

Interview with Australian postal worker:

"Hell will freeze over before I believe that these illnesses are a coincidence"

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Angie Adams worked for Australia Post for over 25 years, including nearly a decade at the Capalaba mail centre, before becoming ill with incurable systemic lupus erythematosus. She initiated the demand for an inquiry into the high incidence of cancer and other serious illnesses among her Capalaba workmates. Adams, now 50, first started in the Post Office as a 15-year-old in Melbourne.

She spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* last week about her experiences at Capalaba.

"I started work at Capalaba in late 1992 as a senior clerk. Around March 1993, I started getting headaches. The headaches were incredible—I would get this shocking pain in the center of my head. After I had worked there about six months, the joint pains began. I had joint pains all over, my hands would swell and I could hardly walk. I couldn't eat. I thought it was glandular fever. I had blood tests that came back negative. Then I had blood tests for Ross River fever. The doctors didn't know what was wrong."

At first, Adams did not link her health problems to her workplace.

"Because there was no history of that in the family, I always thought it was something environmental. I just went on alone until early this year, when I found out that two people I worked with on the counter at the post office had died 16 days apart. Then I thought there was something wrong.

"And then there was another woman I worked with on the counter sometimes. She had Graves' disease, which is an auto-immune problem. She had her thyroid gland removed and they found that it was cancerous and they re-diagnosed her with auto-immune hepatitis. That was four people and then I remembered a fifth

person, Bev Harris, who also worked on the counter sometimes.

"She died on January 10 of pancreatic cancer, or what started out as that. I remember her symptoms on the counter—she would sort of have constant aching flu-like symptoms. I thought, 'no way; you cannot have five people working on a counter and all of them with something seriously wrong'."

Adams wrote to Australia Post on February 23 asking for tests to be conducted.

"I wrote to them requesting that they do independent tests and I said that Energex, the electricity company, was quite welcome to do tests if they wanted too. The electro-magnetic tests came back as below normal. The union got involved and they arranged for Dr Maisch from Tasmania to examine the test results. He said they were not bad but there were some 'hot spots' in the building."

Adams has fears for the health of people still working at the mail centre.

"I always will, until I know what's under that ground. I don't agree with the office staying open. They should have closed it to do tests, so they could dig down at the hot spots and get soil. Keeping the office open is causing a lot of anxiety for the staff."

Adams said that when workers voted on April 18 to keep working at the centre, they were under pressure from management to keep the office open.

"I didn't like the vote because the night sorters were not there. The vote was something like 11 to 7, which adds up to 18 but there are 45 people working there, so I'm led to believe. In my eyes, it's an illegal vote. We are talking about a health issue."

Adams condemned the preliminary report issued by

Queensland Health chief officer Brian Campbell and Australia Post medical adviser Ed Castrisos, presenting the health problems at the mail centre as a mere coincidence.

“Hell will freeze over before I believe that. The report was a joke because they did not approach any of us—they didn't talk to us, they just looked at the sick leave records. If a worker went to a doctor and got a medical certificate that is recorded on the sick leave record.”

Adams said her own record was incomplete and estimated that at least 10 victims had not had their records examined.



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