a job that paid \$12 an hour. I'm not happy about any of it. I want to work. I'd like to keep working at GE doing light work, but they say they have nothing for me," said [redacted] who has three children.

Another GE employee in his mid-30s has had three operations for carpal tunnel syndrome and has been placed on permanent disability. He says: "The operations gave a little relief, but now I don't have any strength. The left hand hurts all the time. My main concern is supporting myself. What do you do when you don't have hands?"

This employee was offered \$11,000 in compensation for the loss of movement in his hands but has refused the settlement. He has hired an attorney. [redacted] has also hired an attorney to negotiate a settlement, and [redacted] worries that her problems will come to that.

In an interview last year, John Sallazzo, who was company spokesman at the time, said GE had initiated a number of programs to educate employees about carpal tunnel syndrome and had hired a national expert, Suzanne H. Rodgers, to improve working conditions. She recommended a number of changes including rotating jobs with people in less repetitive jobs.

McLeod said some of Rodgers' suggestions had been implemented but not enough of them. He said the state found the situation was serious and avoidable and would follow up to make sure that recommended changes were instituted.

[redacted] of Rutland suffers from carpal tunnel syndrome, a disorder that afflicts the arms and hands. She was a worker at the GE plant in Rutland.

Staff Photo by Michael Alonshire

Conditions at GE Lead to Injuries

By YVONNE DALEY

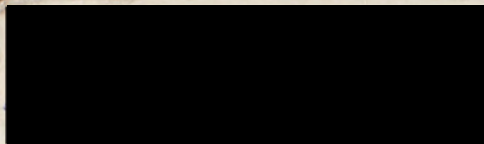
General Electric Co. faces a \$1,400 fine for creating a hazardous environment in which employees could develop carpal tunnel syndrome and other nerve disorders by performing repetitive motions under adverse conditions.

Robert McLeod, manager of the Vermont Occupational Safety and Health Administration, said one former employee

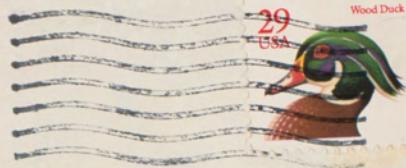
could be credited with bringing problems at GE to the state's attention so that working conditions would be improved for other employees.

He couldn't identify the employee because of client confidentiality, but it was clear to everyone involved that it was [redacted] of Rutland, who suffers from carpal tunnel syndrome, whose persistence

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