

Newfoundland creates occupational disease panel

Written by COS staff

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The Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission (WHSCC) of Newfoundland and Labrador is ramping up efforts to address occupational disease issues through the creation of an Occupational Disease Advisory Panel (ODAP), which will oversee and “address the government’s action plan” on matters relating to occupational disease.

A statement issued by the WHSCC said this new initiative will “broaden the medical and scientific knowledge available to the commission, which is necessary to determine entitlement to compensation for workers and families impacted by occupational disease.”

Members of the new ODAP include: George Kean, worker representative; Elizabeth Forward, employer representative, and; commission chair Ralph Tucker.

“The awarding of fair and reasonable compensation to workers and families impacted by occupational disease is a priority for the WHSCC and for the government of Newfoundland and Labrador,” said Tucker.

The WHSCC also announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail (IRSST), a research firm specializing in the area of occupational health and safety.

“Occupational disease is a complex issue, with decisions regarding compensation requiring expertise from the global medical and scientific community, and we have begun the process of acquiring that information,” said Leslie Galway, WHSCC’s chief executive officer.

Following an assessment of the occupational disease issues currently being addressed by the WHSCC, the ODAP has approved a medical and scientific review of the literature pertaining to cancer among shipyard workers, which will be completed by the IRSST. According to the WHSCC statement, the Commission is currently finalizing contractual arrangements with the IRSST for the completion of this work.

The creation of the ODAP and new partnership with the IRSST “allows for the transfer of key medical and scientific knowledge to the WHSCC, health care professionals and other parties in the province, with an interest in occupational disease, WHSCC said.

“This initiative represents a proactive, knowledge-based approach that will give us access to the best scientific and medical advice and evidence available to support the timely and effective resolution of claims for occupational disease,” said Galway.

The WHSCC serves over 16,000 employers and about 12,000 injured workers. It is an employer-funded, no-fault insurance system that promotes safe and healthy workplaces, provides return-to-work programs and fair compensation to injured workers and their dependents.