

Answering the Tough Question on Workers' Memorial Day

April 28th is Workers' Memorial Day. It is a day recognized globally that started locally. It is a day to remember the people who have died at and from the workplace, and fight for improved health and safety measures in the workplace. For the past 20 years I have spoken at the event. My comments are in the context of my workplace experience (as President of the Loughheed Funeral Homes) where surviving family members in shock shout the unanswerable word – why? Not that there is a good cause of death, but I believe we reluctantly understand the potential prognosis of cancers, heart ailments, kidney failures etc... from genetics, environment or lifestyle factors. We also understand that no one should go to work with a lunch bag and leave work in a body bag. It is called making a living not ending a life.

In recent months there have been three mining fatalities in my community, Jason Chenier, Jordan Fram and Stephen Perry. These families were thrust into the nightmare defined by the words, "I can't believe this has happened."

By law, investigations and inquests will determine the specific circumstances of these situations. But is that enough? Is a prolonged process of toothless inquest recommendations and the retention of legal counsel to redirect blame and seek absolutions really helping anybody?

Beyond the blame game we need a comprehensive review of the mining sector. Such a review is necessary because: 1) There has not been an inquiry into mining practices in Ontario for 30 years; 2) There were eight deaths in Ontario mining properties since January 2011; 3) Mining Technology has significantly changed how mines operate in Ontario; 4) Ownership of the mining sector has become international; 5) Environmental issues have been identified in workplace diseases and community health from mining operations.

After last year's Workers' Memorial Day, a committee was formed in Sudbury (and a new chapter was recently established in Timmins) with the acronym MINES – Mining Inquiry Needs Everyone's Support. And it does! Mining companies' management representatives have not supported this request. The McGuinty government Labour Minister Linda Jeffrey patronized the people whose families lead the project with a meeting and no follow-up or action. On Sunday, April 28th, white roses will be laid on a bible and the deceased miners' names read. Flags will be lowered. Bagpipes will play a lament. Dead people don't see flags or hear laments. But their grieving families and our community want to see action and hear that those in governance will have a review to prevent additional roses on the bible.

What I cannot understand is the resistance by industry and government to have a review. If everything is good – that’s great. If things need to be improved that might save a life – that’s even better. Make the rhetoric of the Workers’ Memorial Day motto, “Mourn the Dead, Fight for the Living” a reality by pledging your support on the website – www.mininginquiry.com.

Knowing those who shouted why? - now ask - If not you then who? If not now then when?

Gerry Loughed Jr. is President of the Loughed Funeral Homes, Chair of the Bereavement Foundation and a member of the MINES Committee.

