

Coalition for GE workers agrees on how to proceed with compensation from the province

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She also says, in her talks with Flynn, he would like to resolve the situation by the end of the year. Burton adds he is supportive to their cause and is pushing his staff to act quickly.

The decision to go for presumptive entitlement comes after a retrospective report by former GE workers and their families that documents the types of chemicals people were exposed to in different parts of the factory.

Jeremy Carver, a doctor and adviser to OEHCP, says the report will help for those currently filing claims or resubmitting them by filling in gaps in their records for exposure.

It also becomes a key document to justify presumptive entitlement by proving that people were exposed to various chemicals.

“This will accelerate the process of compensation immensely,” says Carver.

The problem with WSIB claims in the past is that claimants had to prove they got certain types of illnesses from specific chemicals.

“They were exposed to a huge variety of carcinogens,” says Carver, adding its scientifically impossible to tell the effects of what combinations of those chemicals might do.

“The workplace was just a cancer factory,” he adds.

Bob DeMatteo, coauthor of the report, says previous claimants faced issues when their experiences were dismissed as anecdotal.

“When you begin to interview groups of people like we do, it’s no longer anecdotal,” he notes.

He says it also wasn’t just exposure to chemicals that got the employees sick, but that many other elements contributed to their cancers and respiratory problems.

Large quantities of chemicals would drift through to other parts of the plant, leading workers to breathe in not just fumes from their own workplaces, but fumes from others, DeMatteo argues.

He also says employees would come into contact with chemicals with their bare hands, and weren’t properly trained or informed about handling them.

When the government tried to step in, they did nothing, he adds.

“They were afraid of GE,” he explains, noting how they were a rich company that helped fuel the war machine.

DeMatteo supported the idea of presumptive entitlement, saying it’s something firefighters fought for and won. As a result, there are 16 cancers, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder, which are covered.

“It took several years to achieve just half of that,” he says.

Former employee Jim Dufresne expressed concern about how long that process could take. He says in just three weeks, around 10 former workers have died.

“If the minister doesn’t soon do something, there won’t be anybody left,” he says.

A few people questioned how long the process of pursuing presumptive entitlement would take, but Carver assured them they were pursuing that option as well as individual claims.

“It’s going to take forever if they go case by case by case, so let’s do both at the same time,” adds Burton.