

# VIDEO VIEWS

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THE VDT COALITION

Spring 1985

## IBM Report Calls for Radiation Shielding

by Cathie Chavez

In an IBM report, Dr. Bill Guy of the University of Washington recommends metallic shielding on pre-1983 VDTs to block workers from possible emissions of non-ionizing radiation. Such shielding, he claims, is already present on newer VDTs which must conform to a 1983 Federal Communication Commission regulation requiring shielding to reduce electromagnetic interference.

Last October, IBM released a six page summary of the 66 page confidential report prepared by Dr. Guy. The summary did not mention the shielding recommendations for older model VDTs.

In a copy of the original report, obtained by *Video Views*, Guy reported findings of extremely high levels of localized electric fields near the surface cover of the flyback transformer in older VDTs. Based on these findings he wrote "... it is certainly desirable to shield the cover of the VDT. Since such shielding is relatively inexpensive the benefit to cost ratio is large."

Dr. Guy also measured levels of magnetic fields, finding emissions to be "significantly lower" than those of the electric fields. He did not advise shielding of magnetic fields "unless it can be shown that there is a real

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## California VDT Bills Die:

## State Issues Purchasing Guidelines

by Jennifer McNulty

On May 2 the State of California issued guidelines for the purchase and leasing of VDTs and related furnishings. The State Office of Information Technology (OIT) now requires that state offices buy only furniture which is easily adjustable and designed to support the user's body. New VDTs must have detachable keyboards, tiltable platforms and brightness and contrast controls. Screens must be designed to be free of flicker and glare.

These guidelines follow recommendations of a State Joint Labor/Management VDT Committee which had been charged with reviewing state VDT use and making proposals to the state by April 1, 1985. This committee was set up through contracts covering state employees represented by the California State Employees Association.

This administrative move surprised supporters of VDT legislation who, on May 2, watched two VDT bills die in the Assembly Labor and Employment committee, despite a large turnout of VDT workers and unions. The new state purchasing guidelines are, in fact, quite similar to proposals in one of those bills, AB 687, which would have directed the state to set up VDT purchasing specifications. AB 687 and AB

1006, a comprehensive bill including furniture and lighting requirements, employer-paid eye exams and regular rest breaks were authored by Assemblyman Tom Hayden, sponsored by the California Labor Federation and supported by a statewide coalition of unions and workers. On a vote of 7 to 6, the committee deferred decision on the bills, referring them back to interim hearings. According to Judy Corbett, aide to Hayden, "Interim hearings are an evasive tactic. We have all the information we need to regulate basic minimum guidelines for VDT health and safety." Supporters of legislation in California are turning their attention to the Senate where SB 612,

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"More likely to call it the neutron bomb... eliminates jobs, but leaves the workplace intact!"

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## Legislative Update

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mandating regular eye exams and special glasses for VDT users, has been introduced by Bill Greene.

Opposition to Hayden's legislation has come from an increasingly organized coalition of computer manufacturers, newspaper publishers, and trade associations, according to Bill Davis, Administrative Office of the San Jose Newspaper Guild. Last year, legislators faced "tremendous pressure" from newspaper, airline, and hospital industry groups lobbying against regulations, Davis said. He expects at least as much opposition this year.

The Coalition for Workplace Technology, a little-known Washington, DC based lobbying group, will likely play a major role in that opposition. Formed in late 1983, the Coalition is a national network formed by the Computer Business Equipment Manufacturers Association (CBEMA) to defeat state level legislation on VDTs and occupational safety. Made up of 40 different industry associations, this group has lobbied heavily in the past against VDT bills in California, Ohio, New York, and 11 other states. Members are currently working to block legislation scheduled for review in twenty states.

Charlotte LeGates, Director of Communications for CBEMA, said that it is the "inflexibility of many of the bills" that her organization opposes. Charging that the legislative approach entails "specific ergonomic design [and] specific management techniques" that restrict individual choice, LeGates prefers voluntary recommen-

dations that "make compliance more flexible." When asked whether there is any assurance that employers would voluntarily implement workplace improvements, LeGates conceded that "At this point we don't know."

According to Judith McCullough of 9 to 5 in Los Angeles, the central issue behind the VDT legislation battle is control over the workplace. "Industry believes that employer education is the solution. We believe that a legislative mandate is necessary."

In 1985, state legislators are producing a record number of bills aimed at regulating the use of video display terminals (VDTs) in the workplace. Activity is strong in at least 20 states, and efforts are underway in six others.

The first success of 1985 came in March, when Governor Anaya of New Mexico signed Executive Order #85-11. The Order regulates VDT use among state employees and includes recommendations regarding job design, noise levels, air flow and quality, lighting, rest breaks, work station design, and training for both operators and supervisors. It does not address the potential radiation hazard or suggest transfers to non-VDT work for pregnant employees.

The twenty states scheduled to hear VDT legislation this year are: California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington, and Wisconsin.

The six additional states reporting some VDT activity

include Georgia, Hawaii, Maine, North Carolina, Texas, and West Virginia.

## IBM Report

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hazard due to magnetic field exposure." He discounted the findings of Spanish scientist Delgado who found a relationship between magnetic fields and biological changes in chicken embryos, believing that the Delgado findings need to be replicated and carefully analyzed." "Though a relationship could exist [between magnetic field and bioeffects] it is highly unlikely."

Studies on the long term health consequences of of this type of electromagnetic radiation are inconclusive. In his report Dr. Guy recommended further research into what is a complex mechanism of interaction between such emissions and potential biological effects.

At present, IBM and other VDT manufacturers do not have information available on how many VDTs without shielding are still in use. For more information on VDT shielding see *Video Views*, Summer 1984, Vol. 1 No. 2.



You look like you need a break. Why don't you take a lunch break like *Theima*.

## Automation Cutbacks:

# Blue Cross Employees Fight for Jobs

by Mike Eisensher  
OPEU Local 29/Plant  
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Clerical, administrative, and service employees of Blue Cross have launched THE CAMPAIGN TO KEEP BLUE CROSS JOBS IN OAKLAND, in the wake of the sale of Blue Cross' modern 21 story headquarters building in Oakland, California. Nearly 2,000 people work in the Oakland Blue Cross center, of whom 892 are represented by Local 29 of the Office & Professional Employees Union.

In the three years since the merger of Blue Cross of Northern California with Blue Cross of Southern California, the company has transferred 200 jobs from its Oakland Center, represented by Local 29, to its unorganized Woodland Hills Center in the South. Management describes this as simply "consolidation" of duplicate operations designed to make the newly merged corporation more efficient and cost-effective in the competition for health insurance dollars.

This "consolidation" is closely related to the development of new telecommunications technologies. These new technologies enable companies like Blue Cross to drastically cut clerical labor costs by the introduction of computer networks hooked into satellite transmission systems. The statewide computer network now being completed will allow Blue Cross to transfer its data processing work to any site in the state at will. If introduced without regard to its impact on workers, hundreds of jobs could be eliminated.

This growing fear among

Blue Cross employees for their jobs is not without foundation. Just three years ago the management of Blue Shield in San Francisco introduced a similar telecommunications network that enabled them to transfer data processing work to scattered small town sites across the state. This removed over 1500 workers from the influence of their union--OPEIU Local 3. Workers at the new sites are paid just above minimum wage. Of the 1800 San Francisco jobs, today only 100 remain. Efforts by Local 3 to organize the scattered new worksites have proven futile.

In other areas this "consolidation" process is even more advanced. Blue Cross work from Wisconsin is now processed in Sacramento, resulting in the loss of 700 jobs. Large New York insurance and financial institutions now send their

routine data processing to Barbados. There, clerical workers, paid \$1.00 per hour, input data and route information by satellite. Publishing companies are now contracting out word processing to electronic sweatshops in Hong Kong and Taiwan where clericals there do the tedious work of inputting manuscripts for pennies per hour.

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If you are interested in finding out more about the VDT Coalition's activities please call 415/642-5507.

## Bargaining for Safety

SEIU local 707 has negotiated a VDT eye benefit program covering over 300 VDT operators working for the County of Sonoma in Northern California. The contract provides a special vision program for employees who operate a VDT 20 hours or more per week.

The vision program consists of:

1. A user/ supervisor program which will discuss the visual system and ways to reduce eyestrain and explain the VDT eye examination. A users' booklet will also be provided to all VDT operators and their supervisors.

2. An annual 100% paid close-vision eye examination with free glasses and lenses for VDT use if indicated. This examination is in addition to the existing vision program covering all County of Sonoma employees.

3. An Ergonomic Review Committee to receive and investigate workplace complaints and to make specific recommendations to correct problems identified in County departments.

Dr. Juanita Ardley, behavioral optometrist from Oakland, was selected to provide these services under a two-year contract.

For further information regarding SEIU Local 707's eye benefit program, contact Pat Wolfard at 707/545-7349.

# VDT Worker Wins Workers' Comp Settlement

A former VDT operator was awarded \$5,000 as a settlement of her workers' compensation claim against her employer. The claim was for a VDT-related eye injury.

Jeanne Robinson, formerly employed by Matthew Bender & Co., Inc. as a legal writer, was awarded the settlement on the morning her trial was to begin. The settlement, entered into by Insurance Company of North America, is believed to be the largest award in this area for a VDT related injury.

Ms. Robinson said she hoped the award would encourage others injured by VDTs to pursue their legal remedies. However, she noted that the workers' compensation system presents several pitfalls to the VDT-injured worker. "The system relies heavily on the opinions of ophthalmologists when eye injuries are involved" she said. "Unfortunately, many ophthalmologists do not acknowledge that VDTs can be the cause of eye injuries. Consequently, such doctors are often unreceptive, and sometimes hostile, to the claim of injury."

Additionally, Ms. Robinson noted that the workers' compensation system does not fully compensate a person for his or her injuries. There is a statutory limit on the amount of lost wages that can be recovered, which is likely to be less than the actual wages lost due to the injury. Also, in the case of eye injuries, medical expenses for eye exercises or vision therapy may not be recovered because such treatment is not recognized by the medical establishment. And, because VDT-related injuries have little precedent, judges are still skeptical about the

existence and severity of the injury.

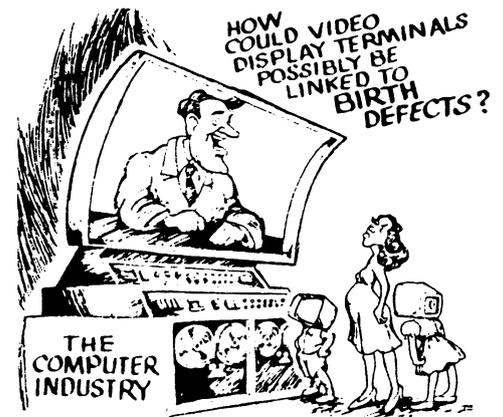
Despite the success of her workers' compensation suit, Ms. Robinson states, "The best resolution of a VDT injury would be the prevention of any injury before it happened. Awareness and education about the possible hazards of VDTs is of vital importance to all VDT operators."

## Cutbacks:

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If unchecked, this process of office automation will radically transform the working conditions and jobs of millions of clerical workers. The campaign organized by Blue Cross employees intends to reverse this trend. Through their union, Blue Cross employees are determined to influence the process of automation and demand that the needs of the labor force be fully considered and protected as changes are made.

The Campaign is trying, through demonstrations, public



hearings and letter writing, to bring enough community pressure on Blue Cross to force them to make a firm commitment to retain all jobs and operations in Oakland. Nearly two dozen union, religious, ethnic, women's and community groups have gone on record in support of the employees. The Oakland City Council enacted a resolution by unanimous vote in favor of the workers' demands. The Campaign can be contacted at 415/653-9614.

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