



Community

Walk targets silent killer

Asbestos-related diseases cause the most occupational deaths in BC

by Laura Walz | editor@prpeak.com

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An organization dedicated to raising awareness about issues surrounding asbestos is planning a first annual walk.

Walk for Truth—Asbestos Kills 2012 will take place on Sunday, June 10 in Powell River. The AREA (Asbestos-related Research, Education and Advocacy) Fund is hosting the event to honour asbestos victims and to raise awareness of the asbestos issue.

Asbestos-related diseases are the number one occupational killer in BC, explained Tracy Ford, who, along with her family, created AREA. “When we started talking to people, we realized they’re really unaware. They have no idea that asbestos is killing so many people. There are lots of misconceptions around asbestos.”

Tracy’s father, Dave Ford, died in October 2008, from mesothelioma, an illness that is caused by exposure to asbestos. His wife, Lesley, along with their three children created the organization to help other asbestos victims and their families.

As long as asbestos is not disturbed it’s not going to hurt anyone, Tracy said. “It’s when it’s disturbed and the fibres get into the air. The fibres are so small, you can’t see them and they have no odour and you can’t taste them. They call it the silent killer because you have no idea you’ve been exposed.”

As well as raising awareness among workers, particularly construction workers, mechanics, plumbers, pipefitters, electricians, Tracy said she thinks homeowners need to be aware of the issue as well, because so many tackle do-it-yourself projects. “We want to renovate our homes and it’s the cheapest way to do it. But I want people to know they should get testing of materials done.”

While asbestos hasn’t been banned, it is heavily regulated in Canada, Tracy said. Building products now don’t contain it. But for decades, it was used in many building products. “We want people to realize that it really is a public health issue,” said Tracy. “It’s not just a worker or a union issue. We’d really like the whole community to get behind it.”

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WALKING FOR TRUTH: Tracy Ford is ready for the 2012 Walk for Truth—Asbestos Kills, which will take place on Sunday, June 10 in Powell River.

Asbestosis is a disease that is caused by inhaling fibres from products that contain asbestos, Tracy said. “They get lodged in your lungs and it reduces your lung capacity. Breathing becomes more difficult. Doing simple things, like going for a walk and playing with kids or grandkids, becomes really hard.”

Many asbestos-related diseases take decades to be realized, she added. “You breathe it in your 20s, 30s, then in your 50s, 60s, 70s, you start coming down with these diseases.”

Sometimes when people get diseases like this, Tracy said, they think they’re the only one. “We want people to know they’re not alone. There are lots of people who are suffering and, of course, it affects all the family members too.”

Pat Martin, MP for Winnipeg Centre, will be attending the walk, Tracy said. “He’s really vocal about the asbestos issue.”

Martin also wants Canada to ban asbestos, she said. “Globally over 50 countries have banned asbestos. Canada is not one of them. I think it’s important that we ban asbestos in Canada and that we stop shipping it,” she said.

The walk will start and end at Powell River Recreation Complex. The route and time will be established in the near future. People can walk as little as they wish, Tracy said, and there will be marshals along the route to help participants. Registrations, as well as donations, can be made [online](#).

Currently, Tracy is contacting potential sponsors. She is also looking for someone who has been affected by an asbestos-related disease to say a few words at the beginning of the walk. Interested readers who would like more information can contact Tracy at tracy@areafund.ca.

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