



The Brief

Vol. 3 No. 2

A project of the NB Media Co-op

October 2011

nbmediacoop.org

Lead in his blood: miner goes to court for compensation

By TRACY GLYNN

Roger LeBlanc, who was a miner for 34 years of his life says he is suffering from illnesses as a result of his work in an underground mine in northeastern New Brunswick. The 68-year-old man from Eel River Crossing spent half of those 34 years working at the Brunswick Mine, one of the world's largest underground zinc mines. Lead, copper and silver is also extracted from the mine, which was owned by Noranda during LeBlanc's employment and today is owned by one of the world's largest mining companies, Xstrata.

LeBlanc fainted in the mine on February 23, 1994. He left his job two years later due to poor health when he was 53 years old. He was having trouble breathing. After visits to at least a dozen doctors providing him with different diagnoses, he was finally diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and silicosis in early 1997.

Years later, in 2005, LeBlanc had his blood tested. His blood tested high for lead, thallium, arsenic and cadmium.

The blood lead level considered to be safe by Health Canada is 10 µg/dl, although most experts agree that no level of lead in the blood is safe, particularly for children. LeBlanc's blood tested 14.3 µg/dl for lead in 2006. Blood levels greater than 10 µg/dl have been associated with increased risk of developing hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, kidney dysfunction, neurological disorders, cognitive dysfunction (e.g. verbal memory performance) among other health impacts. Past, chronic low-level lead exposure and lead in blood and bones have also been linked to age-related hearing loss, tooth loss, lower brain volume and Parkinson's disease.

LeBlanc sought costly medical treatments and legal assistance. LeBlanc traveled to Sudbury, Ontario, to start the costly process of having the heavy metals removed from his blood in 2006. The chelation treatments made LeBlanc feel better. He no longer had to use his breathing pump and respiratory machine.

Dr. Jean Aubry, from North Bay, Ontario, explained to Bernard Richard, the N.B. Ombudsmen, in a letter concerning Roger LeBlanc's case on May 24, 2007 that, "Some occupations are more contaminated than others. Mining, smelting, welding, are among the worst in the world."

LeBlanc moved his chelation treatments to Miramichi, which is a shorter distance from his home, in 2008. Crystal Charest, who is treating him says that, "LeBlanc's condition is considered a chronic manageable condition with treatment but, no cure is currently available."

LeBlanc has had 151 chelation treatments and after each treatment the lead in his urine is tested. The treatments draw the lead from his body.

LeBlanc believes the lead and other heavy metals in his body was the result of working in the mine. He wants the thousands of dollars that he has spent on treatment reimbursed by WorkSafe NB. However, WorkSafe NB has rejected his request for compensation and a subsequent appeal. Xstrata is an intervenor in the case. The company maintains that the lead in LeBlanc's body does not come from working at their mine.

LeBlanc is now taking his case to court with the support of his wife, Yvette LeBlanc, and Inka Milewski, Health Watch Director for the Conservation Council of New Brunswick. They do not believe LeBlanc got a fair hearing because Milewski was not allowed to cross-examine Xstrata's expert witness.

The LeBlancs and Milewski appeared before a New Brunswick Court of Queen's Bench Judge in Fredericton on September 26th. The Judge made it clear that the case is restricted to compensation for expenses related to his exposure to lead because that was the subject of the last appeal. The limitation placed on LeBlanc's compensation claim is a bitter pill to swallow for LeBlanc's wife who has been by her husband's side through his entire ordeal. She thinks that her husband should be compensated for all the costs associated with his sickness and healing. They plan to argue their case in court in Fredericton in November.

Milewski has assisted a number of workers and residents in this province and as far away as Port Colborne, Ontario, understand their blood test results and navigate through workers' compensation board and the courts. She is also the leading author of a two-part report on Cancer in New Brunswick's communities. Her study found links to industries and agricultural activities with certain types of cancers.

LeBlanc believes his case is not an isolated one, which led him to organize a walk in solidarity with miners, widows of miners and orphans of miners in Bathurst on Saturday, September 17th. "I know the hardships and the sufferings miners, their wives and children go through once they can no longer work. Unfortunately, former mine workers are left to pick up the pieces of their health by themselves and they do so in silence. It's time to make this reality known to



Retired miner, Roger LeBlanc, stands in front of the New Brunswick Legislature. He is asking for compensation for the health effects he suffered after working for 34 years in the Brunswick Mine. Photo by Siti Maimunah.

the greater public so that mining companies, government and WorkSafe NB accept responsibility for helping former miners get the appropriate health services they need to remain as healthy as possible and to live with dignity," said LeBlanc.

Shale gas opponents face intimidation

By STEPHANIE MERRILL

Shale gas protesters around the province are learning what happens when they speak out publicly against something they feel strongly about. They are being flagged, tagged and targeted – by industry, government and the authorities. While the public heat has been turned up on the provincial government's plan to explore for shale gas around the province, so too has the security in rural communities and their own government condemning protesters as violent criminals.

At planned events, the police and RCMP security has noticeably increased. According to Sgt. Daniel Landry, of the Codiack RCMP, it's part of operations for the RCMP to cover large demonstrations. Along with accompanying protesters on march routes, the RCMP also record the goings-on during large demonstrations.

Many people have observed private security and investigative firms following protesters at planned events and in their communities. G4S, a large multinational security firm with 25,000 employees across Canada, followed behind the fRACTION Moncton March in a marked vehicle. Securitas, a security firm hired by SWN Resources while doing seismic work in many communities have been also monitoring people.

All this has left many rural New Brunswickers feeling like they are being watched, when it is the industry who, they feel, needs closer surveillance.

One couple from Durham Bridge have had numerous

encounters with a private security firm and plain-clothed police officer in their community. Joey and Anna Saindon have been followed on their way to work and have had their pictures taken with telephoto lens cameras while going about their daily routines. When they called the RCMP, they found out that Securitas had already filed a complaint against them. They then contacted Securitas directly and voiced their concerns about being watched; once again, Securitas filed a second complaint with the RCMP.

"We went from a community that might see a police cruiser once every couple of months to seeing multiple cruisers passing by our house every half hour or so," says Joey Saindon. "For a month or so it really felt like our community was being invaded by Southwestern Resources, Geokinetics, Securitas and RCMP, and there was nothing we could do about it".

Graham Waugh's family, from Corn Hill, recently received a visit from the RCMP after he sent an email to Corridor Resources, voicing his displeasure with their upcoming seismic testing program proposed for their pastoral community. Corridor Resources reported Waugh and his email to the RCMP. "Dealing with the authorities is a bit unnerving," says Waugh, "it makes us feel ashamed to speak up, and like you've done something wrong. It feels like an intimidation tactic to pressure people into staying quiet about how they feel and what they are going through."

In some instances, the intimidation has crossed over into personally threatening territory. Derek and Terri Telasco, founders of BanFracking NB, ... (continued on page 2)

Visit nbmediacoop.org!



NB MEDIA CO-OP
independent media by and for New Brunswickers

The NB Media Co-op relies on financial support from its members to fund high-quality, independent journalism by and for New Brunswickers.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____