



R E Devlin

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The Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs References  
Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Re-Toxic Dust Inquiry

I was employed by *D.I.M.E.T.* as a general hand from 1971 to 1977. During that period, most of the tasks I was assigned to involved industrial cleaning in heavy industry including the Whyalla Shipyards. In most instances, there was a great deal of dust of all varieties at those sites, including asbestos, silicon, and the dust from sandblasters which, I understood, was a bi-product from copper mining. In the early days, protection usually consisted of a handkerchief across the nose and mouth just to stop the irritation and discomfort of the dust. There was never any suggestion that the dust might be injurious to health, in fact, we were often told that it (the dust) was O.K. Later, when there was some murmuring about asbestos, we were given a paper nose mask for general dust and when working in areas where the dust was constantly thick, if we asked for one, we would be given a basic dust mask covering the nose and mouth with twin filters. When the filters became clogged and breathing difficult the general practice was to go out of the dust, remove the filters and tap them to remove the dust particles, often, a tablespoon of dust would fall out, we would then replace the filters and return to the work site until the filters blocked again. I cannot recall any occupational health and safety advice being given at any time or any monitoring by employers' representatives to make sure that people employed to work at excessively dusty locations were taking proper safety precautions. I have no doubt that as time went on, the dangers of long term toxic dust related health problems were being brought to the attention of employers but those dangers were not (in my opinion) being relayed on to the people at risk, the employees who were often working for days at a time in what would now be termed "hazardous conditions".

At the moment, I appear to be one of the lucky ones. However, some of my workmates were not so lucky, some have died and a number now suffer from respiratory ailments which seriously impact on their quality of life. I feel that such people, who have often given many years of dedicated service working in toxic dust, in complete ignorance of the dangers (through no fault of their own) should receive compensation if it is proven that their employers knew of the dangers but did nothing to minimise the effect. I am willing to give evidence if called upon to do so.

Yours faithfully,

R E Devlin