

MASTER PAINTERS

GLOVE UP CAMPAIGN

The victim of this country's first identified case of industrial death from solvents was a young vibrant man of 29 - a father of a beautiful young girl aged 3 - His name was Jason Gibson. It was the worst tragedy a family could go through - However out of this tragedy has come an awareness campaign that could potentially save many lives.

This campaign has been the focus of his parents Annette and Tony Gibson. Tony - Jason's father, has been a painter for 35 years he followed his father and his grandfather into the trade - Following their fathers footsteps both of Tony's sons took pride in following the tradition. Jason started in the painting industry in his teens - Little did he know that many years later the beer vats he had been painting the inside of, along with other 'high risk' jobs his former employer had him do, would be the cause of his death in 2003.

Jasons Father tells his story:

"I'll never forget the day, about ten months before he died; he came around to our house to pick up his daughter. He opened the van door and fell to the ground, I said have you been drinking, Jason said no I have been spraying tanks at the brewery.

I said to him, you can't put that baby in there, thinking the smell was coming from the van. But when I went over to the vehicle, there was no smell - the fumes were coming from him!

On the Wednesday before he died, he had complained of hay fever symptoms, headaches, and he had a bleeding nose. He went to the doctor the next day and on the Friday received a call saying, "you'd better get up to the hospital right away - you have leukaemia".

"On Sunday we were told he had an 85% chance of recovery. The following Wednesday, he died. He had suffered five massive brain haemorrhages.

"You can probably imagine what we went through.

A few months later we asked for a meeting with CHB as we had a few issues concerning our son. At this meeting the specialist asked us if Jason's blood could be submitted to the cancer research, we agreed as we knew there was something that had caused our son's illness

"When the findings came back from the cancer panel, Dr Evan Dryson told us that due to the long term exposure Jason had to solvents in the trade, he declared his death as 'industrial death from solvents.'

"We submitted a claim to ACC and they accepted this. Some months later, their decision was to turn it down - obviously the ramifications of Jason's death would be the first case of industrial death from solvents in New Zealand.

"We had further meetings and went back to ACC. I said to them 'Are you going to be responsible for the people who are going to keep dying from solvents?'

ACC advised if we could prove a link between the products Jason was using, and his death, they would re submit our claim".

"It took us two years, but we found it – we found the link!". We used overseas criteria amongst many other findings. The ACC accepted the claim. They gave my sons daughter - \$300 a week until she is 18.

"In between these times I also had arranged a meeting with OSH as in the original findings they said they declared the whole painting industry was category No. 1 in 1989! And I had a big problem in hearing this and decided to act!....

"I was in a paint shop one weekend and I saw on the counter two products side by side. One was methylated spirits and the other a product called 'Kum Clean'.

I read the labels - the 'Kum Clean' label stated it had 850 mls of Xylene per litre.

Xylene is a derivative of Benzene – It is a No. 1 Carcinogen. There was no warning on the label. - "By way of explanation, Dr Dyson said the problem was, there was no correspondence between OSH and IRMA. IRMA is responsible for labelling in New Zealand.

I took both bottles to my meeting on the Monday.

"I turned my attention to the head of OSH and said "Why , as a contractor, some 13 years after the whole industry has been classified as No. 1 is there no safety warnings(?)" "Why had we all not been told at a Polytechnic level –were we are learning about the products of our trade, we were not informed"

"I was told by OSH that the polytechs are the employer and it's up to them to find the relevant information!

"My boy was in polytech from 1991 to 1993 and he should have been taught about the dangers of carcinogens in the work place! He never had that education. I felt I had to go to the polytechs and pass on the information that I had found – so they in turn could make our young people of today aware of the dangers of the products they will be using in their chosen Trade.

"I also presented 18 submissions to Ruth Dyson in 2005. In these submissions I want to regulate the industry to licensed applicators only - only licensed applicators could purchase the products. To get a licence you had to be schooled in the correct use and identification in these solvents and their carcinogens ratings.

"It is not job protection, it is protecting our people. Between 3 and 4 thousand people die each year from industrial Cancers. That figure is higher than the road toll – So what are we doing about it?"

“A carcinogen No 1 is a substance that will create cancer in humans – anything that is a derivative of benzene is a No. 1 carcinogen. The biggest problem is there is no identification of these substances; we don’t know what we are using.

“If you wash your hands in toluene – ie: GP thinners, within 30 seconds it can be read in your blood. What does it do? - It leaches on to fat globules in your blood. The myelin coating that protects the brains nerve endings is dissolved by the solvents that causes Lymphoma and Hodgkin’s Disease. In my son’s case 5 massive brain haemorrhages.

100,000 people are exposed to organic solvents in New Zealand every year. 1 in 3 are dying of cancer in this country. That is crazy!

“The group Toxic Awareness had identified that painters have a 40 per cent higher chance of lung cancer, a 20 per cent higher chance of stomach, bladder and larynx cancer, and their children have an increased risk of developing leukaemia. Solvents cause chromosome damage.”.

The Campaign

The Glove Up campaign Tony launched, is, he says, symbolic. Gloves are only part of protecting yourself. All parts of the body need protecting. Tony wants to see all Category 1 and 2 rated products throughout New Zealand displaying the Glove Up sign. Statistics show painters are top of the risk list – so this awareness is vital for those in the trade.

Master Painters CEO Brian Miller applauds the campaign. It is, he said, beholden on all employers to provide their employees with protective equipment.

So don’t forget, ever, if you are working with solvents – to GLOVE UP – COVER UP. *It really is a matter of life or death.*