



I was blindsided by cancer, and the asbestos that caused it

TREVOR GRANT
Opinion, The Drum

5 April 2016

I was shocked to discover I had mesothelioma, the cancer that twists tongues as well as lungs. How could this be? I'd had no exposure. Or at least that's what I thought, writes Trevor Grant.

The blessing of first world good health and an aversion to talking about death makes many of us rather flippant about our own mortality. So many times over the years I listened to journalist colleagues invoke the cliché of a "good life, not a long life" whenever we were reminded that a daily routine of a pack of cigarettes, six pots at the pub after work, and a souvlaki on the way home was a guaranteed path to an early demise.

I would often join in, rising from my bar stool to quote Sir Thomas More from Robert Bolt's "A Man For All Seasons" who, when about to face the executioner, says ever so calmly and defiantly, "Death comes to us all. Even for Kings he comes." It's true. We all die. One day. But when the moment comes to confront the reality of your own death, as it did for me last year at 63, I discovered it's not so easy to be a smart-arse about it. Certainly, I was no Sir Thomas More.

It all came from nowhere. A short, sharp pain in the right shoulder while carrying a full shopping bag, a trip to the GP, an X-ray that revealed a shadow on the lining of my lung, a couple of further scans, and presto, there I was, sitting before a specialist at a Box Hill hospital as he told me: "I'm sorry to have to tell you that you have cancer..."

My whole body shuddered. My eyelids closed over as tears began to well. My world faded to black. My partner sucked in a few long breaths and my hand felt as if it was caught in a vice she clutched it so hard. I was soon as limp as a wet rag. However, there was worse to come.

A biopsy confirmed the specialist's suspicion that the cancer was caused by asbestos. I had the terminal disease that twists tongues as well as lungs: mesothelioma. Simply impossible, I thought. As a journalist who'd worked for 40 years for Melbourne's two main newspaper companies, The Age and the Herald and Weekly Times, I just didn't fit the bill. There must be some mistake, sir.

To me, mesothelioma victims were easily defined. They were the poor souls who'd spent their lives working in close contact with the fine dust of asbestos, or even the wives who'd washed out their husbands' asbestos-covered overalls at the end of the day. They were plumbers or electricians or builders, not journalists.

I'd had no exposure. Or at least I thought not. It was only after contacting legal firm Slater and Gordon that I discovered the insidious tentacles of this disease have spread far and wide through the community, to a point where it is no longer correct to describe it as rare. My oncologist tells me he gets a new patient every month who was much the same as me - totally disbelieving they had the disease.

Why isn't it compulsory for those responsible for these death-traps to notify potential victims?

What I discovered through the process of a Supreme Court action I launched in September last year shocked me to the core. Thanks to the work of an industrial hygienist whose files can pinpoint asbestos in buildings throughout the Melbourne CBD, I discovered I had been working close to the dangers of asbestos for decades, both at The Age building at 250 Spencer Street, where I worked from 1969-1970 and 1978-1989, and the Herald office on 44-74 Flinders Street, where I worked from 1970-74 and 1989-1996.

Records showed workers in both these buildings, mostly printers and tradesmen working with insulation, had contracted mesothelioma during these times. I worked on separate floors from these people, but I'd had a lot of regular contact with many on the printing and composing room floors, especially as a young sub-editor.

My first question was, how come I didn't know that I'd been working for decades in an environment that had killed people? Why isn't it compulsory for those responsible for these death-traps to notify potential victims?

If I had known that people who worked in the same buildings as me had died from mesothelioma, I would have at least been able to take the simple precaution of letting my doctor know I'd potentially had exposure to asbestos. A scan that caught the tumour in its infancy might, according to doctors, have made treatment less severe and, at the very least, extended the time I have left.

Mesothelioma can lay dormant in your body for decades. Then, when it suddenly begins to grow, there are few warning signs. This is why it's such a devastating cancer. You have little idea it's there, until it's grown big enough to cause pain, as in my case, by pushing against the nerves of the chest wall.



Photo: [Thanks to campaigners like Bernie Banton, compensation is available to many victims. \(Mick Tsikas: AAP\)](#)

Late last year The Age and Herald and Weekly Times, along with the infamous makers of asbestos-riddled products, James Hardie, agreed to settle my case out of court, which included a significant pay-out to me. In legal terms, this is not an admission of guilt by any of them. At the same time, I know I'm not responsible for my terminal illness.

I would have much preferred to have been alerted years ago after workers at these places were stricken by the disease and it became known through research by legal firms that, for example, asbestos was sprayed over the walls in the brand-new Age building in Spencer Street in 1969, when I started working there. Or that the Herald building had asbestos in pipes that were maintained by workers with whom I most likely had contact.

I was also unaware that James Hardie had continued to use asbestos in scores of its products until 1983, which also meant possible exposure from an early 1980s kitchen renovation by a builder at my then home in Richmond.

I expected to be angry about all this; angry about a cynical corporation (Hardie) risking so many thousands of lives, including my own, for the sake of its bottom line; angry every time I saw the foreign minister Julie Bishop on television and was reminded she was paid handsomely as a lawyer to represent one of these vulture corporations; angry that nobody warns potential victims that they had worked in places where others had contracted the disease.

But all I feel is sadness; sadness not just that I'm going to die prematurely, but sadness that I live in a society that, so often and so easily, still writes off human lives as collateral damage in the pursuit of profit. Financial compensation is now available to many mesothelioma victims, but only because of the courage and persistence of working-class campaigners such as the late Bernie Banton.

It's easy to blow a gasket about such callous disregard for humanity, but I'm not about to let these feelings overwhelm me. Indeed, it's hard to forget Bishop was [once part of a legal team doing its utmost to stop dying asbestos victims from receiving compensation](#). (She represented CSR, the operators of the Wittenoom blue asbestos mine in outback WA, which has caused the death of many hundreds of mine workers and their family members, including people exposed as toddlers and babies.)

[As Labor shadow minister Greg Combet told Federal Parliament in 2012](#): "She acted for a company that had this to say in 1977: 'Even if the workers die like flies ... they will never be able to pin it on CSR'."

As I said, it's easy to blow a gasket about such callous disregard for humanity, but I'm not about to let these feelings overwhelm me. Besides, I don't have time to do anything but try to stay alive as long as I can. For someone whose regular exercise regimen included running the thousand steps in the Dandenongs, Pilates classes at the local gym, and 20 laps of the local pool, it's difficult to cope with a static existence. However, when walking beyond 100 metres brings on a stabbing pain in the chest and arm, you have no choice.

It's the same with treatment. Chemotherapy is like your worst hangover multiplied by 10. It kept my tumour under control for a brief period, and now I'm on a new immunotherapy drug known as Keytruda. So far it's been working well. I'm able to walk without pain and there are very few side effects.

The one problem is that it costs me \$7,000 per treatment, because it's not listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. When I go to hospital for my treatment, I will sometimes sit next to someone with melanoma cancer. He or she gets it for virtually nothing as it's PBS-listed for melanoma. I'm paying \$7,000, or \$120,000 a year - to stay alive, if it continues to work. Sadly, there are many mesothelioma patients who have died, or will do so, because they can't afford Keytruda. Through all this, somehow you learn to adjust, and, really, it's not so hard to do, especially knowing that thousands of other people have it tougher than you.

Even contemplating the end - which might be a few months away or longer - is easier for me now than it was when I was first diagnosed. I would not pretend to give advice on how to cope. I'm still learning myself, and will go on learning until my time is up. But I've adopted a mantra, which I repeat to myself at least once a day: "I accept that I'm dying in order to go on living."

There's nothing heroic about this, because the alternative is to crawl into the foetal position in a corner and sacrifice what precious life you have left.

Last year I saw the Sydney arts administrator Betty Churcher interviewed by Leigh Sales on ABC's 7.30. Ms Churcher was nearing the end of a long struggle with cancer. She was bright and perky and said she was ready to go. I would love to emulate her. Above all else, I want to die happy.

Trevor Grant is a sports journalist in Melbourne.

Comments (edited)

Oaktree:

5 Apr 2016

Hi Trevor, we are one of the families you refer to in your article, who live in the shadow of mesothelioma. We fear more for our sons than ourselves, but it is a terrible illness. Our hearts go out to you and your wife and family as you have had confirmed what we currently only fear. I hope you travel well on this journey and can hold off the conclusion for as long as you need to. Kindest regards.

Forrest Gardener:

05 Apr 2016

This was published a few weeks ago. Is the suffering of a journalist more newsworthy than the suffering of others?

Alan:

5 Apr 2016

No, he is doing his job and speaking for all the others without a voice and those like myself who had extreme exposure to asbestos in the 70's. I have been living in fear for almost 40 years, thankfully I don't have any disease yet. Linking asbestos to lung disease was 1st made 100 years ago, and confirmed in 1935. CSR, Hardies, Wunderlich, Lang Hancock (In Hancocks case vehemently denying any link) and others in this exploitive industry must have known this, but chose to ignore it, profit before peoples health.

Forrest Gardener:

5 Apr 2016

Quite so Alan, but the question remains. Why publish it twice?

Paul 01:

6 Apr 2016

FG, It is as Alan said, Trevor has the skills to give us an insight into what it is like to be diagnosed with a terminal disease. A disease that was caused by the negligence of corporations.

One of these corporations proudly advertises its products today as if nothing ever happened. A corporation who took its HQ overseas in an effort to save money. A corporation whose negligence and malfeasance caused workers compensation law to be changed because the government of the day feared the monstrous costs that would be associated with the corporate negligence.

How many people went to prison? Not one. Why print it twice? Why not? I reckon it should be compulsory reading.

bobrox:

5 Apr 2016

The ROMANS knew that asbestos was deadly. They found that if they gave face masks made of pig skin to their slaves in the mines then they didn't die as quickly. Either way, it's evil stuff.

Forrest Gardener:

5 Apr 2016 6:06:54pm

HPH, the others I had in mind were those Alan describes above namely other sufferers of mesothelioma.

Mitor the Bold:

6 Apr 2016 7:55:33am

Articles don't just appear - someone has to write them. Got a story? Then write it. I'd live to minimise your tragedy in a similarly heartless way.

OnWard Regardless:

5 Apr 2016

Rorts, fraud and deliberate establishment neglect are newsworthy where I live. From some comments I read in this forum often, lead poisoning looks rampant also. Of where's the free of accountability market to help sort the mess it

knowingly makes? Of asbestos unattended is good for who's humanity? Or how is it those inflicted are paying for services the free of accountability market/govt/banksters are responsible for there in? Looks corrupt as from where I live.

GreyBags:

05 Apr 2016

New chemicals are approved for use constantly without consideration for their long term effects. New processes for fracking and GM modification are being sold to the public as 'risk free'.

Who will pay if people become sick from exposure to water contaminated with fracking chemicals in fifteen, twenty or more years time when they have slowly migrated through the porous aquifers to another 'separate' aquifer?

Who will pay if some new GM modification causes cancer? Who will pay if all the bees die due to a 'safe' pesticide and crops around the world collapse?

The profit motive rules corporations and not consideration of their actions. The political parties that pander to these corporations in the hope of donations will continue to approve their products/processes, while they pass laws against people who protest, are equally to blame.

Maurice Hilleman:

5 Apr 2016

Politicians in the pockets of harmful corporations that harm the public. Cigarettes are healthy, vaccines are good for you and Asbestos is a great building product. What kind of cigarette do you smoke doctor - yes the media is also guilty in promoting harm.

Gerard Oosterman:

5 Apr 2016

Right now there are hundreds of thousands of homes clad with asbestos cement sheets used in Australian homes. After our family migrated here from Holland in 1956 it was a race to get our 'own -home,' an obsession that all should share in the national 'dream'. Of course, the house was clad with asbestos cement sheets called fibro. It was a cheap way to keep out the wind. Already then, authorities knew that there was a link between asbestos sheets and cancer. So what, we are cowboys, you know! A 'Dream' turned a nightmare that will follow many of us for years still to come.

OUB :

5 Apr 2016

I grew up in fibro homes Gerard. No sign of asbestosis yet. As long as the sheeting stays intact and you don't drill into it it is fairly stable.

HPH:

5 Apr 2016

"As long as the sheeting stays intact..." and how many of them stayed intact?

OUB :

5 Apr 2016

No idea. When I was young there was a fashion for brick veneering fibro houses. Whether they removed the asbestos sheeting or simply bricked around the outside I do not know.

Paul01:

6 Apr 2016

Ever ride on a commuter train? Remember the old red rattlers in Sydney on a hot summers afternoon with all those windows open? Train brake shoes were made of asbestos. As were car brake shoes, same set up in the pre aircon days, windows down in traffic on a hot day fine particles of asbestos dust floating freely in the air. Try not to worry too much because the worry will kill you too. There really isn't anything you can do.

olddavey:

5 Apr 2016

""The one problem is that it costs me \$7,000 per treatment, because it's not listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. When I go to hospital for my treatment, I will sometimes sit next to someone with melanoma cancer. He or she gets it for virtually nothing as it's PBS-listed for melanoma. I'm paying \$7,000, or \$120,000 a year - to stay alive, if it continues to work. Sadly, there are many mesothelioma patients who have died, or will do so, because they can't afford Keytruda.""

The weed:

5 Apr 2016

Thanks for your insights Trevor. Asbestos was used in vehicle brakes and clutch linings and can be found almost anywhere. I know I've been exposed to it because I use to play with it when I was a child.

The best description of asbestos I have found is that it is a naturally occurring substance that can flake away and reduce in size to micro (nano?) particles, shaped like a dagger that can stab into ones DNA. This can physically destroy DNA just like "bullets" of radiation particles or highly reactive chemical reactions such as oxidisation and free radical formation.

But the most telling thing about mesothelioma is that it is almost exclusively caused by asbestos. Being a victim of a big corporations' need to make money over all other considerations is tragic. I fear we are all becoming more victimised by big corporations' wealth and power. After all morality is not in their brief.

Geoff:

5 Apr 2016

I live in a fibro home I built myself in the '70s and well remember the dust rising a I stacked the sheets which bore a small black warning sticker. I also recall being inside an old RAAF building we bought for our Golf Clubhouse and along with others, smashing every sheet of very old fibro before the gyprockers arrived. We worked in an asbestos snowstorm.

I don't lay awake at night worrying about when I'll get crook from ingesting so much of the stuff. What worries me is the 'industry' generated by the asbestos clean up mob.

Find a six inch square of the stuff in a public park and it is cordoned off. True! Fireys hosing out a small kitchen fire get the full 'HAZMAT' treatment if there's the smallest bit of fibro in the building.....on and on and on it goes. This fibro 'overkill' is way beyond the pail and costing us a fortune. Also, James Hardy did not know the full extent of the danger before reacting to the problem. Yes, they tried to worm their way out of the compensation claims, but they were not nearly as evil as the press has portrayed them. Agree?

foolking:

5 Apr 2016

No I don't agree, the British government knew during world war 2, considering it looks like a burr under a microscope and can be airborne, it's negligent .

MsOz:

5 Apr 2016

No, I don't agree with the glib proposition that the most worrisome aspect of Corporate denial of Asbestos caused injury and death is "the 'industry' generated by the asbestos clean up mob" either.

James Hardie spent decades wasting untold millions on legal battles against those they deliberately wronged. Then, when certain building contractors started to really notice that there was a buck to be made removing the poisonous stuff, some tried to do it on the cheap. I know, because as a 17 year-old (supposed Gap Year) I was very nearly fired from a State Government dept. charged with producing OH&S pamphlets for workers new to the delightful job of removing the stuff as I refused to design the pamphlets as per specifications. Even I knew then that the "safety measures" proposed were woefully inadequate. There is a reason that these workers wear "Hazmat suits" etc. I did not want workers to be co-opted into dangerous practices with a false sense of security. Had I 'done my job' and just typed up the 'information' I'd been given I would have been morally and possibly legally responsible for any illness resulting.

The carcinogenic effects of exposure to even minute amounts of asbestos have been suspected since 1935, and were firmly established in 1955 by Sir Richard Doll. I feel no sympathy for the corporations complicit in the denial of its devastating consequences, nor do I believe they were depicted unfairly in the media.

My deepest sympathies and best wishes for a possible remission go to Trevor Grant and his loved ones, and for that matter anyone affected by this shameful and lingering stain on our country's history.

whogoesthere:

5 Apr 2016

No, we don't need 'big' Governments and regulations and 'red tape', we don't need to worry about OH&S, we don't need to worry about damage to the environment (which is the thing we live in, some people seem to think we live apart from it). We don't need to have strong publically funded organisations to oversee private companies, we don't need Unions to act in the interest of employees. We don't need any of those things. We just need to let the 'free market' regulate itself and do it's own thing. They are quite capable of doing that aren't they ?. Never been any problems. And, in the rare case there is a problem those responsibility will be held to account and go to jail, won't they?. All the best to the author and his family.

OUB :

5 Apr 2016

Yep it's easy to be joke about death when young and healthy. Now I am more conscious of his shadow I don't joke but, in the absence of physical health issues, I have no fear of him. No doubt that fear will appear when he threatens.

I am curious how Trevor came to claim against James Hardie rather than CSR. My friend worked at CSR. Part of management training involved a stint at their asbestos operations. They lost a large part of that management cohort to the disease. I can assure you they did not laugh off the disease when they lost so many friends to it. I know bitterness cannot be avoided but to ascribe one stupidly worded comment not meant for publication to an entire company is wrong. CSR did not try to avoid its responsibilities to anywhere near the extent that Hardies did, they had completely different cultures. My understanding is CSR did not defend those proceedings vigorously beyond linking the illness to their product. It is also wrong, in my view, to blame a barrister for representing their client, unless you would do away with defendants being represented altogether. It detracts from this piece to bring in politics. If Bishop is to be criticised a much fuller explanation of the proceedings is required for fairness. To quote Combet's ugly comment as evidence of anything other than his preparedness to descend into the political filth is unfortunate. Presumably his emotions got the better of him.

I wish Trevor well with Keytruda. I hope this is not a treatment regime that he will need to follow for the rest of his life and that at some stage it will be included on the PBS for this disease. There do seem to be a few trials for other drugs that may impact on mesothelioma. We can only hope the research proves fruitful but such work takes years and the chances of eventual success do not seem large. Those that do succeed are more likely to prolong life after chemoresistance sets in for first line treatments, either by working to overcome that resistance or through a different mode of action. I hasten to add my knowledge in the area is superficial only. Trevor may want to consult with his doctors on whether it is worthwhile to participate in any drug trials. From the ANZCTR site it appears a few trials are being undertaken at the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital Cancer Centre in Perth. Bionomics is trialling one of its drugs on mesothelioma. No doubt many more trials are going on in other countries.

I wish you well Trevor. This is going to be a very tough fight. Lasting til the 15th round is the aim. As you point out the man in black always wins eventually.

Forrest Gardener:

5 Apr 2016

The reference to Bishop brings to mind the law as it existed prior to the increase in asbestos related diseases. Briefly stated the issue for people seeking compensation was causation. Because mesothelioma could be caused by a single fibre of asbestos, proof that it was a fibre from a particular source was next to impossible. Thankfully, the law does not now impose that impossible standard, but is satisfied with a threshold based on sources of potential exposure.

Closer to home for Bishop was the issue of corporate culpability. The suggestion that it is improper for a law firm to act for a defendant is about as misguided as it is possible to be. Even the devil is entitled to an advocate.

KAS:

5 Apr 2016

The point I think is not to say that a lawyer shouldn't act for their client to the full extent of their capability or that corporations should be deprived of legal representation, but to point out the way that the system as a whole - corporations, government and lawyers - failed the victims here. There is a clear disconnect between the "legal ethics" that the profession has carved out for itself (allowing lawyers to relegate moral responsibility for defending clients like James Hardie and CSR) and the everyday ethics that make knowingly exposing millions of people to a toxic product wrong. Like the corporations, the law firms disregarded the value of human life in the name of profit, and were able to write it off as their duty - corporations as a duty to their shareholders, and law firms as a duty to their clients.

Julie Bishop may have just been doing her job then, but she became part of that system. Now she occupies a position of power within government and undoubtedly has the ability to influence change to government policy. The question is what will be changed to prevent this happening again. Sadly, the answer appears to be "not much".

BSeeto:

6 Apr 2016

FG: "Even the devil is entitled to an advocate." Advocates can choose their clients and the devil pays handsomely.

Jon:

6 Apr 2016

Check out Matthew Peacock's book 'Killer Company'. It shows how precedent was set that James Hardie became responsible for most Asbestos claims. You probably also need to understand that the Asbestos companies worked together, especially Hardie and CSR.

CDA:

5 Apr 2016

How can we help get this on the PBS?

OUB :

5 Apr 2016

There is always a greater demand for new drugs to be included in the PBS than there are funds available. The pharmaceutical company that has the rights must agree with the government on a discounted price. A lot of times they fail to come to terms and the patient misses out on discounted drugs. I remember being incensed when the Labor government slowed down the process by requiring cabinet approval for new drugs and they simply did not put those drugs up for approval until close to an election, for budgetary reasons. I don't know if that is still the regime. The other day Ley was trumpeting about negotiating better prices on some PBS drugs, thereby making room for new drugs. Which drugs will get priority and how those decisions are arrived at I have no idea. I'm sure there will always be arguments about which candidate should go forward first. I would not like to be deciding those priorities. Would you?

gray:

5 Apr 2016

i have been in the building trade since i was 15 and when i was an apprentice plumber we always used abestos to wrap piping etc , it was even used in our technical college at granville back in the seventies , trust me corporate greed was out of control then and even worse now , profit above all else !! always was and always will be and there is nothing we can do about it !!! the powerful and wealthy control the world and politicians are there puppets ,

foolking:

5 Apr 2016

The only way these type of disasters can be avoided is if the public's interests are represented over corporate political influence. Most of my life asbestos has been in and around my environment and still is. I spray it with water now before I move it and of course have no idea whether it is has lodged in any of us.

It would be hard to find a better example of how weak the enforceable moral or ethical code of conduct for corporate behaviour is and what that means for an individual. Was/is James Hardy an election sponsor ? It is hard to believe the consequences of a few airborne particles. My father in law passed away, the day after he died the tests came back identifying where the fibre came from sparing those responsible of recrimination. Thanks for the well written and informative article.

OUB :

5 Apr 2016

The use of blue asbestos was banned in 1967. Are you sure it wasn't the less deadly white stuff? I have a small piece of the blue stuff which I picked up in the Pilbara. It is sandwiched between two layers of rock. Stays in the jar.

Robert2:

5 Apr 2016

Saddened to read of another case where ignorance and carcinogenic materials combine to create mayhem and destruction to another innocent family. Organisational misuse of unwitting but willing participants is as opportunistically managed in todays environment as it was decades ago I strongly concur.

A volunteer into a workplace, or an active service orientated emergency organisation, should not have their health compromised by unprofessional management who in many cases exist by the pitiful doctrine of, "may the next rung on the ladder be my rudder".

The WHS standards of yesteryear are not appropriate in todays world and those that continue to manage along yesteryears lines are as guilty as any other criminal of a failure in duty of care, malpractice, and maladministration. The Nuremburg defence of ignorance and instruction holds no sway, by, or, among our so called managerial elite.

gerard oosterman:

5 Apr 2016

In 1948, Dr Eric Saint, a Government Medical Officer, wrote to the head of the Health Department of Western Australia. He warned of the dust levels in the Wittenoom mine and mill, the lack of extractors and the dangers of asbestos and risk of asbestosis, and advised that the mine would produce the greatest crop of asbestosis the world has ever seen.

You can see, why I now feel that the dream of 'own home' could well have been a very nasty and expensive coffin for my parents and their children, which it has become and will continue for the tens of thousands still living in the asbestos containing cladded homes. How come Australia doesn't provide alternative accommodation to all who still live in asbestos containing asbestos fibro cement sheeted homes and give compensation to all the sufferers?

Forrest Gardener:

5 Apr 2016

GO, you are right about the warnings back in 1948. It then took quite a few years for the connection with products installed in houses to be established.

Why no alternative accommodation? The first reason is that the problem is too widespread. It's not just houses. The stuff was used almost universally. Schools, public buildings, and in Trevor's case private workplaces. That means that a cold hard calculation has been done about the cost of undoing the problem.

The second reason is that present science and engineering indicates that unless disturbed the risk is tolerably small. There is in fact greater risk in removing the stuff than there is in leaving it in place. Again see the first reason.

Compensation is a troublesome issue. James Hardie, for example, would have ceased to exist if ordered to pay full compensation. Then the first few claimants would be compensated and the rest would receive nothing. Governments don't have unlimited funds either.

None of the above will of course be of any consolation to victims and sufferers. The only consolation at all is the lessons learned.

hoolibob:

5 Apr 2016

As a former carer one thing I learnt was those that lived happy die happy. Whether you realise it or not you've spent the first part of the article trying to say why me, the next part allocating the blame, then how to fix the problem with medication you realise isn't affordably there and finally talking about yourself in the last couple of paragraphs. You are worth better than a couple of paragraphs. You haven't curled up in that corner & you're not going to. I'm not sure you've fully contemplated your mortality, but suggest you pick out the funeral you want then forget about it. Whether you know it or not you are a fighter. Whatever they give you I'm betting there's more.

Want something to do? Have a good look at the system & keep helping to fight for a better one. You may be surprised to know iron rest stands were made out of asbestos. In addition to drinking it & bathing in it via water lining in pipes, breathing it from walls you probably were wearing it as well. Whilst you probably have touchy feely medics around you & those telling you to let go of your anger. I'm saying "You really go for it!". Usually its those who don't want to be sued talk of resilience from others. You're a good writer I'm looking forward to reading a good article, why not a serial, a book or a trilogy.... In the meantime I look forward to racing you to respond on the Drum articles to the topics that relate to cutting health funding. I'm not going to wish you luck, I'm going to wish you success in a new direction for your journalism.

TC:

5 Apr 2016

I'm sorry you have received this diagnoses. But it is quite pathetic to bring up Julie Bishop as the lawyer. In our legal system everyone has the right to a legal defence. Imagine our society if this was not the case.

Erick Quang:

5 Apr 2016

It is not unreasonable to bring up Julie Bishops name in the article, it is a shame she showed more compassion to two drug lords who were facing execution than to decent folk who just wanted fair compensation from the company that was responsible for them contracting this terrible disease.

Bob BRYDEN :

5 Apr 2016

Trevor, As a Safety Professional I just wanted to say all the best for the future and look forward to reading about your journey. Your words are very sobering yet inspiring.

p.a.travers:

5 Apr 2016

Amazing people like you come out of the asbestos woodwork at election time. Always committed to the Medical profession, and not even understanding that if they cannot tell you why the pain from walking happens with a greater exercise regime, you simply do not want to believe in yourself first. And because of that, no-one can help you. Try a negative ion generator sold often through Nexus New Times Magazine. Pain as acupuncture practitioners know, if you are not walking on soft grass, but hard concrete footpaths, and getting pain the cancer maybe undiagnosed properly or blocking what are called energy meridians. You have made yourself dependent on the ABC who simply on matters of cancer, should be told to shut up! They in Melbourne where there building was near a Cancer related building, have churned out so much filth about cancer and publicising it, that they are the main proponents of a sick,very sick attitude,in

effect, accepting still today, the medical profession is a caring organisation. Forget about it. I know as a fact they are not. How many of these asshole doctors would accept even the latest of treatments!? They hide completely behind the wonders of University trained excuses. Keep blaming corporations rather than individuals, and you are not recognising a business registered as a business does not make such decisions. Unless you want the American citizen problem that registered entities have the same rights at law as the devious human being that hides behind the entity having the rights of such. Then you will finally notice that various vulture culture types are just waiting for you to die. To overcome that status, the only answer is to be a bigger vulture and feed on something other than what they will want from your life! Did Bernie want to try negative ion therapeutics, and if not, why not!? If in fact you knew him at all much and his wife! Why this type of criticism! Simple! Your thoughts meet some standard at the ABC!

Leo:

5 Apr 2016

This will be of little solace to Trevor Grant but a few facts rather than polemic and uninformed mudslinging might be useful. There will, of course, be some who will not be dissuaded from their particular position on this. Lang Hancock started the mining of asbestos in Wittenoom in the late 1930's. He sold his operation to a subsidiary of CSR in 1943. At the time, both during and after the war asbestos was regarded as a most valuable industrial product and was widely used for lagging of steam pipes, machinery seals, brake linings, general insulation. Johns-Manville Corp in Canada was the world's largest producer of asbestos - Canada was also the source of the main supply of asbestos to the world. Prices were very high and to have a local source of supply was regarded as strategic by the governments of the day. Remember we were still at war. Jumping forward a bit, CSR expanded the mine and ran it until 1966 when it was closed. CSR never made money from the operation as by the time it closed the costs of compensation far outweighed the profits. I did hear one Director say he "wished we'd never bought it". As early as the late 1920's researchers in Europe and North America had linked mesothelioma with asbestos. The producers, probably hoping the problem would "go away" kept the information confidential but by 1935 John-Manville knew full well what was happening. That was before CSR invested in the Wittenoom operation and one can only believe they were in the dark at that stage about the information Johns-Manville had obtained. Post war rationing of building materials, unemployment, and the desire for people to return to a 'normal' domestic lifestyle was undoubtedly a major impetus for the rapid uptake of a cheap and versatile sheeting in the form of "Fibro" by home handymen and builders. And CSR was, and is, a leading supplier of building materials. Of course we now know it contained asbestos as the fibre (today cellulose fibre is the common binder) and there are still thousands of homes built in the 1950's and 60's in Australia still standing and occupied that are constructed from Fibro. Belatedly, perhaps, the Board of CSR acknowledged there was a major problem and closed the mine. They also created a significantly large fund to provide for the payment of compensation of the number of estimated victims. We now know those numbers were underestimated but additional amounts were later provided - the fund never ran out. Workers who, on medical evidence and on making a claim on the company were offered a substantial sum in compensation. It was a standard amount in most cases, some running into several hundred thousand dollars and many accepted it and were paid relatively promptly. Then Slater and Gordon got in on the act, instigated a class action, told their clients they would get much more for them than the company was offering and went to litigation. The legal wrangling and delays that many people suffered as a result.

Dave:

5 Apr 2016

As a semi driver in the 1970's for a country carrier I would load asbestos products from the James Hardie factory at Largs Bay in South Australia. The loads would range from 2 or 3 tons of product up to 15 tons or more. Back loading from the country location would always have asbestos products of some kind. The company I worked for was a building materials supplier. I was employed in this job for 7 years. What hope have I got for a continuing good health and a long life. Thanks for nothing James Hardy their greedy share holders and even greedier lawyers.

VetTeacher:

6 Apr 2016

As a former employee of the CSR Building Materials Laboratory at Rhodes I was attached to the department which was working to eliminate asbestos from fibre reinforced building products. When CSR divested itself of the Wunderlich business we as employees were told that it was expected that we would take up employment with the James Hardie company. CSR was acutely aware of the dangers that asbestos posed to people during the production of sheet materials, during installation and in the long-term because of degradation after installation in a building.

It was also acknowledged that both "blue" and "white" asbestos were potentially deadly. James Hardie as a company did not seem quite so determined to eliminate asbestos from its products and I decided that it was probably a good idea not to take up the kind offer of employment. Forty years on I am lucky, in that my regular chest X-Rays have produced no sign that my time working in the building materials industry have left me a deadly legacy. But to underestimate the dangers of asbestos contamination is sheer folly. The author is fortunate in one respect and that is a clear path existed by which he could track the exposure to the asbestos which caused his illness. Without this linkage his chance of obtaining compensation was almost zero.

It is not surprising that CSR chose to get out of the "asbestos" industry with its potential downstream legal issues, especially compensation claims. It is more than disappointing that some corporations still choose to try and walk away from their responsibilities when damage is caused by neglect. Remember the risks attached to the use of asbestos were known well before its use was banned by legislation. Unfortunately a similar disregard for the damage which they cause attaches to the tobacco industry and some mining and chemical corporations.

As regards Julie Bishop, she was a lawyer representing a client. Lawyers represent people who have or are doing the "wrong thing" all the time. I presume she knew a lot about the risks attached to the use of asbestos, but was under an obligation both to her law firm and their client to obtain the best possible outcome in the case. In the end when you are diagnosed with this dreadful condition the thought that your case for compensation may be fought "tooth and nail" in the courts must be truly devastating.

Sunshine:

6 Apr 2016

A beautiful, poignant article. Keep living Trevor, enjoy every moment.

Jon:

6 Apr 2016

Hey Trevor. So sorry to hear about your diagnosis. Mesothelioma is a dog of a disease. The sad part about the whole asbestos saga is that so many people, like yourself, will catch the disease not from having worked with the product or from having worked in an asbestos materials factory but through incidental exposure. This is something that particularly concerns me as a resident of Parramatta, a location in Sydney where the major suburban factories of James Hardie and its affiliate companies were. Of greater concern is the fact that much of what was left over in the factories was dumped in various places around this area and none of the residents here have any idea where it will turn up. More needs to be made of places where incidental exposure such as yours occurred, and whatever is left of the James Hardie system that dumped the devil's dust on us need to be made to report where and how much was dumped and over what period of time this occurred. The saddest thing is that the selfishness of one company will continue to impact on the lives of Australian families for generations to come, and that just doesn't seem right.

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