

HELP PROTECT WORKERS IN THE BIOLOGICAL INDUSTRIES

Why would Pfizer, the world's largest drug company, so mistreat and silence one of their top molecular biologists that a federal jury in Connecticut recently awarded her \$1.37 million in damages?

The answer promises to tear open the curtain covering hazards confronting tens of thousands of scientists and assistants in corporate, government and university labs

Becky McClain's lawsuit against Pfizer claimed that the company's sloppiness exposed her to an engineered form of the lentivirus, a virus related to one that could lead to immune deficiencies. Pfizer denied connections between its lab practices and Ms. McClain's recurring paralysis and other illnesses.

Pfizer's advantage over its imperiled lab workers has been built on the absence of any available risk assessments, the very nature of possible latent, silent violence, and the cruel refusal to give afflicted employees their own exposure records on the grounds that they are company trade secrets.

Becky McClain is not alone. As a revolution in genetic and other biological sciences has greatly expanded the number of laboratories in the past twenty years, workers in the biological industries have suffered from health and safety regulations that have fallen well behind the times. **The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) currently has no regulations or disclosure requirements about biohazards in laboratories.** Moreover, the agency is ill equipped to identify health and safety issues in highly sophisticated facilities where these employees go to work every day.

David Michaels, the head of OSHA, has admitted that there are "many gaps" in his agency's standards. "New biological materials, nanomaterials, there are many things where we don't have adequate information" (NY Times interview).

In the absence of any action, business as usual has become cruel and unusual punishment for innocent scientists, lab technicians and other workers.

What Can You Do?

The Council for Responsible Genetics is mobilizing an effort to ensure that worker health and safety are once again protected in the United States by identifying hazards, educating the public and policy makers and working towards the creation of enforceable and openly accessible standards and practices for biological laboratories. We hope you will support us and work with us in this crucial effort.

For more information, please contact:

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About the Council for Responsible Genetics (CRG):

CRG was founded in 1983 by among others, the great labor leader and passionate worker health and safety advocate Tony Mazzocchi. CRG is a leader in the movement to steer biotechnology toward the advancement of public health, environmental protection, equal justice, and respect for human rights through lasting policy reform.

