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Bitter workers blame Bendix

By Brian Bannon
Star Medical Reporter

Bob Taylor asked: "Who's going to take care of my four children?"

The 36-year-old former Bendix Corp. worker told the Royal Commission on Asbestos he has a disease called asbestosis and no one will hire him since Bendix closed. "I'm just a time bomb," he said.

Asbestosis is a lung obstruction caused by breathing in particles of asbestos.

Friday's one-day royal commission hearing at Windsor City Hall heard passionate appeals from former Bendix workers and widows.

"These widows shouldn't be sitting here," said former Bendix worker Jack McCann, his voice cracking.

HE CALLED testimony by senior Ontario ministry of labor officials "bullshit."

Minutes before, Assistant Deputy Minister of Labor Ann Robinson said she believed Bendix did not keep detailed records of where each employee worked.

McCann said Bendix supplied such information on many occasions when it was fighting the union over health and safety protection.

McCann, who was health and safety representative for UAW Local 193, said senior ministry inspector Hugh Nelson "sat on his ass" for more than four years without enforcing Bendix's violations of safety laws.

He produced documents showing Nelson signed orders in 1966 to clean up hazards at Bendix and then signed the same orders in 1970.

A NUMBER OF UAW witnesses attacked the position taken by Bendix and the ministry that only 10 per cent of Bendix workers were ever exposed to asbestos. Even office workers said they walked through dusty areas of the plants.

Bendix worker Tommy Dunn died three months ago with asbestosis. Workmen's Compensation Board found to be an asbestos-related cancer, although he didn't work in the high-asbestos area.

"This is the story," McCann said, "and people wonder why we don't trust the ministry?"

In the morning, the government also came under fire by witnesses upset about asbestos in Windsor schools.

Government is "the ever-faithful bedmate" of industry when safety issues are concerned, said Jim Brophy, head of the Windsor Occupational Safety and Health Council.

WORKERS had to do their own 18-month survey of the diesel smoke hazard at the Canadian Rock Salt mine, he said.

Unions also faced resistance from management at Wyeth Co. and Bendix over health issues and the govern-

ment supported the companies, witnesses said.

Robinson told the commission her ministry has started a study of deceased Bendix workers to see why they died.

She said she has the full cooperation of the company and union, but UAW officials later told the commission this is the first they have heard of this study and have had no input.

Robinson did not stay to hear the union testimony.

Bendix submitted a written brief to the commission denying it broke any laws and saying it closed its two Windsor plants last year because of economic conditions, not the asbestos controversy.

IT ATTACKED UAW statements as "inaccurate and misleading."

No one from Bendix showed up Friday.

Of 21 claims to the Workmen's Compensation Board for cancer or asbestosis at Bendix, only two have been allowed.

35-year-old employee of Bendix becomes 13th victim of asbestos

WINDSOR (CP) — A 35-year-old man has become the 13th victim to die of an asbestos-related cancer after working at one of the two Windsor plants of Bendix Corp., the man's union representative and closest friend says.

Tommy Dunn, who worked for almost 12 years in the welding department of one of the plants, died on Saturday.

Doctors operated on Mr. Dunn in December, 1979, for mesothelioma, a rare form of inoperable cancer linked to asbestos fibres. They discovered two tumors in an advanced stage in his lung and gave him a maximum of two years to live.

Rick Byrne, former plant chairman for Local 195 of the United Auto Workers, who worked with Mr. Dunn for 11 years, and other union negotiators have taken the cases of 19 Bendix workers to the Workmen's Compensation Board.

Thirteen of the 19, including Mr. Dunn, have died of asbestos-related diseases.

Mr. Byrne said Mr. Dunn asked him to check with the board to see whether he was eligible for benefits. After long negotiations, the board decided Mr. Dunn's illness made him suitable for compensation and he received payment retroactive to November, 1979.

However, Bendix, which uses

asbestos in the manufacture of automotive brake linings, has never acknowledged that it was directly responsible for Mr. Dunn's illness. Mr. Byrne said Mr. Dunn was one of those concerned that Bendix did not completely comply with a 1966 Government request to clean up its plants.

"They were supposed to clean it up in 1966 and Tommy didn't know why they didn't clean it up."

Now, however, Mr. Byrne said that although the union has made some headway, negotiations will be tougher because Bendix closed its two Windsor plants last August.

"What can you change now — they're gone."