

Injured Worker Advocate Can Cut Workers' Comp Red Tape

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(May 22, 2002) An employee is injured at work, goes to the doctor and is kept off the job for a period of time. The employee files a workers' compensation claim, but there's a snag, a delay, frustration. What now?

Now, the employee can contact the MTA's new Injured Worker Advocate – a neutral third party who has the authority to investigate and resolve problems involving workers' comp claims.

The Injured Worker Advocate can help expedite claims processing, ensure that employees receive quality medical care and see that employees' workers' comp questions are answered promptly and completely.

A panel that included both union and MTA staff selected Suzanne Marshall, a rehabilitation counselor with more than 20 years' experience in many areas of practice, as the Injured Worker Advocate. Her activities are partially funded by an 18-month, \$125,000 grant from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.

"We feel it is important for our members to know that there is someone who will be concerned about their rights and their welfare," says UTU General Chairman James Williams, who sat on the selection panel. "It's a step that has long been necessary in dealing with the workers' comp situation."

Vocational rehabilitation counselor

Marshall worked in Pennsylvania for a number of years as a case manager for workers' compensation, vocational rehabilitation and physical therapy organizations.

At the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, she assisted stroke victims, traumatic injury patients and patients with chronic conditions who required special help or equipment to remain on the job.

After a move to California in 1991, she managed health and rehabilitation services for an insurance company, American International Group, and later was an employment risk consultant for Marsh & McLennan Companies.

"We believe we've selected a person who will look after the membership and steer them in the right direction," says ATU President Neil Silver. "She's the person to bring the MTA's workers' comp litigation costs down, while alleviating the membership's frustration."

"TCU officials believe the Injured Worker Advocate will be able to help employees get through the nightmare of the worker's compensation system," says TCU Division Chairman Ray Huffer. "We recommend employees call her with any questions or problems with an industrial injury."

MTA staff handles claims



Suzanne Marshall

For questions about the Injured Worker Advocate program, or assistance with a workers' compensation claim, employees can contact Suzanne Marshall at 922-2734, e-mail marshalls@mta.net or page her at 213.530-9533

In addition to hiring an Injured Worker Advocate, the MTA is handling workers' comp claims with its own staff, instead of using an outside contractor to process claims as it had in the past.

"Employees often didn't understand the process of filling a claim or felt their needs and concerns weren't being addressed," says Marshall, who was a member of Pennsylvania Social Services Union, Local 668, for 14 years. "These were some of the reasons the unions wanted to have an injured worker advocate."

Under the new service sector concept, workers' comp analysts also will be assigned to each sector to provide direct assistance. But, if a situation arises that bogs things down for an employee, Marshall can help.

"I was given very clear directives and assurances before I took the job that it would be independent," she adds. "I'll have the flexibility to cross the boundaries of bureaucracy and cut through some of the red tape, and I've been assured by all parties that will happen."

The biggest plus of the Injured Worker Advocate program for employees, according to Marshall, is that, "they can come to me and get the extra help they normally would go to a lawyer to get. They won't have to pay a lawyer because my services are free of charge."

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