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State Issues Rutgers "Serious" Citation for Lack of Emergency Preparedness
Union Health and Safety Experts Hoping for Better Cooperation

NEW BRUNSWICK... When Joyce Sagi and Amy Bahruth collaborated on a grant through the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to cultivate peer-to-peer emergency planning at Rutgers, the duo had no idea university management would fiercely resist sharing vital information. Now the state has confirmed that the refusal to cooperate in emergency action planning constitutes a serious risk to student, faculty, staff and community safety.

"Why did it take a Public Employee Occupational Safety and Health (PEOSH) investigation before university management would share potentially lifesaving information with us?" asked Union of Rutgers Administrators-AFT (URA-AFT) health and safety chair Joyce Sagi. "We were dismayed that university management would not even meet minimal standards until we brought them to the table by filing this complaint. We are confident that we can expect cooperation and develop a program that will serve as a model of preparedness."

All hazards planning depends on informed participants and peer-to-peer education is the most effective form of training, according to professor Amy Bahruth, chair of the health and safety committee of the American Association of University Professors/AFT (AAUP/AFT) local at Rutgers. "Educators have a special responsibility to keep the lines of communication open and make sure that we are following best practices," she said. "We are hopeful that this planning process will result in our members knowing how to protect ourselves and students in any number of potential emergency situations."

AAUP/AFT president Lisa Klein agreed. "If an emergency occurs when we are in front of a classroom, our members need to know what to do to protect our students and ourselves," she said. "Faculty members are more than willing to work with management on this important matter if given the opportunity"

The difficulty in working with university management is indicative of an overall adversarial approach to labor relations at Rutgers, according to URA-AFT president Lucye Millerand. "Effective emergency preparedness means that all stakeholders are involved in the planning process—not just first responders," she said. "Rutgers needs to recognize that working with all the unions on campus yields a tremendous benefit for the entire community."

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