

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: June 14, 2023

Name: Carl Cochenour

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Position/Title: Electrician, Cenovus Oregon Refinery

Address: 2536 Redfox Drive

City: Toledo State: Ohio Zip: 43611

Best Contact Telephone: 419-376-8904 Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB 205

Specific Issue: Refinery safety and training

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 5 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

Construction workers should have stronger refinery safety protections in light of recent deaths and injuries from explosions/fires.

*Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.*

To: Ohio House of Representatives – Homeland Security Committee  
From: Carl Cochenour  
RE: HB 205 - High Hazard Training Certification Act

Chairman Ghanbari, Vice-Chair Plummer, and Ranking Member Thomas:

My name is Carl Cochenour. I live in Toledo with my wife, Heather, our 16-year-old daughter Cami, and our 11-year-old daughter Lia. I'm an electrician at the Oregon Cenovus refinery. I'm here to tell you what I see working at the refinery. I'm here because I'm worried about the people I work with going home safe to their families.

When I was 19, my dad was killed in a motorcycle accident. I had to become an adult quick - so I started my IBEW Local 8 electrical apprenticeship. After 5 years I topped out as a journeyman electrician. Since then, I've done every facet of work in the electrical trades. I've been a superintendent, a foreman. I was Bechtel's General Foreman for head replacement and steam generator replacement at Davis-Besse. I've worked at the Lima and TRC refineries. I've been in the Oregon Refinery for about 3 years. So, I have worked at all 3 of the refineries in NW Ohio.

In my apprenticeship, I was taught what's safe and what's not safe. My most important job as a foreman is making sure my crew goes home every night.

Working on the refinery isn't like building a school or a warehouse. The complexities of the system out there are immense. Of all the places I've worked in my career, the most dangerous is the oil refineries.

I don't think it's right that people who live in Northwest Ohio take all the risk of the refinery, but all I see are Texas and Oklahoma trucks coming in the refinery to work. On average, I deal with at least 3 or 4 different types of construction tradespeople in a day – carpenters, insulators, pipefitters, electricians. You can tell the crews that don't have the training or safety knowledge that we have.

Once we had to pull our electricians off one flare towers because there was asbestos insulation on the tower. The untrained workers couldn't tell if it was asbestos or non-asbestos and it was blowing all over the job site. Our workers brought it up to the steward, the steward brought it up to management, and they finally got local insulators involved to clean it up quickly.

Once they had to have the Ohio carpenters go through the scaffolding because they were finding loose parts and pieces. Anyone who went up on their scaffolds had to wear harnesses just to work. Your last line of defense should be your PPE – the first line of defense should be to eliminate the hazard.

Those workers almost only speak Spanish on the refinery busses and in the unit. I've heard the plant come over the radio to order, "English only on the radios." When I'm working with trained tradespeople, I can tell them directly what needs to be done and they know how to handle it.

With the crews they've been bringing in, I've had to have them go find someone who speaks English just to understand what I need.

It's very aggravating and maddening to work like that on a dangerous site. When a simple problem comes up - when you are trying to find out why there is red danger tape blocking your work area or you need to make sure your workers are safe - they've got to go find the one guy on the new crew who can speak English – and it's busted English – to get anything done.

My wife and I talk about how dangerous it is at the refinery. She's the one who showed me the stack going crazy that Tuesday last September. I was out for COVID that day. When we found out about the Morrissey brothers being killed, it was horrible. Especially with my dad dying when I was so young, I think all the time about their kids and their wives.

When we started the restoration project at the refinery after the explosion, I remember walking by the area near the tanks where everything happened. I don't know how to describe what I felt: grief remorse, utter shock. What if that was me? What would happen to Heather, Cami and Lia? Here I am, making a living, when two men just died here.

I don't know if we'll ever hear the real answers to what happened. During the turnaround before the explosion, they brought in a lot of new construction workers. The impression I got was they didn't really care what those guys on the turnaround were doing - just get it done. This isn't right. There are thousands of Ohio construction workers that have the training AND experience at the refineries that they are passing up for the unskilled workers from Texas. WHY???

Something has to change. It shouldn't be profits over people at the refinery. When an explosion happens and over a dozen workers get hurt and two workers die, it's usually because someone put profits over people.

So, I'm asking YOU to protect refinery workers. Thank you for hearing my testimony.