

Contract update – May 11, 2010

Apparently the bubonic plague is something to laugh about, at least for one Social Security management official.

Commonly known as the “black death,” it killed about 75 million people worldwide during the 14th century and confirmed cases of the plague were reported in the United States as late as 1995.

During contract negotiations today, AFGE representatives sought to expand the definition of serious communicable diseases to include H1N1 and other deadly illnesses. The Union wants that broader definition so if an employee gets sick while interviewing a member of the public, they would have a right to medical screening on agency time (rather than having to use their own leave).

Agency officials weren’t interested in that idea.

“In fact,” said Witold Skwierczynski, the Union’s Chief Negotiator, “one of them made a joke out of it. Jack Leiby said, ‘if you agree to include the bubonic plague, we’ll agree to that.’”

Skwierczynski was not amused.

“It was a highly insensitive comment,” he believes, “and it shows again that SSA management really doesn’t care about the bargaining unit or the threats they face every day from people who may not even know they’re sick.”

Agency representatives also made it clear that if a member of the bargaining unit is sued after helping a co-worker or a member of the public, SSA will not defend the employee or reimburse their legal expenses.

“If you’re an employee escorting a blind person down a stairwell during an evacuation and that person trips or falls, they can turn around and sue you ,” explained Jim Marshall, an AFGE bargaining team member. “You will be on your own!”

Agency’s negotiators also refused to have joint AFGE/SSA health and safety inspections and they criticized Union surveys of employees as “irrelevant.”

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