OHCOW
Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc.
Centres de santé des travailleurs (ses) de l'Ontario Inc.

OHCOW Occupational Disease Cluster Investigations: Current Status and Emerging Successes

Occ-tober Webinar Series

October 29, 2026

Andrew Zarnke, Ph.D.
Executive Director (Projects)

Outline

- How OHCOW defines a “cluster”
- OHCOW’s approach to occupational disease cluster investigations
- Updates from OHCOW’s fall 2026 cluster investigation events
- A recent success from the McIntyre Powder Project
- Looking ahead to Spring 2027

OHCOW's interdisciplinary team

- Occupational Physicians
- Occupational Hygienists
- Ergonomists
- Occupational Health Coordinators
- Occupational Health Nurses
- Client Service Coordinators
- Leadership/Administration





What is a ‘Cluster’?

A **'CLUSTER’** occurs when more people than expected develop the **same** illness or health problem, in the same place, over the same period of time.

A **'CLUSTER’** is an unusual aggregation, real or **perceived, health events** that are grouped together in time and space and that are reported to a health agency.

OHCOW has a slightly broader definition of an occupational disease cluster

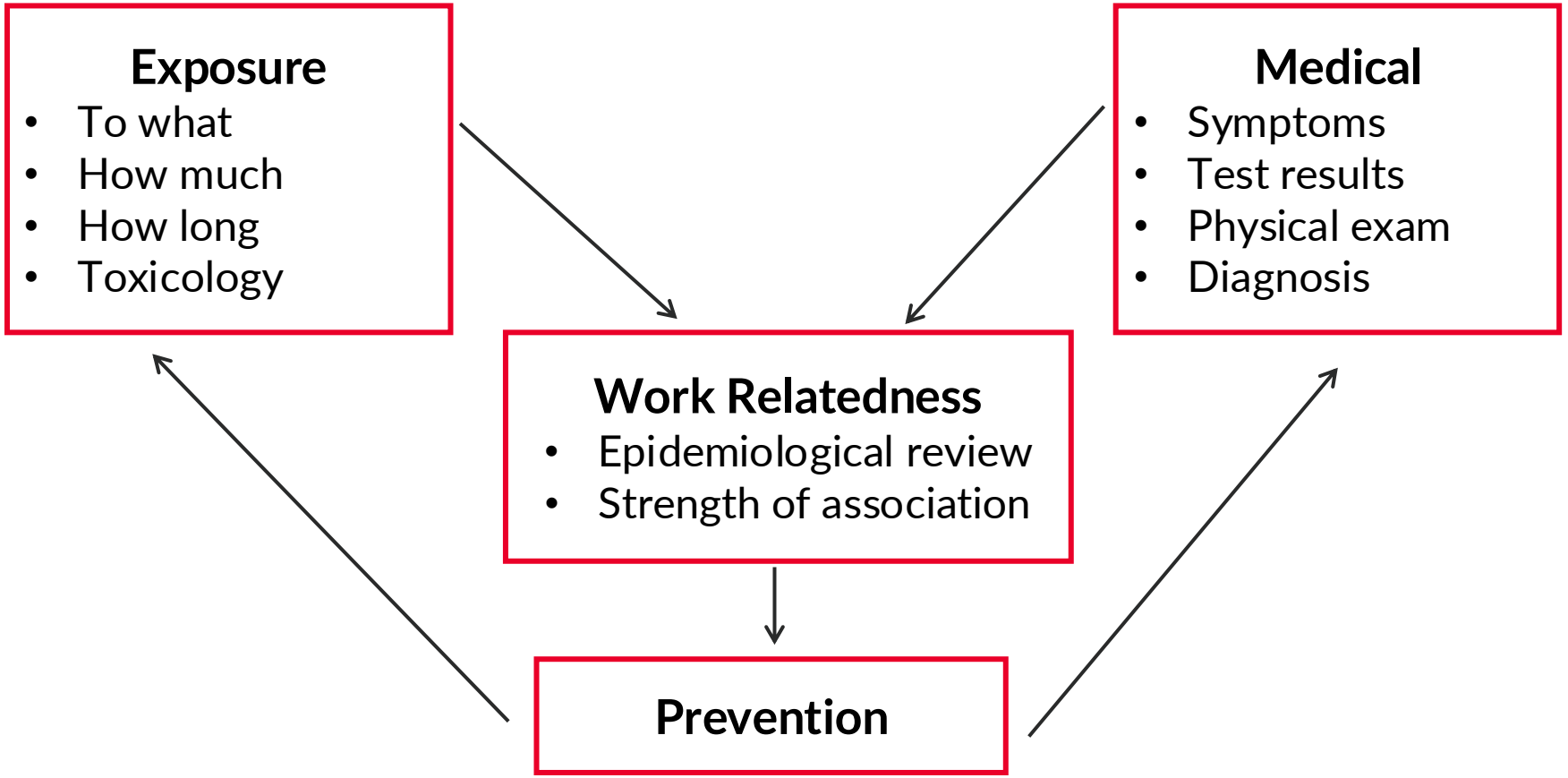


OHCOW Cluster Characteristics

Groups of workers with…

- Shared workplace experiences
- Shared workplace exposures
- Shared concern for their family members, coworkers', and their own health
- **Shared belief that their health issues are work related**

How can OHCOW help?



Cancer Care Ontario, Occupational Cancer Research Centre. Burden of occupational cancer in Ontario: Major workplace carcinogens and prevention of exposure. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2017.

Primary activities of OHCOW's Occupational Disease Cluster Investigations

- **Document workers experiences**
- Cultivate partnerships
  - Community support groups, researchers, unions, etc.
- Identify work related health concerns and/or diagnoses
- Assist with starting WSIB claims (describing workers rights)
- Develop exposure profiles
- Conduct work relatedness assessments
- Conduct WSIB policy assessments
- **Compile data and identify "Red Flags"**

OHCOW cluster investigation products and services

What workers can expect from OHCOW…

- Intake clinics
- Health history interviews
- Work and exposure history interviews
- Expert evidence reports – can support WSIB claims on appeal
- Retrospective exposure profile reports
- WSIB policy critique reports
- Systematic literature reviews
- Case series reports

OHCOW's Clinical Cluster Investigations

Special Project Funding:

- Rubber Workers
- McIntyre Powder
- Peterborough (GE, Ventra Plastics/Pebra)

Core Budget Funding:

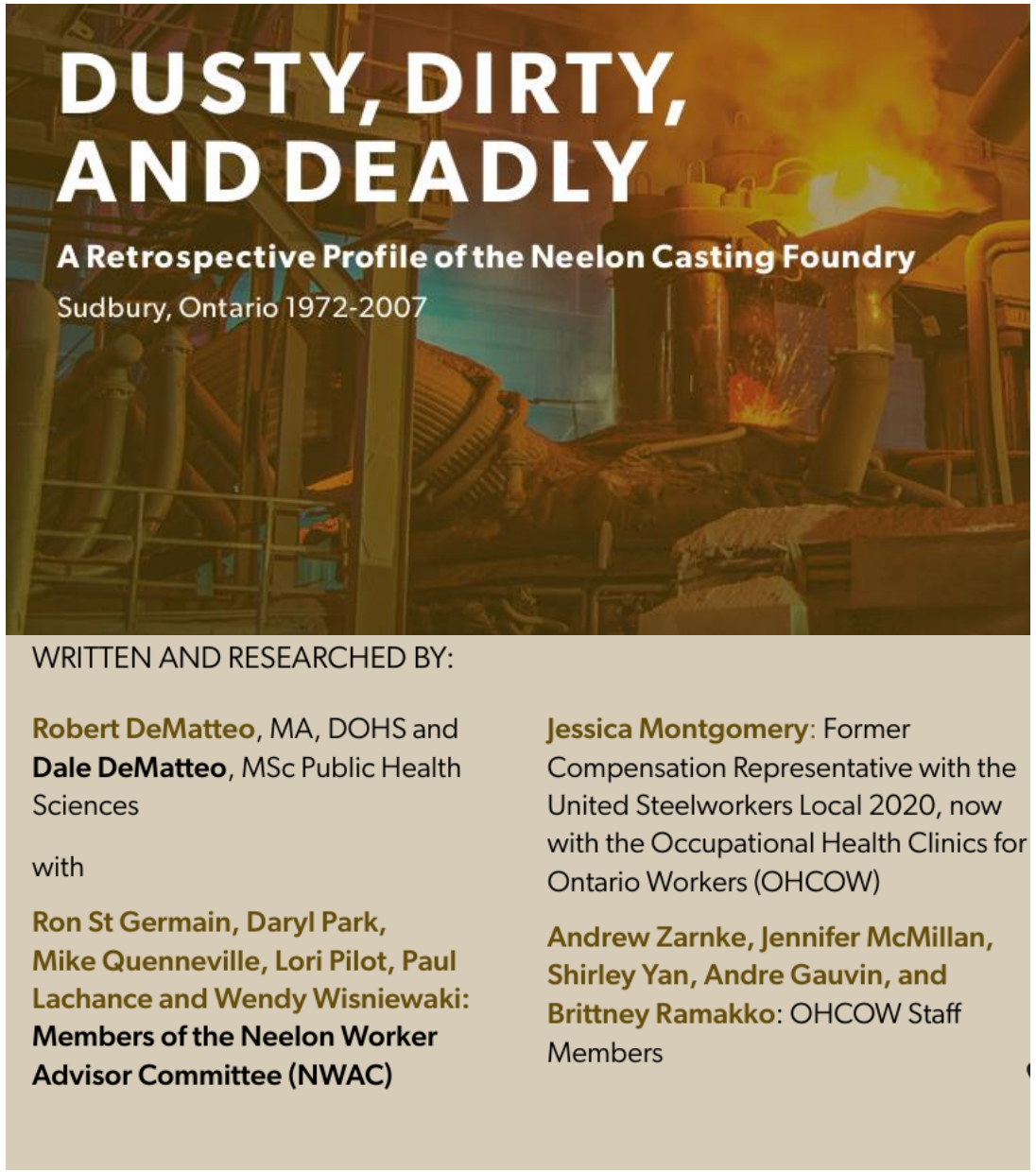
- Neelon Casting
- Dryden RB4
- Kidd Met Site
- Algoma/Essar Steel
- Kellogg's
- Accuride Canada
- Agent Orange
- "The Company"
- Stelco





Neelon Casting, Sudbury, Ontario

- Foundry that produced **automotive break parts**
- Operational from **1972 to 2007**
- During those 32 years **more than 2000 workers** were employed at the plant, represented by the united steel workers (USW) local 2020
- **In 2020** OHCOW partnered with the USW to conduct a cluster investigation – **we began work on the Neelon Report**
- **+500** past Neelon Casting worker contacted USW to participate in the project
- **191** workers were referred to OHCOW which resulted in a total **376** cases (diagnoses) opened



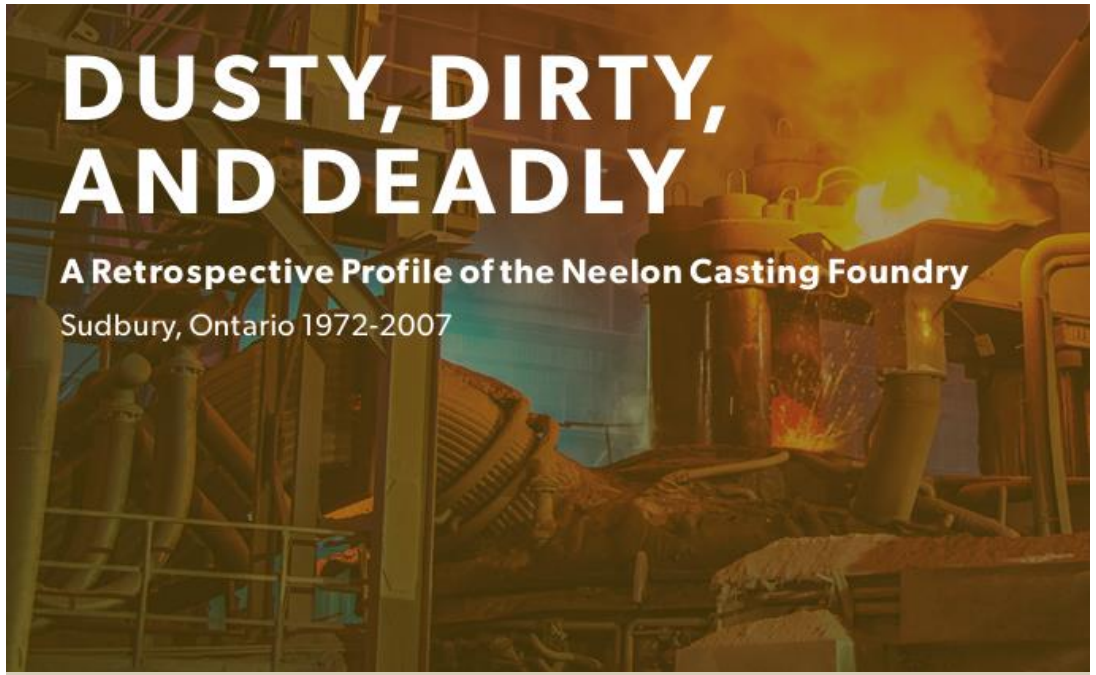
https://www.ohcow.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/NeelonDoc_June2026ONLINE.pdf

Neelon Casting Exposure Report

- Jessica Montgomery (while still at USW) recruited the Neelon Worker Advisory Committee
- The “Neelon Report” titled “Dusty, Dirty, and Deadly: A retrospective profile of the Neelon Casting foundry” was released to USW in June 2026.
- OHCOW hosted a Neelon Worker Advisory Committee appreciation event on August 14, 2026 (in Sudbury)
- WSIB is **currently** reconsidering **77 claims** using the report as new evidence

Next Steps…

USW and OHCOW will be hosting a Neelon Report release and intake clinic public event in Sudbury this coming **Spring!**



https://www.ohcow.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/NeelonDoc_June2026ONLINE.pdf

Weyerhaeuser RB4, Dryden, Ontario

Pulp and paper mill still in operation and no longer owned by Weyerhaeuser

- Weyerhaeuser commissioned a new Recovery Boiler4 (RB4) to **reduce** air emissions at the Dryden facility in 2002
- The RB4 was 18 floors high with the top floor approx. 300 feet and the stack 370 feet
- The construction project duration was from 2002 to 2004
- 2200 different trade workers were employed; 600 workers were present at the site at any given time.
- **The pulp and paper mill production was ongoing**
- November 2004 OHCOW hosted an intake clinic in Thunder Bay
- ~400 workers were interviewed for their exposure and health history.



Weyerhaeuser RB4, Dryden, Ontario

- In 2021 OHCOW re-engaged with the Thunder Bay Injured Workers Support Group (TBIWSG)
- 2021 OHCOW began to follow-up with all the Dryden Project workers
- **October 8th, 2026, OHCOW hosted a Public information session and intake clinic in Thunder Bay**
- 76 people attended the event across the morning and afternoon sessions
- Stimulated a great response and **we continue to get calls from workers!!**



KIDD Metallurgical and Mine Sites, Timmins, Ontario

KIDD Mine Site (non-unionized)

- Discovered in 1963
- Has open pit and underground hard-rock mining operations
- Substantial amount of exposure data in OMED
  (Ontario Mining Exposures Database)
- Cross over from the McIntyre Powder Project



KIDD Metallurgical and Mine Sites, Timmins, Ontario

Metallurgical Site

- In operation since 1966
- UNIFOR Local 599
- Was previously scheduled to be closed in early 2027
- Recently purchased by Discovery Silver Corp.
- Ore from the Kidd Mine is transported here where Cu & Zn ore is processed
- 2010 OHCOW conducted an intake clinic and **exposure profile report – available on our website!**
- **Long history of legacy exposures and health concerns**



KIDD Metallurgical and Mine Sites, Timmins, Ontario

- Sept 8th & 9th OHCOW hosted an intake clinic in Timmins, Ontario
- ~100 attendees across both sessions
- ~80 new registrants
- ??? # of new cases (diagnoses)
- **We continue to get calls from workers!!**





Personal Reflections

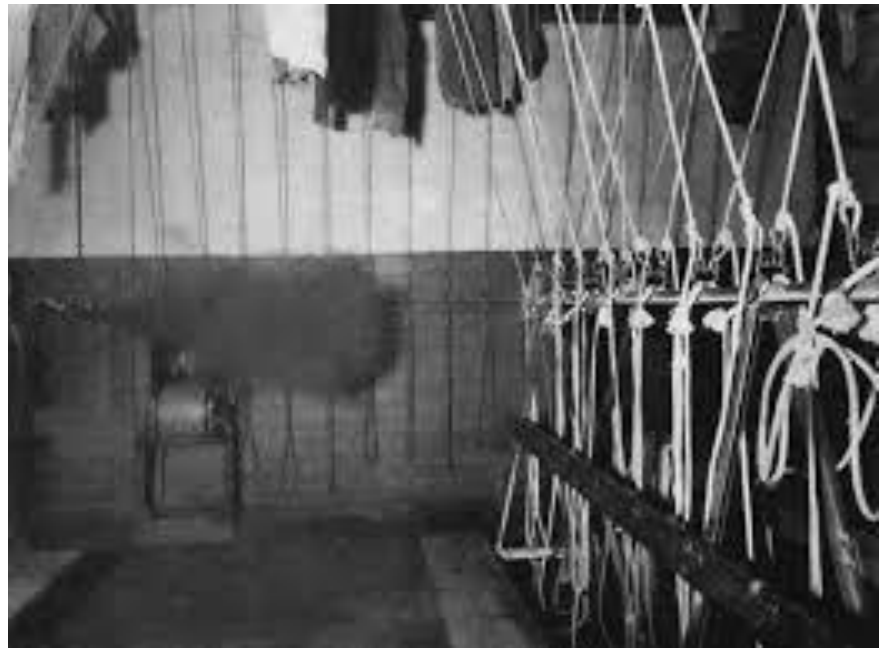
- Community outreach gave workers the confidence to come forward.
- Direct engagement encouraged workers to exercise rights they might otherwise not have pursued.
- These experiences highlight persistent underreporting and under recognition of occupational disease.

- Limited funding significantly constrains the scope of these projects
- Additional funding would enable OHCOW to offer more comprehensive support

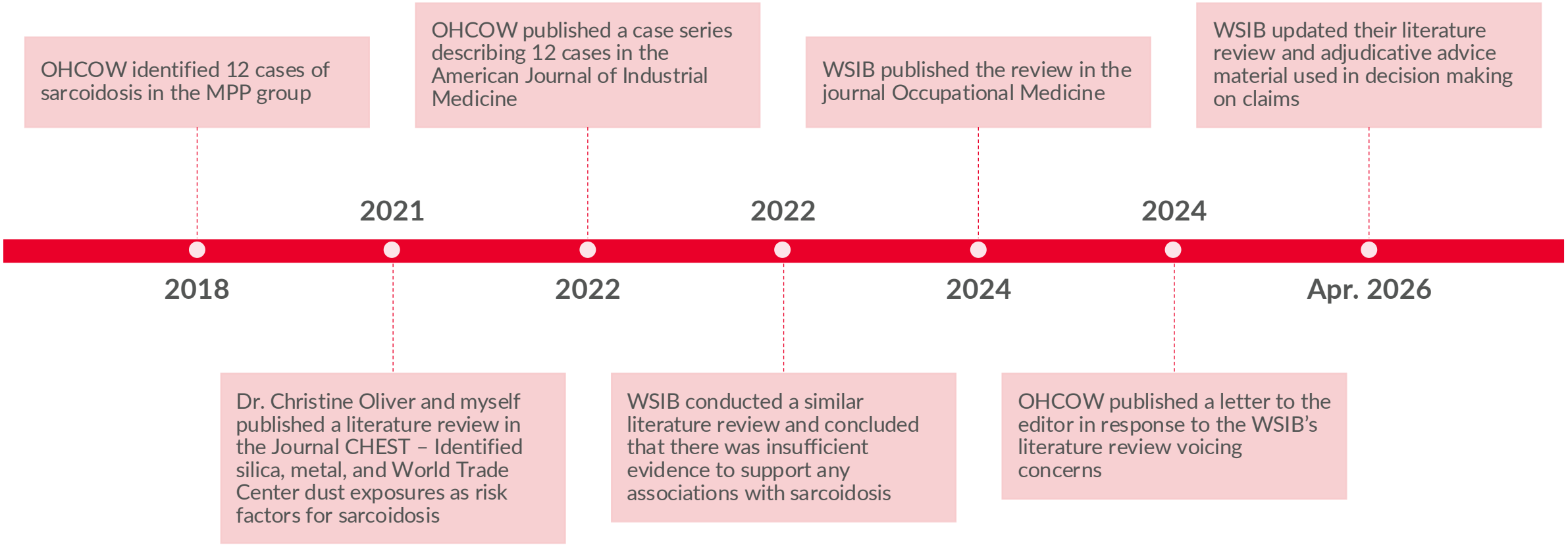
McIntyre Powder Project (MPP)

- **Sarcoidosis**
- Cardiovascular disease
- ALS case series publication
- Alzheimer's disease
- Parkinson's like conditions





McIntyre Powder Project – Sarcoidosis timeline



McIntyre Powder Project – Sarcoidosis

Conclusions of the updated WSIB literature review

"There is additional evidence suggesting that the risk of sarcoidosis is positively associated with exposure to silica, noting increasing strength of the association with higher silica exposure levels, and a near doubling of risk at cumulative exposure levels approaching 0.2 mg/m^3-years."

Ontario OEL – 0.1 mg/m^3
ACGIH TLV – 0.025 mg/m^3

At the current exposure limit a worker would require 2 years of exposure to reach this threshold

SILICA CONTROL TOOL

Sarcoidosis References

1. Oliver LC, Zarnke AM. Sarcoidosis: an occupational disease? Chest. 2021;160(4):1360–1367. doi:10.1016/j.chest.2021.06.003. (48 citations!!)

2. Oliver LC, Sampara P, Pearson D, Martell J, Zarnke AM. Sarcoidosis in Northern Ontario hard-rock miners: a case series. Am J Ind Med. 2022;65(4):268–280. doi:10.1002/ajim.23333.

3. Rezai M, Nayebzadeh A, Catli S, McBride D. Occupational exposures and sarcoidosis: a rapid review of the evidence. Occup Med (Lond). 2024;74(4):266–273. doi:10.1093/occmed/kqae016.

4. Oliver LC, Sampara P, Zarnke A, Martell J. Occupational exposures and sarcoidosis: a rapid review of the evidence [letter]. Occup Med (Lond). 2024;74(6):461. doi:10.1093/occmed/kqae062.

Reach!

Foundation for Sarcoidosis Research
Occupational Cancer Research Center (OCRC)
Dr. Mark Mallozzi, National Jewish Health
Legal Clinics in Canada and USA

Planned Events for Spring 2027 (Dates TBD)

Kellogg's

- London, Ontario
- Cereal manufacturer
- Operational from 1890-2014
- Follow-up from intake clinic in 2014

Accuride

- London, Ontario
- Automotive part manufacturer
- Closed Feb. 2025
- Multiple Myeloma

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Neelon Casting

- Sudbury, Ontario
- Hosted by USW local 2020
- Raise awareness for the recently released Neelon report

General Electric (GE)

- Peterborough, Ontario
- Community engagement
- Identify effected workers and their families

Thank you.

Questions?

Contact us.

Phone toll free: 1-877-0336
Email: ask@ohcow.on.ca

www.ohcow.on.ca

Connect with OHCOW on social media

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