

## Capitol Tunnel Workers Receive Award

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WASHINGTON -- Ten Capitol Hill steamfitters who say they were harassed by their bosses after complaining of asbestos exposure in the tunnels where they work are being given an award for civic courage.

Recognition for the Tunnel Shop crew comes amid a continuing dispute with the Architect of the Capitol's office over their medical treatment and a pending case before the congressional Office of Compliance alleging they faced retaliation after making their safety concerns public.

On Thursday they are to receive the Joe A. Callaway Award for Civic Courage, established in 1990 for people who take a public stance to advance truth at personal risk. It is administered by the Shafeek Nader Trust for the Community Interest. Shafeek Nader, who died in 1986, was the elder brother of consumer advocate Ralph Nader.

The workers went public with their complaints after the Office of Compliance, which oversees the civil rights and employment laws affecting congressional workers, last February cited the architect's office for not taking steps to remove safety hazards to workers in the tunnels under the Capitol.

David Marshall, an attorney representing the workers, said the architect's office had known for years that the asbestos levels in the tunnels were unacceptably high and were affecting the health of workers.

The workers attended Senate hearings on the issue and met senators to seek their support in obtaining medical treatment. Specifically, they asked the architect's office to cover medical costs, estimated at more than \$4,000, and transportation so they could be evaluated by a Detroit doctor considered a leading expert on asbestos-related illness.

Sen. Dick Durban, D-Ill., in October wrote Architect of the Capitol Alan Hantman that the workers' request for a comprehensive analysis of their health and travel expenses "is not unreasonable."

On Nov. 17, Hantman and Dr. John Eisold, the attending physician of Congress, wrote Durbin that the architect's office would pay for a full pulmonary evaluation by two local doctors, one who was willing to consult with the Detroit doctor. They said the office did not have the authority to pay for travel and lodging for a medical visit outside the Washington area.

Marshall said these doctors were not asbestos experts. He said three of the workers had traveled to Detroit on their own, and that preliminary tests had shown scarring and plaque in the lungs consistent with asbestos illness.

In the meantime, according to the complaint filed with the Office of Compliance, the Tunnel Shop workers said the architect's office retaliated against them by describing them as troublemakers to members of Congress, threatening their jobs and cutting off supplies they need to work in an environment where the temperature can exceed 130 degrees.

"What is really a shame and an outrage," said Marshall, "is that this poisoning of the workers and deliberate indifference to their health is taking place not in some remote location but just below the halls of Congress."

He said that if there is no resolution to the dispute the workers will go to court to seek compensation both for occupational injuries and

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harassment.

The architect's office, citing the ongoing investigation, had no comment. "We agree with you," Hantman said in the letter to Durbin, "that the health and safety of these employees is of paramount importance."

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