

UAW-GM plan alcoholic aid program

Problem recognized as disease by both union and management

UAW and General Motors have established a joint program to help rehabilitate workers suffering from alcoholism.

UAW Vice President Irving Bluestone, in announcing the program, said, "Essentially, the program recognizes that alcoholism is a disease and should be treated as such."

According to a policy statement by the corporation, it's an illness "in which an employee's consumption of any alcoholic beverage definitely and repeatedly interferes with his job performance and/or his health," Bluestone explained.

"The program's objective thus is to help any worker who becomes afflicted with alcoholism," said Bluestone, director of UAW's GM Department. "It provides for joint effort by the UAW and the corporation to establish a system through which the disease of alcoholism can be identified in an early stage, referred for proper treatment, and concerned follow-up."

Bluestone said the joint statement by UAW and GM of cooperation on the program emphasized that mutual cooperation between the union and management is absolutely essential in encouraging the worker:

- To obtain treatment as needed;
- To respond successfully to treatment, and
- To maintain a resolve to avoid alcohol following treatment.

He pointed out that the program provides for establishing a two-man alcoholism committee at the local plant level. One member of the committee will be appointed by the local union, one by management. Local 662 President Jim Johnson has been studying the new appointment but had not announced who he would name to the position at press time.

The local committee's duties will include helping the worker understand he can consult with the plant medical director, or an outside qualified facility or agency, on a confidential basis concerning his alcoholism tendencies without fear of disciplinary actions based on such discussion, Bluestone said.

The committee also will arrange for the local insurance program administrator or a local union insurance representative to explain to the worker and others who may be involved the extent to which recommended treatment qualifies for payment under the UAW-GM insurance program, Bluestone added.

The program, Bluestone pointed out, also specifies that an alcoholic employee should not expect any "special privileges or exemptions from standard personnel practices" during or following treatment. Additionally, management continues its disciplinary responsibilities in cases of misconduct involving the use of alcohol while the union maintains its right to process grievances concerning such matters.

Bluestone noted that the new joint program followed a series of meetings between UAW and the corporation which started in late 1971. The corporation, during 1970 negotiations, had rejected a UAW proposal to establish such a program.