

Union, Pratt closing in on buyout numbers

By Howard French

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Roughly 70 percent of the number of Pratt & Whitney workers required to take a buyout, eliminating the need for forced layoffs, have signed on for the program, according to the Machinists union.

James Parent, assistant directing business representative of the union's District 26, said about 350 of the 500 workers needed to avoid layoffs already had come forward as of Thursday. And he said he's confident the union will achieve its goal by the end of the day Monday, which is the deadline for signing up for the buyout.

"Over the weekend and on Monday we'll see a surge of last-minute volunteers," Parent said.

If the drive to find volunteers for the buyout falls short, he said, the union still has until September to work with Pratt on bringing back in house some of the work that has been farmed out to subcontractors, thereby easing the need for job cuts.

Parent also has said that Pratt has pledged to seek no forced layoffs through at least July, should the number of volunteers for the buyout fall short of 500.

Pratt plans to close its Cheshire engine repair plant as well as the smaller Connecticut Airfoil Repair Operation, or CARO, in East Hartford, creating the need to cut 500 jobs.

The buyout offer, also known as the "Special Severance Program," is intended to create vacancies to be filled on a one-for-one basis by employees who are displaced as a result of the Cheshire and CARO closings.

To be eligible, workers must be 55 or older, except at the closing plants where the company has waived the age requirement to give the maximum number of people a chance to take the package.

The buyout provides for a \$20,000 cash payment to each worker taking the offer. In addition, the buyout provides for a week of pay for every year employed. It also includes one full year of paid medical and dental insurance.

"Once the window closes" on Monday Pratt will review the list of volunteers before determining who can be accepted for the program, according to Bryan Kidder, Pratt's media relations manager.

"Employees will leave between Jan. 31 and Sept. 30 as determined by the company to facilitate a smooth transition," Kidder said. "We are trying to place as many people as possible in a way that provides seamless support to our customers."

The closings will leave only two Pratt plants operating in Connecticut — the headquarters operation in East Hartford and the major assembly plant in Middletown.