

Spotlight

on Injured Workers



OCTOBER 2022

“Dirty Black Cloud” - McIntyre Powder Project

Silicosis and Mining in Northern Ontario

Mining was a prominent profession for many in Northern Ontario however, the significant impact of breathing in silica dust was causing miners in the gold-producing region to develop the debilitating lung disease - silicosis. In 1944, to get the case count of silicosis under control, McIntyre Research Foundation developed an aluminum powder to be used as a prophylaxis against the effects of the silica dust. From approximately 1943 – 1980s, McIntyre Powder was primarily administered to miners in Ontario, Western Australia, the U.S., Belgian Congo, Chile, Mexico and Geevor Tin Mine in England¹.

Both the mining companies and miners were told that breathing in the aluminum oxide powder would act as a preventative to silicosis. So, to stop the effects of one inhaled dust they should inhale another one! Tens of thousands of miners were forced to breathe in the powder prior to beginning every shift either via a compressed air system or constructed chambers. The aluminum powder was used in several non-mining industries such as: pottery manufacturers, foundries, silica brick manufacturers and refractories. For these non-mining industries, workers were individually given the powder through a mouthpiece-hose apparatus which was attached to a mill that ground the aluminum into dust. It was later found to have no protective effect².

McIntyre Powder Project

What has been extensively researched, is that the McIntyre Powder was in fact the significant contributing factor to the development of neurological conditions, i.e., Parkinson’s Disease, ALS and COPD. In 1979, the CBC’s Fifth Estate, “Powder Keg,” conducted an investigation into the black powder and found research in other countries admonishing the practice. After seeing the exposé, Janice Martell, a miner’s daughter, was driven to find out what this powder did to miners that it was supposed to be saving.

Founding the McIntyre Powder Project in 2014, Martell’s goal was to compile a registry of miners, research, document health issues and collect data to show the dangers of inhaling the powder with the assistance of the Occupational

Health Clinics for Ontario Workers. OHCOW’s role was to conduct examinations and clinics to collect the miner’s medical information that would ultimately determine the health effects



(1,2) <https://www.mcintyrepowderproject.com/>

of McIntyre Powder on miners. To date, more than 500 miners have registered.

Ultimately, The Project was pushing for the Workers Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) to recognize the powder as the significant contributing factor of a work-related injury. The WSIB, bound to document and consider new research on illness and diseases, refused to acknowledge that the McIntyre Powder was the cause of the neurological conditions the miners were claiming.

WSIA Regulation, Schedule 3

The Project persevered from 2014 to 2022, meeting numerous challenges and barriers from the WSIB, but on January 27, 2022, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act (WSIA), Ontario Regulation 175/98, Schedule 3 Occupational Diseases was amended to include Parkinson's disease due to any process involving exposure to McIntyre Powder in the mining industry.

This is a major accomplishment for all the Project's and miners efforts, but as importantly, it shows advocates that change can happen. Opening up the WSIA to amend its regulations is no small feat and rarely happens.

Pushing the WSIB who continue to delay, obstruct, prolong and deny claims on technicalities or interpretation of policy, needs to continue to happen as we fight for change in occupational disease, mental health, loss of earnings quantum and non-economic loss award increase to name a few.

Closure

As profound as this recognition was to the miners and the families they left behind, on April 28, 2022, a group of miners, families of deceased miners, including Janice Martell, asked the Legislative Assembly of Ontario for an official apology to all miners exposed to McIntyre Powder.

This apology was denied due to alleged lack of notice and there was no unanimous consent from the Legislature. These families were told it could happen next session of the Legislature – conveniently following the election. Because of their unnecessary and insensitive delay, miners are dying and deprived of the the dignity they deserve from the government's apology.

More information and resources on the McIntyre Project

Videos:

The Fifth Estate - Aluminum dust in mining – Powder Keg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1-fsm3GAK0>

The Fifth Estate - Aluminum dust in mining – The Miner's Daughter

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pv2rrwf_wx8

The Fifth Estate - Aluminum dust in mining – More on The Miner's Daughter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=soeRzN1JygY>

Janice Martell, May 11, 2022, explaining the Government's refusal to apologize and miner's deaths

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxALZbEmb8A>

