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ANTHRAX TERROR TRANSFER

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Rep. Chris Smith

Pol, Postal Workers Outraged Over Job Relocation



(Left) Workers seal up windows at the Hamilton Post Office last December. (Right) As many as 100 employees from the anthrax-tainted facility may be permanently relocated.

Trentonian Photos

RETURN TO SENDER

Workers may be transferred from Hamilton facility

By LAURA PELNER
Staff Writer

HAMILTON — In what one postal union member called a major insult, officials yesterday announced as many as 100 employees from the anthrax-tainted Hamilton Post Office may be permanently relocated to facilities outside the area.

"[Postal employees] have lost all respect for the postal service," Bill Lewis, president of the Trenton area local postal worker's union, said yesterday.

Yesterday's news came as yet another "insult," said Lewis who pointed out that workers have already had to endure anthrax contamination, long commutes to temporary facilities and now permanent relocation.

Postal officials say they will downsize the workforce at the Jack Rafferty Post Office on Route 130 when it reopens and force at least 60 people to work elsewhere.

"We shouldn't let the legacy of this anthrax terrorism be that more people lose their jobs," Rep. Chris Smith said yesterday at a morning press conference.

Woes for Hamilton's postal employees started last October when letters addressed to Sens. Tom Daschle and Patrick Leahy, NBC News anchor Tom Brokaw and the New York Post passing through the Route 130 processing plant.

Several workers were exposed and all employees received the antibiotic Cipro. The facility was indefinitely closed and workers were forced to work out of tents outdoors and later at interim facilities elsewhere.

Smith met with postal officials and union members yesterday to discuss the future of the Hamilton facility and its employees, as well as a deal to lease space in Monroe Township until the Rafferty building is clean.

Lewis, who also attended the conference, said the postal service is negotiating to move

more than 100 people out of the township.

So far, 66 employees have definitely been slated for transfer.

"Permanently assigning workers out of the Hamilton facility at this time appears to be premature since postal deliveries in our area are still delayed and the resumed operation of the Hamilton facility is still months away," Smith wrote in a letter to

David Solo on, New York regional vice president for the postal service, whom he met with yesterday before the conference.

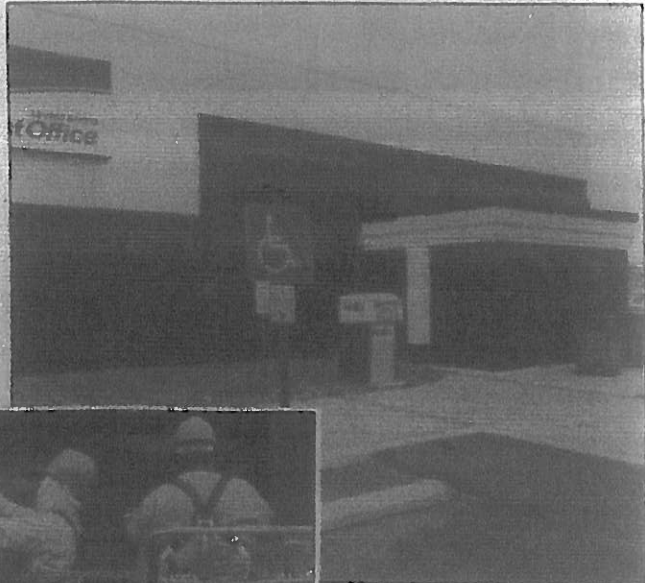
"It is difficult to see how permanently assigning these employees out of the area will improve mail service in the area since these employees are already working at other facilities and mail delivery remains slow."

Since the anthrax attacks in October, the 1,200 employees who used to work at the Route 130 facility have been displaced to Middlesex and Monmouth county offices. Letter carriers are working out of trailers near the Hamilton site.

"Our primary concern is to get all employees home to Trenton," Lewis said.

Until that can happen the postal service is looking to open a temporary office in Monroe Township near Exit 8A off the turnpike. The government is moving quickly to negotiate a lease.

"This won't ease the problems of commute for employees, but it may increase the service,"



Trentonian File Photos

The post office on Route 130 in Hamilton has been sealed in plastic since December as it awaits anthrax removal.



on this," said Lewis, adding that he was unimpressed with the outcome of yesterday's meeting with postal officials because he received few real answers.

However, Smith called the interchange "candid."

The congressman said just the fact that dialogue was exchanged is a move in the right direction.

"Moving Hamilton employees because of the terrorist damage done to their workplace is an unjust response to the anthrax attacks," he wrote in the letter to Solomon.

"Prior to its closing last fall, the Hamilton Post Office and its employees had a stellar reputation for customer service and timely delivery. Now it appears they are the easiest target for reassignment because they are temporarily without a home."

"These men and women were victims of terrorism and they do not deserve to be victimized by their employer."

Lewis said.

Right now former Hamilton employees are traveling long distances to get to work and haven't received compensation for their journeys.

Smith said postal officials told him they are seeking as much as \$1 million to reimburse people for driving, but there's no word on when the money will come through.

"This is not what they signed up for when they decided to work in the township," he said.

Postal employees and the congressman are upset with how slowly the postal service is moving to remedy the problems in Hamilton and are trying to keep an open dialogue between the groups so everyone knows what's going on.

"They're dragging their feet