

YOUR HEALTH

OSHA celebrates 40 years

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration celebrated its 40th birthday last week, noting that because of the agency, thousands of lives have

been saved because of safer workplaces.

It's hard to believe more than 40 years ago most workers in America had no basic human right to safe workplaces, said Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health Dr. David Michaels

Barbara Theriot, Area Director for the OSHA Kansas City Area Office added, in the 40 years since OSHA was created, the agency has led the way to historic declines in workplace fatalities, injuries and illnesses.

OSHA continues to make a difference in the lives of all workers ensuring that businesses provide safe and healthful conditions for their workers.

When OSHA formed in 1970 more than 14,000 people died each year from workplace accidents. Countless other lives were lost from exposure to hazardous materials and thousands sustained workplace injuries.

To battle the number of deaths and injuries The OSH Act of 1970 created OSHA,

and on April 28, 1971 the new agency opened its doors with a mission to protect workers and end the carnage in our workplaces.

In signing the OSH Act, President Richard Nixon called it "...one of the most important pieces of legislation... ever passed by the Congress of the United States."

Morton Corn, the OSHA administrator under President Gerald Ford, said OSHA "was the instrument of a revolutionary law... a new right in the Bill of Rights — the right to a safe and healthful workplace."

Forty years after the adoption of the act the U.S. workplace fatalities have decrease by more than 65 percent. At the same time, U.S. employment has almost doubled.

OSHA continues to strive for stronger legal protections for workers, increased public awareness of workers' rights, and more active cooperation between employers and workers to eliminate hazards, Michael said.

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Decades later, asbestos still haunting union workers and families

By KEVIN WEAKS

Thousands of Missouri and Illinois residents have died from mesothelioma, and all they did was take a breath.

Sadly, the dangers of asbestos exposure were known long before any efforts were made to protect workers. Throughout the last century, thousands of St. Louis workers were exposed to invisible, microscopic asbestos fibers and did not even know they were in danger.

Even worse, the toxic substance came home with them on their clothing, exposing their spouses and children. Decades later, those exposed have been diagnosed with mesothelioma, a deadly form of cancer.

Asbestos was widely used in many industrial products, including cement, brake linings, roof shingles, flooring products, textiles, and insulation. When tiny asbestos particles float in the air, especially during the manufacturing process, they may be inhaled or swallowed. Asbestos exposure is the single known cause of mesothelioma.

Asbestos products were used extensively throughout the 20th century in a wide variety of places like flooring, pipe insulation and in safety applications because it was fireproof.

Mesothelioma manifests itself largely in workers in the trades — drywallers, railroad workers, shipyard workers and mechanics, among others. If you worked in an industrial setting, chances are that you were exposed.

THOUSANDS HAVE BEEN EXPOSED

Unfortunately, many asbestos companies continued to produce these products even after they were known to be hazardous and harmful to workers and their families. Today, those who have become sick because of exposure to these products may be eligible for financial compensation.

"It's important to understand that mesothelioma is a cancer caused only by exposure to asbestos and that thousands of union members — and their families — throughout Missouri and Illinois have been exposed," said Chris Guinn, partner in the Simmons Law Firm (Simmons Browder Gianaris Angelides & Barnard LLC), which specializes in representing mesothelioma victims.

"Unfortunately, there are a number of misconceptions about asbestos litigation," Guinn noted. "Many union members believe if they've been diagnosed with mesothelioma or asbestos-related lung cancer, they have no legal options. This simply isn't true. We've helped hundreds of trade workers and their families throughout the region.

"We tell our clients that the most important thing is to focus on their treatment. But we also make them aware that starting the legal process is critical. Filing a lawsuit sends a message to companies that knowingly exposing workers to hazardous materials is not okay. Additionally, the monetary recover helps cover medical expenses and ensure that your family is taken care of," Guinn said.

RISK INCREASES WITH AGE

It is important to understand that mesothelioma typically takes decades to develop after the exposure to asbestos occurred. The latency period for mesothelioma (the period of time between date of first exposure to date the disease develops) is often as long as 30, 40 even 50 years.

Although reported incidence rates have increased in the past 20 years, mesothelioma is still a relatively rare cancer. Nationally, according to some sources, there are approximately 3,000 to 3,500 new cases of mesothelioma each. Mesothelioma occurs more often in men than in women and risk increases with age.

Pleural mesothelioma is the most common form of the disease, accounting for roughly

70 percent of cases, and occurs in the lining of the lung known as the pleura. Peritoneal mesothelioma occurs in the lining of the abdominal cavity, known as the peritoneum.

In addition to mesothelioma, exposure to asbestos increases the risk of lung cancer, asbestosis (a noncancerous, chronic lung ailment), and other cancers, such as those of the larynx and kidney.

There is notable evidence that family members and others living with asbestos workers have an increased risk of developing mesothelioma, and possibly other asbestos-related diseases. This risk is the result of exposure to asbestos dust brought home on the clothing and hair of asbestos workers.



RESOURCES FOR PATIENTS

WEAKS

The Simmons Law Firm is well-known for litigating on behalf of people whose lives have been affected by exposure to asbestos. The firm, you might say, has also been very willing to put its money where its mouth is, and over the last several years has pledged millions to mesothelioma and cancer research.

"I think all of us here would be very happy if we never had to see one of these cases again," said the firm's Managing Partner Mike Angelides. "I wish I never had to see a family go through the heartache and agony of having to deal with this disease. It would be great to find a cure and put this disease to rest."

Although treatment options have improved over the past decade, there is no known cure for the cancer. Resources like the Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation (www.curemeso.org) can help patients find proper treatment. After assessing overall health and the stage of the disease, treatment for can include surgery or chemotherapy, or a combination of both.

Angelides added that more needs to be done to improve patient care and fund research for a cure, and that the firm is trying to do its part.

Founded in 1999 by attorney John Simmons, the firm has helped over 2,000 mesothelioma victims and is largest supporter of the Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation. In addition, the firm has pledged \$10 million to support cancer research at the Simmons Cancer Institute at Southern Illinois University.

In 2010 the firm launched the Simmons Mesothelioma Foundation, a private non-profit organization with a mission to help expert medical and scientific researchers make dramatic advances in mesothelioma treatment options for patients and their families. The firm is also the national sponsor of the foundation's Miles for Meso fundraising event.

Angelides added that until a cure is found, the firm will continue to offer legal help to mesothelioma and lung cancer victims.

If you or someone in your family is a victim of an asbestos-caused disease, you can get more information about your rights by contacting the Simmons Law Firm in St. Louis at 314-644-6222 and Alton at 618-259-2222. Visit their very informative website at www.simmonsfirm.com.

Contact Kevin Weaks at kweaksl@labortribune.com.



Runners in a recent Miles for Meso run in Alton. In 2010 the Simmons Law Firm launched the Simmons Mesothelioma Foundation with a mission to promote dramatic advances in mesothelioma treatment options for patients and their families. The firm is also the national sponsor of the foundation's Miles for Meso fund-raising event.

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