

Help stop our heroes from dying  
By Denise Everett

My dad retired in 2000 as a Captain of the Calgary Fire Department (CFD) after 33 years of service. Sadly, on January 23 my dad's many years of battling fires caused him to lose his life. Most firefighters know there are risks associated with the job, but he didn't die of smoke inhalation. Nor did he get trapped in a burning house or fall through the roof of a collapsing building. My dad was stolen from us by cancer.

The number of firefighters dying from cancer in our country is alarming. On the job they are often exposed to toxic and carcinogenic fumes while putting out blazes. Although their breathing equipment does give some protection, many carcinogens are absorbed through the skin. Research is showing that this type of exposure is making firefighters as much as three times more likely to develop cancers of the brain, bladder or kidney, as well as leukemia and non-Hodgkins lymphoma.

My dad, who was only 63, was in extremely good health other than his leukemia. He wasn't a drinker, never smoked a day in his life, ate nutritiously and went to the gym regularly. You could even say that longevity runs in the family seeing as my grandpa died just months shy of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. But the effects of years of firefighting is no longer letting these brave men and women live long enough lives to watch their grandchildren grow.

My dad and many other firefighters helped pass legislation in Alberta that recognizes a direct link between firefighting and the five cancers I mentioned above. Under the legislation Workers Compensation benefits will be extended to full time, urban firefighters, who have been working for several years and contract the disease.

Gord Colwell, President of the Alberta division of the International Association of Fire Fighters, attended my dad's funeral and explained to our family that under the old system it often took years and numerous costly appeals for sick firefighters to get the compensation they deserved. And in many cases compensation was never granted. They also had to use their sick days if they needed sick time.

Under the new law, firefighters will no longer have to prove that they developed cancer as a result of their work and will automatically qualify for WCB benefits.

I am writing this editorial to try and help make a difference in my dad's honour. Currently, legislation in B.C. under the Worker's Compensation Act does not recognize the link between firefighting and cancer. The British Columbia Fire Fighters Association is actively lobbying the province and I encourage you to do the same. Write our MLA or the Premier. Express yourself in a letter to the editor. Write the Prime Minister so this can become a law across the entire country.

Firefighters attend huge blazes and most of us don't think anything of it because they usually all survive the fire. But what most of the public doesn't get to see are the firefighters dying decades later caused by those fires. Cancer is a horrible disease and the last thing someone fighting cancer needs is another fight. Firefighters are extremely courageous and protect us every day. It's

time we do our part to protect them.

My dad loved being a firefighter. Nothing satisfied him more than knowing he was saving lives, protecting property, and making a difference in the community. If my dad had a chance to live his life all over again, knowing what he knows now, I believe that nothing would have kept him away from firefighting, not even cancer.

His pride for the job inspired my uncle to join the Calgary Fire Department. And it motivated my brother to become Rookie of the Year for the CFD in 2000, something my dad had accomplished 33 years earlier. And it made my younger brother, 20, want to continue the legacy by handing in his application to the CFD just two days before my father died.

In loving memory of Edward Ernest Briggs. July 17, 1940 - January 23, 2004.