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ISSUE 12 VOLUME LXXXVI

Thursday, April 23, 2009

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Danger in the library?

MAX COHEN - [X]PRESS

The J. Paul Leonard library at SF State has been closed since November 2008. Workers still enter the building to retrieve books for the university. A recent complaint alleged that the environment within the building was unsafe, prompting an investigation by SF State's Office of Safety and Risk Management.

Union official calls library 'death trap'

By Eric Gneckow CONTRIBUTING WRITER

California's work safety watchdog sent a letter to SF State last week requiring the university to investigate a complaint over conditions in the J. Paul Leonard library, according to a copy of the letter.

The letter from the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration asked the university to investigate claims that the library, which is closed for renovations, is unsafe for the 22 workers who retrieve the books still stored within.

The letter carried no immediate penalty but required that SF State conduct a prompt investigation and notify Cal/OSHA of its findings.

Yet despite SF State's in-house Office of Safety and Risk Management's finding of only minor problems with the work site, many employees said that the environment was not up to their personal standards and that they had no clue how to respond to an emergency while in the building.

"The library is basically a death trap," said Joseph Jelincic, an SF State Service Employees International Union representative for two of the 22 employees, "from our initial walk through, we could only find one way in and one way out."

A Pandora's Box

Touring the library to investigate an employee's concern over air quality, Jelincic, who has received training to identify workplace hazards, said he was shocked by what he saw. Stairways and hallways were poorly lit, and the bathrooms had no running water.

Cal/OSHA requires all workplaces have at least two exits, part of a larger group of standards in the California Code of Regulations.

Jelincic said he reported the problems to SF State earlier this month but received an unsatisfactory level of response from risk management and chose to notify OSHA.

"When there's a complaint like this, there shouldn't be any hesitation in looking into it," he said.

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Closed since November of 2008, the 1950s-era library is undertaking "a major expansion, seismic strengthening and renovation," according to the project's Web site, including the addition of a robotized system for storing and retrieving books.

Until the expected completion of the project in 2011, workers respond to requests online and retrieve the books stored in the library within 24 hours.

Twenty of the workers who retrieve books in the library are non-unionized students, according to Jelincic. The remaining two are unionized library staff, whose ranks are divided between the main building and the other locations set up to provide library services.

Risk management completed its investigation by the five-day deadline set by Cal/OSHA and began installing additional lighting even before

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ASI farmer's market struggles to succeed

By Aaron Harris Freifeld STAFF WRITER

Just over a year after his first time setting up a fruit stand in front of the Humanities building, Jimmy Egoian is determined to keep his spot.

"It's just a lot of good people," he said. "The bottom line is, though, [the stand] is not very successful."

Egoian is good friends with and works for owners of the Twin Girls Farm, located outside of Fresno. The farm wanted to participate in the on-campus market every Thursday to show students what good produce looks like and provide them with a local, organic choice.

Though the location brings him

to one of the best communities he's seen, it also brings the least number of people. Each week Twin Girls makes at most \$500 at SF State, the lowest amount of 20 markets it participates in. The cost of growing, handling, loading, and driving produce to the market costs around \$550. The SF State location is one of only two in which the farm doesn't break even.

Egoian blames this on the lack of consistent buyers and student's tendency to not have excess money.

"On top of all this the media has hurt confidence during the recession," he added.

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STEVE ZETTLER - [X]PRESS


Paige Wheeler examines produce at the fruit and vegetable booth at the San Francisco State University Farmer's Market.

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Investigation verifies few prolems

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the study was available for viewing, according to library employees.

"Minor findings"

The 99-page reply to OSHA from risk management contained several documents, including a summarized response to the initial complaint and the specific measurement of asbestos levels throughout the building.

"I'm pleased to say that there were only minor findings that are easily corrected," wrote Michael Martin, executive director of risk management, in an email to the [X]press.

The report said that the university had added a second exit, added lights to some areas, conducted a fire drill and assigned workers to an Administration building bathroom.

The reply also included signed forms from each library employee stating they understand the "Basic Safety Rules for Construction" handbook and that any concerns should be brought to a supervisor.

Yet when asked where the nearest first-aid kit was, two-year library employee and student Serena Maris said she didn't know.

"I'd probably go in my purse for a Band-Aid," she said.

Gayle Orr-Smith, emergency preparedness coordinator for SF State, said advanced knowledge of what to do in an emergency can save lives.

"It's absolutely important," she said. "Once you have this information, it's amazing how it can affect your behavior."

No better option

While keeping the university's books within an active construction

Items listed in the letter from the Calif. Division of Occupational Safety and Health

- The building only has one working exit
 - Exits are not lit
 - Signs that lead to exits are not clear
- Stairs and passageways are not clear of debris and protruding nails
 - Stairwells have either insufficient or no lighting
 - The automatic fire sprinkler has no water supply
 - No sanitary facilities are inside the building.
 - Possible exposure to airborne asbestos and silica
- Failure to develop and implement an emergency action plan and train employees on what to do in case of an emergency.

zone complicates their retrieval, the head of SF State's library, Deborah Masters, said it was the best option.

"There wasn't any other place to put them," she said.

Since a strongly-fortified building is needed to handle the heavy books, the only other option would be to store them in a remote warehouse that would further delay the time between request and delivery, she said.

In consideration of the additional dangers of active construction, Masters, OSHA, risk management and others held a meeting before book retrieval began last year to determine the best way to protect the staff within the library. In addition to other rules, workers must wear a hardhat and safety vest while passing through the actual construction zone.

Yet despite the early planning, Jelincic said the administration of the library environment has become lax.

"I think the university had some good intentions, but I think they fell apart," he said. "Having a plan on pa-

per is different than having a safe practice."

Workers said they didn't feel like they were in any immediate danger while in the library, but the environment could be uncomfortable.

"In certain areas, the lights are off," said Nguyen, who added that the natural light was not enough to see easily. "We just have to make do with what we have."

With the surrounding construction, including welding, Jelincic said the risk of fire or building damage is substantially higher. In a panic, a seemingly obvious route to safety can be complicated by things like poor lighting and debris.

"Library materials are flammable--it's old paper," he said.

While risk management has addressed the complaints, Cal/OSHA wrote in their letter that the site may still be subject to an inspection.

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Market withers at State

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Alex Fleshman confirms Egoian's belief. The sophomore Cinema student loves to browse through the fruits, vegetables, and bread available each Thursday at the market but only occasionally has enough cash to purchase items.

"I love to buy things at school and wish I could today," he said upon grabbing an orange slice sample and walking away.

In addition to the fruits of Twin Girls Farm there is a bakery and vegetable stand that come every week. The market was started and funded a year ago by the Associated Students, Inc. after a graduate student had the idea as a way to promote healthy living. Each semester ASI pays \$1,500 to license and register the market.

"As far connecting with students, it's been successful," said Horace Montgomery, Leadership Development Coordinator for ASI.

Julio Catalan, who works for his family's vegetable farm, agrees. So far he has experienced friendly relations at SF State. He loves to show students vegetables, such as chard and kale, which many have never tasted or even seen.

Unfortunately he also shares his fruit stand counterpoint's results: low earnings. He said at the campus's market he makes around half the amount he makes at the other seven markets Catalan Family Farm sells at.

Senior Genevieve Jaramilla is one of Catalan's biggest fans and buys from him almost every week. She lives in the Park Merced Villas next to school and loves his variety compared to near-by Trader Joe's. Her next dish, compliments of the stand, will be a stew she can pick at the entire weekend.

After buying celery, onions, broccoli and cabbage she leaned over the table of celery and told

Catalan "you're awesome".

"I need some comfort food," she said. "It's cold and gray, you know."

Edith's Gourmet Baking Company seems to be the only stand with moderate success. Employee Joel Gonzalez says for their products the SF State customer is actually an advantage. Though their sales on bread loafs and whole cakes are lower on campus, the demand for small pastries such as cookies and granola bars from students on break from class is especially high.

"They like coming here because our stuff is not from another state and doesn't have a bunch of chemicals, he said.

That is the SF State farmer's market vendor's biggest asset and advantage over corporate stores; all the food is organic and local.

But for Egoian and Twin Girls Farm, even that is becoming less of a specialty due to large corporations jumping on the organic trend and lowering prices.

"The big guys keep pushing things farther down," he said. "At least many students understand the importance of meeting who your food comes from."

And with that idea in mind Egoian will stay at SF State as long as possible. Unlike many he has worked with, he still has the passion for farming and operating a small business with his wife "like a family from the old days". Reaching out to the student population is especially rewarding to him.

"We're going to stay here as long as we can but also have to make enough to sustain ourselves," he said. "But we are having the time of our life here."

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See the letter from the California Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the university's response at xpress.sfsu.edu