

Tracey Ford holding a photo of her father who passed away from mesothelioma. She helped launch AREA to support research, education and advocacy related to asbestos-related cancers.

Finally, support for families facing asbestos-related diseases



Joshua Berson/BC Federation of Labour photo

HALF OF THE FATALITIES

accepted by WorkSafeBC in the general construction classification are caused by exposure to asbestos. However, according to research by Paul Demers from the UBC School of Environmental Health, many cancer deaths are misdiagnosed. In many cases, asbestos poisoning is only confirmed by autopsy. A minimum of 1,500 B.C. workers will die of mesothelioma and other asbestos-exposure illnesses in the next five years. The number of fatalities will crest sometime in the next 10 years.

Yet families confronted with asbestos-related cancers and mesothelioma soon discover a lack of information and support.

The AREA (Asbestos-related Research, Education and Advocacy) Fund is an initiative of the widow and daughter of Dave Ford, a retired industrial electrician at the Powell River pulp mill, who died at 70 of asbestos fibre lung cancer

(mesothelioma) in 2008.

When Dave was diagnosed with mesothelioma the family was shattered. Ford's retirement years had barely begun. The family was frustrated by not knowing where to turn for help. They were also stymied by the unwillingness of people in the community to talk about the disease. Fear of attacking the town's main source of income or labeling the community as "toxic" provoked a backlash from some city politicians.

The AREA fund is the only fund in Canada established to support research, education and advocacy for asbestos-related diseases. As an endowment fund, it will exist in perpetuity and grow with each donation, generating revenue over the long-term. The Vancouver Foundation is hosting the AREA website at www.areafund.ca

One of the goals of the AREA fund is to provide education for health practitioners. Mesothelioma is difficult

to diagnose and even more difficult to treat. Local doctors are sometimes unwilling to accept the opinions of specialists from Canadian and American centres with asbestos exposure expertise.



In the meantime, Wayne Peppard, from the B.C. Building Trades Council, said, "This carnage from asbestos-related fatalities is disastrous for those workers and their families...It's long past time that the Canadian and Quebec governments stop the production and use of asbestos. It's simply too dangerous a substance and the statistics prove it."