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Workers Inc.

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des travailleurs (ses)  
de l'Ontario Inc.

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# ADVOCATES' GATEWAY

## Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW), Sudbury

### RSI DAY 2006 – HUGE SUCCESS

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This year's RSI Day entitled "Bridging the Distance" was a huge success. The theme "Bridging the Distance" was selected since the eDome at Cambrian College which housed this year's event, allowed us to broadcast via the internet throughout all of North America.

The event was attended by 370 people; 118 in the studio audience in Sudbury and 252 partaking via the internet from across Ontario as well as Newfoundland, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Texas.

Attendees ranged from government ministries, school boards, the mining sector, union officers, public service organizations, insurance companies, hotels, utility companies, public health, hospitals, universities, colleges, ergonomists, lumber sector, municipal and provincial governments, and transportation sectors.

Displays were present from OHCOW, the Workers Health and Safety Centre, the Sudbury and District Health Unit, Association of Canadian Ergonomists and WSIB.

The day began with the Deputy Mayor of Sudbury Doug Craig reading a Proclamation designating February 28, 2006 as "International Repetitive Strain Injury Awareness Day".

The speakers included Mary Cook, Managing Director of OHCOW, who introduced the keynote speaker Mr. Alec Farquhar, Director of Occupational Health and Safety Branch, Operations Division for the Ontario Ministry of Labour. Mr. Farquhar spoke on "MOL Involvement and Work on Ergonomics".

OHCOW Ergonomists Trevor Schell and

Steve MacDonald presented "*Ergonomics and Snow Shoveling*". The presentation examined proper shoveling techniques, shovel selection, and precautions one should take before and during shoveling.

Cassidy DeDiana, Occupational Health Co-Coordinator for OHCOW presented on "*Noise – the RSI of the Ears*". The presentation over-viewed the hazards of noise, including noise-induced hearing loss and prevention methods.

Carmine Tiano from the Ontario Building Trades talked about "*How WSIB Deals with RSI's and how it affects Ontario workers*".

Barb Noel from the Workers' Health and Safety Centre talked about the "*Need for Ergonomic Regulations*".

Local Chiropractors Tony Choi and Devon Jahnke from Algonquin Foot Clinic discussed "*Plantar Fasciitis*" which is an RSI of the feet.

The event itself was extremely well attended at the Sudbury location surpassing last year's turnout by 126%. When including the people watching over the internet, an increase of 411% was reached.

The event itself is now available on DVD for purchase at a price of \$5.00 for those who were unable to attend due to technical difficulties or for those who have an interest in these topics. The order form can be found at the following link:

[http://ohcow.on.ca/clinics/sudbury/PDFs/RSI\\_Day\\_2006\\_DVD\\_Order\\_Form.pdf](http://ohcow.on.ca/clinics/sudbury/PDFs/RSI_Day_2006_DVD_Order_Form.pdf)

We hope to see everyone again next year. ■



## Dryden Update — Executive Summary

### **AIR EMISSIONS RECOVERY BOILER PROJECT (RB4) AT WEYERHAEUSER PULP AND PAPER MILL DRYDEN ONTARIO APRIL 2002-JUNE 2004**

The Air Emissions Recovery Boiler Project (RB4) construction project carried out at Weyerhaeuser Pulp and Paper Mill in Dryden Ontario during the years of 2002-2004 is said to have caused serious worker injury as a result of certain smoke stack chemical exposures.

The RB4 construction site employed approximately 400 construction workers over approximately 26 months. The RB4 construction site being situated at the north end of the Weyerhaeuser Pulp and Paper Mill in Dryden was said to have exposed the construction site workers to smoke stack chemical discharges on frequent bases due to wind direction effect. Various construction trades were involved, but all workers, irrespective of trade, presented with a remarkably similar collection of symptoms, purportedly related to their

exposures to the pulp and paper smoke stack chemical emissions.

As a result of the alarming increase in worker health complaints, it was decided by the construction unions involved, to engage the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. (OHCOW) to conduct a health assessment with respect to the possible work relatedness of these complaints.

An OHCOW analysis of these claims is herein presented and confirms that serious and widespread worker injury took place during the RB4 project. Accordingly, Health Professional's reports (Form 8) have been lodged with the WSIB on behalf of the identified injured workers.

*(Executive Summary done by Dr. Noel Kerin MD, MSc. FCBOM, CIME, Occupational Medical Consultant to OHCOW Inc.) ■*

## ADVOCATE INQUIRY—BLASTOMYCOSIS

**Inquiry Description:** The Clinic received an advocate inquiry regarding the potential association of handling wood and the development of blastomycosis. It was identified that there have been members from different workplaces in Northern Ontario that handle northern softwood including coniferous and deciduous trees who have developed the disease. Outlined below is a description of the disease and possible occupational exposures.

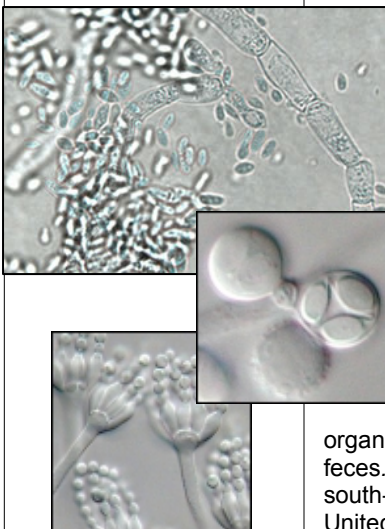
Blastomycosis is a rare fungal infection that primarily affects the lungs and then spreads to other organs. It is caused by the fungus *Blastomyces dermatitidis*<sup>1</sup> that can be found in moist soil enriched by organic material such as rotting wood and animal feces. It is reported to be prevalent in parts of south-central, south-eastern and mid-western United States<sup>1</sup> and Canada (Ontario, Manitoba), concentrated along the Mississippi and Ohio River basin and the Great Lakes<sup>2</sup>, resulting in 1-2 cases per 100,000 people in these areas<sup>1,2</sup>. Immunocompromised individuals are at an increased risk. The infection most commonly occurs in those aged 30-69 years, however anyone of any age can become infected<sup>3</sup>.

**Symptoms:** Infected individuals may not develop any symptoms. Approximately half of those infected present with flu-like symptoms, including fever, sweating, chills, productive cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, nausea, weight loss, and muscle, joint and chest pain<sup>1,2</sup>. Skin lesions have also been reported<sup>2</sup>. The symptoms may progress into chronic lung or widespread infection. The onset of symptoms occurs approximately 21 to 106 days after exposure. The mortality rate is about 5%.

**Transmission:** The disease is transmitted through the inhalation of airborne spores following the disturbance of contaminated soil in decaying plants, vegetation and decomposing wood. Only under specific conditions of elevated humidity and temperature can the fungus grow and produce the infecting spores. The spores become airborne when the soil in which the fungus is growing is disturbed. Blastomycosis cannot be transmitted through human to human contact.

**Risk Factors:** Workers at risk include those in occupations with exposure to wooded areas, including farmers or forestry workers<sup>1</sup>. Other

*(Continued on page 3)*

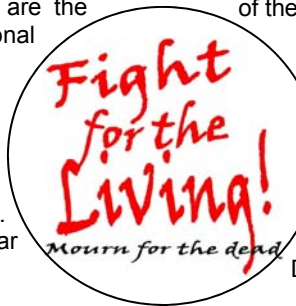


The spores of fungi.  
(They can range in size of  
1 to 50 mm.)

## DAY OF MOURNING— APRIL 28

One death every 15 seconds = 6000 a day. Work kills more people than wars. Those are the startling conclusions of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

The ILO estimates that 2.2 million people die from work related causes every year. More than 400,000 deaths are caused by exposure to chemicals. More than 300,000 cancers per year are due to dangerous substances.



workers killed and injured on the job. Observances of the day are widespread in Canada.

Locally in Sudbury OHCOW members will be attending ceremonies held at Tom Davis Square and in Thunder Bay Cassidy DeDiana and Trevor Schell will be present at the Injured & Disabled Workers Clinic; providing workshops on Lessons Learned from Dryden and Barefoot Research .

In 1984, the Canadian Labour Congress declared April 28 a National Day of Mourning for

For more information on events in your area contact your local union. ■

## ADVOCATE INQUIRY—CONTINUED

(Continued from page 2)

occupations with possible associations include: construction work, mining, carpentry and heavy equipment operation. In a study conducted by the Public Health Agency of Canada in the Kenora region<sup>9</sup>, risk factors were grouped into activities (both occupational and recreational) associated with exposure to the following:

- Recreational waterways/shorelines (fishing/swimming and camping/hunting)
- Soil (digging, climbing into holes, planting trees, gardening, weed clearing and working under houses)
- Wood (hollow/dead trees, woodpiles, and chopping wood)<sup>9</sup>

**Diagnosis:** If you suspect that a worker is suffering from blastomycosis, there are several medical tests which can confirm their diagnosis, including:

- [Chest x-ray](#) (may show nodules or [pneumonia](#) with cavities)
- Tissue [biopsy](#)
- Skin biopsy
- [Sputum culture](#) and special stains

Since blastomycosis is rarely encountered, it is advisable for primary care physicians to seek consultation from a physician more experienced with this disease.

**Treatment:** Once blastomycosis has been diagnosed, the disease can be treated with one of three anti-fungal drugs – itraconazole, amphotericin B, or fluconazole.

**Prevention:** There is a lack of documented prevention strategies to reduce the risk of blastomycosis, occupationally or otherwise, as the disease is so rare. Obviously, the goal would be to reduce exposure to *B. dermatitidis*. Certain protective measures that have been reported for those that work in soil-disturbing activities, include the use of an N-95 particulate mask (or equivalent), protective clothing and shoe covers to reduce skin contact, the implementation of a respiratory protection program and education for workers on the signs and symptoms of the disease and treatment options.

(Literature Summary provided by Cassidy DeDiana, Occupational Health Co-ordinator) ■

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## WHAT'S NEW....?

The Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Sudbury Inc. would like welcome Steve MacDonald to the team. Steve has joined OHCOW as an Ergonomist.

We are looking to add to our team an Industrial Hygienist. See the job posting on our website.

Also WSIB has developed:

- A new form 6 —“Worker’s Report of Injury /

Disease” - effective of November 2005 and a guide to provide the worker with information on how to fill out the new form.

- A new form for workers to request access to their own personal information.

The guide and the new forms can be viewed or downloaded from the WSIB website. Go to [www.wsib.on.ca](http://www.wsib.on.ca) (in the forms menu under workers). ■

## OHCOW — Who We Are? How & Who Can We Help?

OHCOW is a valuable occupational health related resource that is available to advocates and their clients at no cost. The Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario

Workers (OHCOW) were established in 1989 and are funded by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

(WSIB). There are clinics in Hamilton, Toronto, Sarnia, Windsor and Sudbury. Staffed by a multi-disciplinary team of specially

trained occupational health doctors, occupational health nurses, occupational hygienists, ergonomists, researchers and administrators, each OHCOW clinic provides comprehensive occupational health services and information. Our mandate is the prevention of occupational illnesses and injuries. We do this through the identification of the causes which have led to illnesses and injuries. This also provides us with a window into the workplace.

In order to carry out our work we

partner with, among others, public health officials; universities; the Ministry of Labour; the Ministry of Health; the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB); other Health and Safety Associations and organizations such as cancer coalitions. OHCOW works with medical and nursing schools to provide occupational education to medical and nursing students. We also work with unions holding clinics for workers about illnesses which they think might be work related. In short, we have the experience, the knowledge and the credibility to assist you. ■

**We're on the web!**  
<http://www.ohcow.on.ca/clinics/sudbury/>

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

We welcome feedback for generating topics that would be of interest to advocates. Please forward any question or suggested topics to covered in future issues either by e-mail, phone or fax by using the contact information below. ■

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