

AFSCME Says Milwaukee DPW Mismanaged COVID-19 Case

Written by

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Union claims City delayed telling coworkers about sewer worker quarantined because a member of their household tested positive for COVID-19.

MILWAUKEE - AFSCME Wisconsin rebukes the City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works mismanagement of a high-risk COVID-19 case and the subsequent eight-day delay in informing DPW employees. To date, COVID-19 claimed the lives of ten and infects over 600 Milwaukee County residents, with infection rates climbing daily.

On March 18, 2020, a Milwaukee sewer worker was put on a two-week quarantine after a member of their household tested positive for COVID-19 and the employee exhibited symptoms of the highly infectious disease. Eight days later, a memo was provided to “all sewer employees” by the sewer service manager informing employees of a department member’s contact with COVID-19.

AFSCME Wisconsin President Paul Spink remarked, “Mayor Barrett and his DPW administrators waited eight days to tell employees they were exposed to COVID-19. Consequently, workers went home to their families and into the community ignorant of the fact that they might already be sick. They had no idea they might be contagious when they went home to hug their spouses and children. The City was beyond negligent when lives were clearly at stake.”

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AFSCME Wisconsin represents Milwaukee county and city employees from public works, clerical and support staff, sanitation, parks, childcare, and social work. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, Milwaukee AFSCME members voiced their safety concerns, but were unable to do so in a formal setting with county or city management.

AFSCME Wisconsin Executive Director Patrick Wycoff stated, “again, we see the danger posed when workers lack a voice in the workplace. Denying employees’ right to meet with their employers about workplace safety, emergency and disaster preparedness protocol puts the community at risk.”

Wycoff continued, “every day during this pandemic AFSCME members have shown up to keep our communities running, they do so by putting their wellbeing on the line. As a matter of public safety, workers demand a seat at the table.”