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SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION OFFICES EXPOSED TO H1N1

No Action Taken to Close Offices, Protect Employees and Public

Christina Erling | June 19, 2009

WISCONSIN – The Social Security Administration has taken no action to close two offices in Wisconsin despite several of its employees being exposed to the H1N1 flu virus. “This has become a matter of public safety and SSA needs to act,” stated Loni Schultz, president of American Federation of Government Employees Local 1346, which represents employees in several SSA offices in the Wisconsin area. “We have an employee who was diagnosed with swine flu on June 16th. This employee had been to multiple offices prior to, and on the day of being diagnosed, including the Milwaukee DT Reuss Building and the Waukesha, Wisconsin SSA office. There now are four employees at the Waukesha, Wisconsin office with suspected cases. It is appalling that SSA has taken no action to close or sanitize these offices, or notify the public of this exposure.”

“The bottom line here is that the employees and the public have been potentially exposed to H1N1,” said Witold Skwierczynski, president of AFGE’s National Council of Field Operations Locals. “SSA should take immediate action to close these offices and should have the appropriate public health authorities inspect these offices to determine the extent of the contamination and recommend suitable measures. SSA leadership needs to act on behalf of public safety and it needs to do so now.”

According to a GAO report released this week, SSA is one of three government agencies that have no operational pandemic plans in place. The incident in Wisconsin highlights the necessity for SSA to devise a comprehensive strategy to ensure that all its facilities enact proper precautions to minimize the danger of exposure to swine flu.

“SSA Commissioner Michael Astrue needs to devise a plan of action when our facilities are exposed to swine flu,” stated Skwierczynski. “H1N1 has been around for months. It is reprehensible that there is no plan in place to deal with this pandemic and that SSA is completely unprepared to deal with this problem. It further shows the incompetence of the leadership at this agency.”

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