

THUNDER BAY & DISTRICT INJURED  
WORKERS SUPPORT GROUP  
PRESENTS:  
Your Voice Matters Series



## MR. SMITH\*

Mr. Smith started working with the Dryden RB4 project in the Fall of 2002 as an iron worker. His responsibility was to erect the iron above all enclosed areas. He also explains working in the bone yard, an area behind the mill, where portions of the building were pre-erected and then moved by truck to the main area. Similarly, to other mills, the bone yard was where mercury was dumped, reflecting past ill practices of the mill. At the end of the day, they swept the iron work area, the thick smoke lingered. The smoke was always there. It was worse during the winter months. It was worse depending on the direction of the wind. But regardless, it was always there. As Mr. Smith and his crew moved to work on higher levels of the building, they moved closer and closer to the level of the smokestacks. The smokestacks were different heights, so the exposure was always there. Mr. Smith worked 8 to 10 hours a day, surrounded by relentless smoke. He carried a mill escape respirator, but it was not meant for long term use, only to travel in and out of buildings. Personal protection for the relentless smoke was an afterthought at the RB4 project. Mr. Smith received oxygen treatments on the job and was pressured to return back to work. The safety personnel were not happy with his complaints, nor was anything done. There was a feeling of displeasure with how management handled the safety of the worker. Mr. Smith noticed symptoms during this job. He was sick every night, could not sleep, was constantly dizzy and had stomach cramps.

“MY DIAGNOSIS EXPLAINS MY PAIN.  
MY WRISTS FEEL LIKE THEY BROKE AT  
TIMES, MY NECK IS WORSE, ALL JOINTS  
HAVE PAIN, STOMACH PAIN WHEN  
EXPOSED TO MANY THINGS, I HAVE  
BLACK DOTS IN EYES, MIGRAINES.  
TENDONS HAVE RANDOM SHARP PAIN  
A LOT IN FEET AND ELBOWS. I  
CANNOT HOLD ARMS UP ONLY ONE  
MINUTE THEN PAIN. RINGING IN EARS  
NEVER STOPS.”

Mr. Smith is 58 years old. He started working at the age of 14 and has held a whole host of interesting jobs, from painter, to photographer, to security guard, to UPS deliveryman. But his work experience after Dryden RB4 was dreadful. This once eager worker was now having immense trouble holding down a job because of the injuries and pain. His lack of concentration led to a hand injury at the next job after Dryden. And the pain gets worse as the years go on. Mr. Smith has formal diagnosis's of bigeminy, hemochromatosis, fibromyalgia, tinnitus, herniated neck, among others. This was Mr. Smith's reality, and in December 2020, he stopped working for good.

An occurrence that is all too common and will resonate with many injured workers, Mr. Smith describes an incredibly stressful and saddening claims process with WSIB. He describes a frustration with their long process, only to result in a denial. The most challenging aspect has been being denied and forced to go back to work amid many doctors appointments and dealing with the pain and injuries.

\*Name has been changed to maintain confidentiality