

Submission
To
Workers Compensation
Board
Legislative
Review
Committee

Received April 13, 2004

I would like to submit my presentations for the Legislative Review hearing which I will be participating at, as a registered guest speaker, on April 14, 2004 at 3:45 pm at the Canad Inn Transcona.

My submission pertains to the lack of coverage and respect industrial, volunteer firefighters receive. I was a volunteer industrial firefighter for 11 years, as well as a surface plant operator and finally as an underground miner for Hudson Bay Mining a& Smelting in Flin Flon, Manitoba, for a total of 13 years, during this period of time I was exposed to a various hazardous materials and chemicals. And now I'm battling cancer.

We, (the volunteer firefighters) work hard, every day at our regular jobs. Some are security guards, some are surface plant operators, some are equipment operators, some are working in the leaching plant and others are even underground miners.

With the local town fire department less than 500m away from the companies main gate. When a fire call comes into the main security office, which fire department is dispatched, the companies Industrial Fire Department.

The reasoning for this, is the training and the equipment and the man power. As a volunteer industrial fire fighter, I have been thoroughly and extensively trained to handle a higher level of risk and hazard. I was also exposed to a larger and more dangerous range of toxic chemicals, molten metals fires, smelter explosions, oxygen plant fires and over all an higher risk environment, then an average full time fire fighter is exposed to on an annual basis.

WCB is under the impression that you have too been exposed to smoke for 20 years or more before it can affect your health. When the reality is, that the level of TVL's (Threshold Value Limits, meaning the exposer level x the exposer time x the exposer p.p.m.'s) is what matters. For an example, an under ground Scoop Tram tire when burning releases 96 different toxic gases. A couple of minutes in this environment is all it takes to have long term, health side effects, that could be detrimental to your health. You do not have to be a full time city fire fighter for 20 years in order to get cancer.

At a normal to above normal exposer to cadmium for a period of 1 day, increases your chances of kidney cancer by 1,000%. By checking records of employment a verification of how many people have retired out of the Cadmium department at HBM&S since the company opened over 80 years ago, will show that there's been none.

I was exposed to cadmium on a daily basis for a period of over 3 years, Cadmium is 100 x worse a carcinogenic than being exposed to asbestos.

24 hours a day I was on call, responding to fire alarms, smelter explosions and far too often, death at the workplace. Anytime the alarm goes off, we (all industrial fire fighters) responded accordingly. Any employee on the property becomes a priority, a priority of safety, as a fire fighter, our main concern was to take every co-worker, out of harms way. In most incidents we were successful. But in some cases, we were not, but to say the least if someone got hurt or killed, there would be the assurance that they or their family was taken care of, by Workers Compensation Board. As the person risking our lives, to save them, we were not fully covered. We are not recognized as a professional fire department, when the reality is, that the local fire department is not trained to handle these extreme emergency situations. We are the people who reduce and prevent injury, death and loss of property for our employer and co-workers, we are the people who are expected to protect and rescue our co-workers.

WCB covers us on the job, but refuses to cover us on the long term. The level of hazardous and toxic chemicals and smoke we are exposed to are overlooked, we risk our lives to save our employers and their insurers money. But yet all we are treated like an expendable commodity.

Living in Flin Flon, Manitoba we never had the luxury of a full time industrial fire department, c/w hazmat team, employed by the city.

Once any of us have fallen ill from the exposure of being a volunteer industrial fire fighter, we are shamelessly placed in a long drawn out appeal process, to find out we are not covered by WCB.

There is a current case on going at WCB. Where an employer has refused to release all medical information, regarding an employee's exposure levels to certain toxic chemicals, to WCB. The claimant has willingly signed a release for WCB to obtain all medical information. But the employer still refused. The WCB case manager knows that there were a series of over 24 blood tests taken. After a period of 7 months the employer released 4 out of a possible 24 tests, these test levels were still high in the exposure range.

The employer now states that there were no more tests taken. This was found to be false, when the claimant contacted the testing lab and was told that there were over 20 tests taken, but they were property of the employer and that they could not be released to him. Even with the knowledge the case manager has, regarding the employer with holding important medical information. The case manager will base her acceptance of this case on the little information released by the employer.

When all the political appeals and finger pointing is taking place who's left holding the bag, our families.

Our families have to take over the responsibility of care and sacrifice, while the injured fire fighter files appeal after appeal while battling serious health issues.

In closing, My request for consideration of this submission is simple, Employers who's work environment requires an industrial fire department on its premises, is obviously an environment of possible great hazards and risks. And the employer who is using there own employees to protect the lives of co-workers and to protect the equipment and property, which keeps them operative, should be held accountable, for the well being of there fire fighters, short term and long term.

And the onus should be placed on the employer to produce all pertinent medical information or they should be held accountable, there ability to bury any damaging information should be treated like a crime. Make the employers take responsibility. Any refusal of pertinent information should be treated like an admission of guilt.

Thank you

Signed

Allan Joseph Roschuk