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Community-Based Education Program



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Promotional Copy

#4126 Memoir of an Environmental Health Activist: Part II

Organization Information

Host's Mission: To educate and offer support to the Peterborough community regarding the impact of industrial pollutants from the past, present and future; To serve as a voice that can help shape policy decisions that impact the environment and our well being.

Host's - Vision: A healthy viable community in Peterborough and area for generations to come

The host organization grew out of the involvement with Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario, CAW National and Locals 524 and 1987. The clinics were held in Peterborough to study the health effects of old industrial practices. The Clinics, under the direction of Dr. Kerin, occupational medicine consultant, conducted an in depth study of occupational health illnesses and cancers in several industries in Peterborough. Their findings showed a significant disease burden in Peterborough.

Representatives from both labour groups and citizen groups combined and began working together to develop a comprehensive occupational and environmental health plan for the Peterborough community. The organizations's focus is on educating the public about the occupational and environmental hazards including toxins associated with past and present industrial practices.

Project Information

The purpose of this project is to continue to document the personal story of John Ball, a long standing occupational and environmental health activist and to capture important facts in the history of Peterborough's industrial era. This project is about the personal story of John Ball – a man who was determined to see justice prevail for workers injured or at risk for occupational disease. John worked for 35 years at a local industry. He was a welder who trained in nuclear and chemical warfare while in the military. Part 2 of John's story will include a review of the minutes from the company's Health and Safety Committee. John sat on this committee for 10 years and advocated long and hard for changes to protect the health of his fellow workers. He frequently had concerns about workplace exposures to environmental toxins among other things. When John had concerns he diligently documented them, and requested information and clarification. He made numerous requests for safety issues to be addressed by the company. He documented his personal journey of support, discovery and advocacy. He has gathered a great deal of information about worker health, exposures and safety and the OEHC- P feels it is critical to capture in writing the heroic and diligent/consistent efforts he has made. John Ball's contribution to his fellow workers at the workplace is vital to preserve. All that is learned from this story is relevant to all industrial practices across Peterborough and beyond.

Desired Outcomes:

1. Documenting of John Ball's personal story
2. Documenting John's information on the health and safety issues in the workplace in Peterborough
3. Reflecting and analyzing the data and the key lessons and benchmarks about which John was most concerned

The student will:

- Review the information in John Ball's Health and Safety Committee files

- Write a report documenting the health and safety issues identified as they relate to concerns about workplace exposures to environmental toxins
- Document the key issues, and how the Health and Safety committee and the company were successful or not successful in addressing these issues.
- Document the key lessons learned

Benefit to the Host Organization and the Community

This project will enable the host to continue to advocate for education and resolution for workers and the community based on past industrial practices. “Community Right To Know” is its goal and this information will add power and credibility to that process. John Ball has been and continues to be a leader and an activist in bringing about justice for injured workers. His story will be an example of courage, commitment and perseverance – demonstrating for all, that one person can make a difference, not only while employed by industry, but long after retirement.

This project has the potential to significantly impact on the community’s perception of occupational and environmental risks and the health implications for current and future generations. John’s story will support this community and others world wide to take action.

The host intends to use the report to increase public awareness about the impact of past industrial practices and the implications those practices have had on the health and environment of Peterborough and its residents. It is our goal that this project will support other communities as they address similar occupational and environmental challenges.

What Students Might Learn

- Gain an understanding of older industrial practices in Peterborough
- Gain an understanding of how Health and Safety Committees operated at that time
- Gain an understanding of the impact (or lack of impact) those Health and Safety Committee meetings and minutes had on industrial practices as it relates to worker health and safety.
- Acquire and/or develop interview skills
- Experience, through first hand account, the impact industrial practices have on the health of its workers and on the land, air, water, soil and community

Screening or Training Requirements

The student will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement

Skills or Experience Needed

- Good organizational and communication skills, both verbal and written
- A general understanding of health and environmental issues – such as toxins and pollutants
- The ability to write and edit the information gathered
- The ability and maturity to work with others around confidential and sensitive issues

Resources Required for Project that will be Provided by Host

An office with work-space, computer and internet access, telephone, photocopier and office supplies is available. Basic expenses would be covered through the various donations to our organization. The organization would cover any other expenses to a maximum of \$250.