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Posted: 1:48 p.m. Tuesday, May 1, 2012

Local construction workers protest out-of-state contractors for pipeline project

By Ali Myers and NEWS9

JEFFERSON COUNTY, Ohio —

More than 50 local construction workers held a rally in Jefferson County on Tuesday to protest a pipeline project they say is being completed by an out-of-state contractor and out-of-state workers.

The protesters are members of the Laborers' International Union of North America, a national union made up of nearly 500,000 people.

The 50 people who showed up in Bergholz said the message they're trying to send to Progressive Pipeline is to "demand local jobs for local workers." They said their whole focus is to raise awareness. They feel that jobs promised to them by the booming shale industry are going to people out of state.

"Progressive Pipeline is from Mississippi and a vast majority of workers are up here doing the work when we feel there are people up here perfectly capable to do the work," said Michael Engbert of the Ohio Laborers District Council.

The 13-mile pipeline will stretch through Carroll and Jefferson counties and is expected to take six to eight months to finish.

"Out-of-state companies come up here, and it's a great thing because it's a shot in the arm to the local economy. But at the same time, we need to make sure the people living here are reaping benefits of the work that's done here," Engbert said.

Those who protested on Tuesday said they're qualified and ready to work for jobs they feel they were promised.

Curt Mayle, business manager for Labors Local 1015 said, "We need to work here. This area has been depressed for a long time and we need the work. Our people need the work. We've been through two years of hell and we need the work."

The rally lasted until noon, but the protesters will be back on Thursday at the Progressive Pipeline laydown yard in Bergholz.

"Until we get some results, we're going to be here and make things happen," Mayle said.

Chesapeake Energy is the project's owner.

UNEDITED: Chesapeake Energy's response to local protesters

"One of our priorities when looking to hire contractors for work in Ohio is the use of a local qualified workforce. There are other factors like safety performance record, scheduling availability and cost that figure into the equation as well. To suggest that we do not hire contractors who use local labor is completely false and companies here in Ohio, both union and non-union, can confirm our practices. In the case of the pipeline project in Bergholz, 11 bid requests were sent out and Progressive Pipeline, using some local laborers, is the one that was awarded the project."

"It is our understanding that there may have been some destructive behavior during today's event and we are working with local law enforcement to gain all the details before commenting further."

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