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# Disabled group forms chapter in state

## Albuquerque workers at GTE office form group's core

ALBUQUERQUE (AP) — Disabled Workers United, a California-based group, has started a chapter here for people who believe they have been injured by exposure to chemicals.

The core of the group is made up of 47 former or current employees of GTE Lenkurt, now GTE Communications Corp., who have filed lawsuits against the company, alleging they contracted various disabling illnesses from exposure to chemicals and toxic substances on the job.

The workers have asked the court to determine the disabilities and to award all com-

penation benefits and payment of lifetime medical expenses.

Nancy Colbert, a spokeswoman at GTE's headquarters in Phoenix, declined to comment on any individual case. But she denied the Albuquerque plant used chemicals that were suspected or confirmed to cause cancer or other medical problems.

She said there was no medical evidence to link the specific illnesses to exposure to specific chemicals.

GTE's Albuquerque plant manufactures data and optical transmission equipment.

Shirley Conrad, project coordinator for Disabled Workers United in California, said the organization provides mutual aid and worker rehabilitation and allows workers to talk to each other about their illnesses without being told "that it's all in their heads and they're imagining it."

Amanda Hawes, an attorney representing

workers in California's high tech Silicon Valley, said, "Workers have a right to know what they're working with and they have a right to refuse to work under unsafe conditions."

"They should trust their bodies if they are experiencing new problems, and those who expose them should be held accountable," she said. "Above all, they should know that they are not alone."

That program has been in effect for several years, although a U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration right-to-know policy will not become effective until May 1986, Colbert said.

Albuquerque attorney Josephine Rohr, who represents the GTE workers, said their health problems closely parallel those of high tech workers elsewhere with known exposure to specific toxins.