Devil of a Poison
Fighting Back Makes a Difference
In solidarity

“We encourage all of our Unifor activists - all Canadians to understand the dangers of this killer disease. In most instances, cancer can be prevented if we work together to eliminate carcinogens from our workplaces and the environment.”

- Jerry Dias
Devil of a Poison
Fighting Back Makes a Difference
The CAW Council meeting in December of 1997 included a moving address by CAW Local 89 President Bud Jimmerfield, who at the time had only a couple of months to live. Bud, along with his wife Diane and his eight children, urged council delegates to not mourn his death, but fight for the living. He asked all to do their best to prevent future occupational diseases, death and injuries. Bud was a tireless health, safety and environment and workers’ compensation activist and it’s for this reason CAW Council established the annual Bud Jimmerfield Award to recognize the contribution of an outstanding CAW Health, Safety, Environment or Workers’ Compensation activist. The award is made each year at the CAW Council meeting in December. Eligible health, safety, environment or workers compensation activists must be CAW members and be nominated by their local union leadership or local workplace leadership. Activists must have shown leadership in helping their fellow workers as well as participated in activities beyond the workplace.

Bud was a machinist who had worked in the plant for about 30 years and was exposed to metalworking fluids every day on the job. In 1996, he was diagnosed with cancer of the oesophagus. By December 1997, his wife Diane and their eight children knew that Bud, 49-years-old, was dying of cancer as a result of his exposure to carcinogens in the workplace.

Addressing that meeting, Bud said:

“If I look back at it, if I ask, would I rather have my life back than a dollar, I’d rather have my life back.”

Barely a month after addressing the meeting, Bud Jimmerfield’s personal fight against occupational cancer was over. He died on 31 January 1998.
The WSIB Board in Ontario issued a precedent setting workers’ compensation decision in an appeal on behalf of Bud Jimmerfield and his family. Initially the Board denied his claim for cancer caused by exposure to metalworking fluids. But an appeals resolution officer ruled that “the workers’ primary adenocarcinoma of the gastroesophageal junction arose from his workplace exposure.” Bud worked as a grinder and was exposed to metalworking fluids for 31 years.

Bud Jimmerfield played an inspirational role in launching the CAW Prevent Cancer Campaign. He was a health and safety activist and president of his local who always fought for his membership and other workers.

When the Board initially refused to recognize the relationship between metalworking fluids and gastroesophageal cancer which Bud suffered from, the CAW applied political pressure and launched an appeal.

**Workers Compensation Appeal**

Our union called the government to toughen standards on metalworking fluids.

We demanded a reduction of the exposure limit for machining fluids and metalworking fluids to 0.2 mg/m3.

Currently the Ontario limit is 5 mg/m3.

**This is unacceptable. More workers will die as a result.** Studies in the US have shown that workers were found to have reduced ability to breathe across their shift at a level higher than 0.2 mg/m3.

**This should be the standard in all Canadian jurisdictions.**
Unifor Local Union activists will:

1. Identify carcinogens in their workplaces. This is principally the responsibility of the health and safety activists.

2. Insist that they be removed and substituted with less hazardous substances (or at an absolute minimum that the process be enclosed). Once again, this is principally the job of the health and safety activists. Priorities need to be established.

3. Put in WCB claims for all workers who are found to have cancer that might be related to work. This is the activity of the workers’ compensation activists.

4. Ensure community support by making sure the public knows about air emissions and hazardous waste from workplaces which may cause cancer. This is the activity of the environmental activists.

The prevent cancer campaign must have the support and encouragement of the plant committees and the local union leadership.
Cancer Can Be Prevented In Spite Of Rising Rates...

Have you had a family member or friend at work die from cancer? It would be unusual if you did not. Cancer is a common disease. Unfortunately, it is becoming much more common. And this is not because people are living longer or because it is being diagnosed better—although these are also factors to consider. Cancer is killing more people today because we are exposed to more substances that cause cancer. Since the Second World War there have been more and more manufactured substances used in our workplaces, homes and our environment that cause cancer.

Billions of dollars have gone into the fight against cancer. But nearly all funding goes to the area of treatment and genetic research. And unfortunately all these expenditures have not resulted in a reduction in the overall cancer rates. Only a few types of cancer have become more survivable. Five-year survival rates for the majority of cancers (lung, colon and stomach for example) have remained essentially the same as twenty years ago. But in that same time period, the incidence of cancer has climbed dramatically.

- Cancer rates are reaching epidemic proportions.
- Cancer affects different parts of our society unequally—workers, and especially blue collar workers are affected more, and
- Most cancers could be prevented if we had the political will to control exposures to cancer-causing substances.

In 2010 Statistics Canada estimated that there would be a reported 173,800 new cases of cancer (excluding non-melanoma skin cancers) and 76,200 Canadians will die of cancer.

In 1999, Statistics Canada had reported 129,300 new cases of cancer and 63,400 deaths from cancer. That is an increase of 44,500 incidences and an increase in deaths of 12,800 in just over ten years time while Canada’s population has remained relatively the same. In 2010 cancer was designated the leading cause of death in Canada.
Breast cancer is one type which comes immediately to mind. Its rates have doubled within a generation, and it is now projected that the incidence of breast cancer will double again.

We are simply not getting at the real problem, which is that we are introducing agents into our bodies which do not belong there. We were not biologically programmed to be able to process the chemicals or radiation or mineral fibres that we are being force-fed on the job and in our environment.

There are lots of scientific studies to show that occupational and environmental contaminants are major contributors to the soaring rates of cancer.

Workers in certain carcinogen-laden industries are contracting cancer at rates well beyond those experienced by the general population. At least 60 different occupations have been identified as posing an increased cancer risk. Studies show that the auto industry is producing laryngeal, stomach and colorectal cancers along with its cars. The steel industry is producing lung cancer along with its metal products. Miners experience respiratory cancers at rates many times higher than the expected levels in the general population. Electrical workers are suffering increased rates of brain cancer and leukemia. Aluminum smelter workers are contracting bladder cancer. Dry cleaners have elevated rates of digestive tract cancers. Firefighters contract brain and blood-related cancers at many times the expected levels. Women in the plastics and rubber industry are at greater risk of uterine cancer and possibly breast cancer. The list goes on and on.

Scientific evidence demonstrates that blue collar workers are bearing a disproportionate share of the cancer burden.

How do we know whether or not something causes cancer?

Science has identified almost every known carcinogen from the death certificates of workers.

The International Agency for the Research of Cancer (IARC) has identified 24 substances that cause lung cancer in humans. Twenty-three were determined by the excess mortality of workers who were exposed to these substances. The twenty-fourth, of course, is tobacco. Why do we hear so much about the dangers of tobacco but so little about the other 23 lung carcinogens? The reason is that tobacco is claimed to be a “lifestyle” choice, so industry and the medical profession can blame the victims. The other 23 known causes of lung cancer are related to industry. They can be prevented and removed from our workplaces and our environment.
Workers As Guinea Pigs

It is unthinkable that we would test the safety of a substance by placing human beings in a laboratory and exposing them to the substances in question. Yet, isn’t that, in essence, what we have done in the workplace? We introduce the chemicals and ask questions later.

The International Labour Organization (ILO), of which Canada is a member, estimates that over 1 million workers throughout the globe have cancer because of exposures at work!

The estimates of what percentage of cancer is caused by work vary. Twenty years ago American government health agencies estimated that 20% to 40% of all cancers were work-related. Others believe that work’s contribution to this disease is lower—at rates around 10%. Even if we accept a conservative estimate, of say 10%, that would translate into almost 17 funerals every single day for Canadian workers who died prematurely because of exposure to carcinogens in the workplace.

CANCER?
It must be your fault
This raises some pretty uncomfortable moral, ethical and liability issues. Is it any wonder that industry is spending so much time and money trying to convince us that we are responsible for our own cancers—that we smoke too much, eat too many hamburgers, spend too much time in the sun. As long as the focus is on our own behaviour, attention is deflected from industry’s practices.

Workplace And Environment Cancer Prevention
But there is good news. The World Health Organization estimates that at least 80% of all cancers are environmentally related. That leaves only about 20% over which we have little control. It also means that the vast majority of cancers are preventable. With the scientific and political will, cancer could almost join polio or smallpox as a disease of the past.

WE need to know more
We have studied only a tiny fraction of the chemicals in our workplaces to identify cancer-causing agents. Clearly we need more study. A better understanding of the occupational links to cancer will, in turn, shed light on the overall impact of cancer-causing agents in our general environment. For the very same chemicals which exist at work are being introduced into our air, water and food supply.

One practical method for making the link between exposures and cancer is to implement a systematic data collection program for cancer patients. Currently, the BC Cancer Agency is the only organization in Canada to conduct systematic analyses of cancers related to occupations. Provincial cancer treatment centres must be persuaded to record information about the occupational histories of their cancer patients, as has been done in Windsor due to the persistence of the Occupational Health Clinic. The medical profession must be reminded of its public health role rather than focusing almost exclusively on finding a cure.
There are still many questions that have to be answered. But we need not wait until every "i" is dotted to begin to take defensive action.

We need reductions in the allowable exposure limits which have proven to be so inadequate. We need zero tolerance for exposure to carcinogens. Government must compel industry to substitute non-toxic substances in place of carcinogens by stringent regulations and tough enforcement.

Cancer And The Environment
Many cancer causing substances leave the workplace in a variety of ways and cause disease in the community and surrounding environment. These carcinogens can leave the workplace on contaminated work clothes or through air emissions increasing the risk of cancer in family members of workers or the surrounding community. Canadian cities such as Hamilton have higher cancer rates near the steel mills. Dioxin and furan-containing PCB’s have been found in remote regions of the Canadian arctic, where they have been carried by wind from sources thousands of kilometers away. Ground water, streams, rivers, lakes and oceans can become contaminated with wastes from various industries, increasing carcinogenic substances in the general environment.

By eliminating carcinogenic substances from the workplace, large steps will also be taken to reduce their release into the environment and surrounding communities.

CANCER IN CANADIAN CHILDREN
Each year 836 cases are diagnosed
Each year 135 children die
Cancer is a disease that involves uncontrolled cell growth. Under normal circumstances the cells in the body grow and multiply at a given rate. The rate at which they grow generally matches the rate at which they die. Cancer is a condition in which a group of cells begin to grow and divide continuously, resulting in a tumour. The tumour then invades and destroys neighboring tissues. Some of these cells may even travel to other parts of the body, a process referred to as metastasisation, causing more tissue damage. When major organs are involved, such as the lungs or liver, the tissue destruction and loss of organ function eventually causes death.

How Does Cancer Develop?

Every cell in the body contains a set of instructions called deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). These instructions are similar to a computer program telling the cell what to do and when to do it. If there is a mistake in the instructions (a term referred to as a mutation), the cell may not perform properly. Cancer occurs when the cell does not divide properly. The problem is that the instructions in the DNA tell the cell to keep reproducing itself over and over. Mistakes (mutations) can happen in two ways. First, a person can inherit “bad instructions” from their parents. In this case, they are born with a mistake already present. Genetically inherited cancer however accounts for a small fraction of total cancers. The second and more common way a mistake can happen is when a person is exposed to chemicals that interfere with the cell’s DNA. Exposure to the damaging chemicals can occur as a result of lifestyle for example, alcohol and smoking, or result from workplace exposure. In this case, a mistake gets incorporated into the cell’s instructions at which point the cell has the potential to become cancerous. If the cell’s instructions continue to be interfered with, the part of the instructions which tell the cell when and how often to reproduce may get damaged. If the cell loses its ability to control its own reproduction, it becomes cancerous.
Being exposed to a chemical or process that is carcinogenic does not necessarily mean that a person will develop cancer. Other factors, such as how you are exposed, how much you are exposed to, and for how long are as important in determining if a chemical will in fact cause cancer.

**How Much Exposure Does It Take?**

There is no preset amount of exposure that determines whether or not an individual will develop cancer. The risk of cancer increases when cellular DNA becomes damaged. The risk of developing cancer really begins to increase when the body’s natural defense mechanisms are unable to repair the damage. This can happen over a short period of time or over a long period of time. The most important factor is cumulative dose, that is the amount that accumulates over time. It can be thought of as the dose which ultimately leads to the development of cancer. A cumulative dose of 100 ppm in one year is comparable to being exposed to 10 ppm per year over 10 years. In fact, there is little difference between intense exposures over short periods of time and low levels of exposure over extended periods of time. Both types of exposures can cause cancer. The greater the exposure, the higher the risk.
Cancer has become one of the leading causes of death for the general population. The scientific community has been searching for ways to treat and eventually cure the potentially mortal disease. But even after what is now, decades of investigation, the scientists and medical professionals still do not completely understand how cancer is caused, how it develops, or how to treat it.

What is known about the disease is that the most effective way to fight cancer is to prevent it. While some cancers may result from several factors combined (genetics, diet, environment, workplace) reduction of workplace exposures is the most important factor to change. The best way to prevent the disease is to eliminate exposure to the substances that cause it. For example, one of the best ways to prevent lung cancer is not to smoke. Since most occupations involve exposures to various chemicals and mixtures, the same concept can be applied to the workplace.

If carcinogenic substances are identified, then workers and management can and must play a crucial role in preventing occupational cancer. By identifying those substances in the workplace, they can be eliminated and substituted with less harmful substances and processes. In some situations, the use of a specific substance is necessary to meet product specifications but in most cases, with more investigation, there are other solutions to producing the same results. In the event that neither elimination nor substitution is possible using current technologies, efforts must be directed towards developing those technologies. Plans for eliminating carcinogens over time must be developed. In the meantime, exposures to carcinogens in the workplace must be reduced to an absolute minimum by completely enclosing processes and using strict engineering controls such as local exhaust ventilation. Personal protective equipment should only be used as a last resort. A safe practice is to subscribe to the ALARA principle, which states that exposures should be kept As Low As Reasonably Achievable. For known human carcinogens this means eliminating, to the fullest extent possible, all exposures to the carcinogen and for suspected carcinogens, controlling exposures to levels as low as possible.
How To Eliminate Workplace Carcinogens

MSDSs
Make sure your MSDSs (Material Safety Data Sheets) for the chemicals in your workplace are up to date (WHMIS, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, regulations require them to be updated every three years). This is your employer’s responsibility. None of your MSDSs should be more than three years old.

Read Carefully
Read your MSDS sheets thoroughly to see if they contain any carcinogens.

Eliminate the Carcinogens
Propose that the employer eliminate the carcinogen by substituting the carcinogen with a less hazardous substance.

- raise it in the joint union-management health and safety committee meetings
- raise it at the bargaining table by negotiating the elimination of carcinogens
- raise it with government inspectors to insist they write orders for elimination of carcinogens
- refuse to work with carcinogens

DRAWING A LINE IN THE SAND
As activists Unifor encourages you to actively fight for cancer prevention through the elimination of cancer causing chemicals in our workplaces, our communities and our homes supported by strong, progressive legislation.

Demand an end to the cancer carnage!!
Unifor Local 2301 at the Alcan plant in Kitimat BC, spent more than two decades fighting to get WCB recognition of work related cancer injuries. The local’s initiative led to a cleanup of the aluminum pot rooms and reduced smelter emissions which helped to protect the environment downwind from the Kitimat smelter.

The following is a list compiled by Unifor Local 2301 of their members who contracted cancer as a result of exposures at work. As a result of the determination of Locan Union activists, all claims were accepted by WCB.

<table>
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<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Type of cancer</th>
<th>Exposure</th>
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<td>tar fumes</td>
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Rick Belmont  
Past President CAW Local 2301  
Alcan, Kitimat B. C.

“The important thing is you don’t let up, and that was proven with our battle to get bladder cancers recognized in the smelter. We didn’t let up. We had to sink a lot of money into it but we finally got it recognized by the WCB and that’s what you have to do, you have to work at it hard and not let up.”

Unifor “Fighting Back Makes a Difference.”
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