

TUBERCULOSIS IS CONTAGIOUS. CHARTER OAK LEARNS IT THE HARD WAY



The US Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration has cited the Hartford Health Center. The Hartford Health Center faced serious denouncement and censure when it did not immediately disclose that a patient with tuberculosis had died. OSHA began investigating Charter Oak Health Center Inc. in Hartford in February following complaints that the Center had not failed to take protective action, nor did it inform its workers about the patient, endangering them and exposing them to a patient with tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is a contagious disease that generally attacks the lungs and is spread through the air, typically via coughs. On the third of July OSHA issued three citations of health violations and proposed fines of up to \$17,600 against the Center for failing to protect its employees against tuberculosis and other infectious diseases. Robert Kowalski, OSHA's acting area director in Hartford said that, "Employees were needlessly exposed to a potentially contagious infection due to the lack of basic protective measures that should have been in place. An effective infectious control program would have established procedures and provided training and protective equipment to workers to minimize their exposure to tuberculosis and other infectious diseases." In a news release on Tuesday OSHA said that the Hartford Center did not have a hazard communication program nor did it provide hazardous chemical training to its employees. OSHA said that the center failed to have a system in place that immediately identifies and masks patients who are suspected of suffering from the contagious disease. Moreover, it failed to segregate and isolate the patients, bring them into direct contact with the workers exposing them to risk. OSHA also had strong words for the Center for not training workers who would have face-to face contact whilst treating the tuberculosis patients nor having a respiratory protection program. According to OSHA, Charter Oak Health Center Inc. can comply within 15 days, or seek an appointment with OSHA's area director to state any misgivings they may have or challenge the findings before the independent Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission. Pending the enquiries that began in February, Charter Oak Health Center was placed on probation for a period of two years, as part of a consent order with the state. During this probation period the Center would be monitored and patients would be looked after by the state. Edmund Fitzgerald, OSHA spokesman, said Tuesday that OSHA officials are scheduled to meet next Tuesday to discuss the violations. Edmund Fitzgerald, OSHA spokesman, said that all three violations were considered "serious" by OSHA. "There is substantial probability that death or serious physical harm could result from a hazard, about which the employer knew or should have known," he said. Employees say that the tuberculosis patient would frequent Charter Oak frequently; so-much-so that he was an unofficial greeter at the Health Center. The man succumbed to his disease in December. Suspecting possible exposure to him, 140 workers at the center were screened for possible tuberculosis. The findings lead to at least three people undergoing treatment for tuberculosis. Charter Oak officials were unavailable for comment.