

Australian Chemical Trauma Alliance supports chemical injury victims

Peter Harding, Australian Chemical Trauma Alliance

Australian Chemical Trauma Alliance (ACTA) specialises in supporting chemical injury victims in matters of law, legislation and public health. ACTA is currently campaigning to reclaim and consolidate the rights of chemically injured people, including common rights to relief using the Permanent People's Tribunal Charter on Human Rights and Industrial Hazards, to which ACTA has subscribed.

ACTA is a non-profit organisation, staffed by volunteers, which provides the exchange of information, education, advice, counselling, referrals, puts members in touch with each other and raises awareness of the difficulties faced by those who have been disabled by chemical exposure.

Additionally, ACTA works to improve the status of its members through contact with governments and bureaucrats, often with the help of other organisations and groups. A bi-monthly newsletter is circulated to all financial members.

In trying to gain recognition of their problems, the environmentally ill are often misunderstood or ridiculed by unsympathetic medicos, friends and family members. The additional stresses imposed by being labelled as cranks, malingerers or hypochondriacs can be absolutely devastating when trying to cope with ill-health and accompanying financial deprivation. ACTA intervenes to rectify these conditions by providing information where it is lacking, and through selective publicity.

Substances involved in the development of chemically induced illness can range from petroleum products and industrial chemicals, through formaldehydes and anaesthetics, to pesticides and herbicides. The variety of causal agents is almost endless. Very often, due to what is known as the "spreading phenomenon" serious reactions can develop

to substances which are either related to, or completely distinct from the original antigen. Thus, for instance, someone who has become ill through exposure to pesticides may find that they have become sensitive to tobacco smoke, perfumes and foods which they were previously able to tolerate.

Illness may occur through one massive exposure or by repeated small doses, but the final results are all too similar. Unfortunately, because the media is heavily into drama, it is only events such as chemical spills, fires or explosions that are deemed newsworthy. Fleeting attention is paid to the human component in these incidents. As a result, the long-term consequences of human contamination are only occasionally glimpsed, which has led to the term "iceberg syndrome" being coined by chemical victims, who are only too aware that the public sees just the visible tip of a human tragedy of monumental proportions.

Survivors of mechanical accidents may find themselves bruised, scarred or more seriously injured, but their return to a semblance of pre-trauma normality is almost always assured through the intervention of modern medical and prosthetic techniques. This is not the case for sufferers of chemical contamination, who often never recover to enjoy normal health. The ramifications of their disease extend to every quarter of their existence, affecting their earning capacity, family and community life. They are additionally disadvantaged because

they are seldom able to display outward signs of their injuries or illnesses, and become vulnerable to abuse as bludgers or cranks. Their offspring are often at risk because of the reproductive effects of exposure to chemicals.

There is still a great deal of resistance to recognising chemically injured illness as a legitimate complaint by vested interests (insurers, "insurance medical specialists", employers, etc) however, great progress has been made, particularly in the USA and Canada, where recognition by governments and their agencies has led to new precedents being established in the treatment and support of the chemically affected.

Contact Peter Harding, National Coordinator of ACTA on phone (067) 25 5521 for further information.



AUSTRALIA'S LEADING AGENCY
in HOME and FAMILY CARE

Established 15 March 1967
Offices AUSTRALIA-WIDE

TOTAL HOME SUPPORT SERVICES

* DOMESTIC SERVICES * SHOPPING * TRANSPORT
* CHILDCARE * PARENT SUBSTITUTES
* COOKING * GARDENING * HANDYMAN SERVICES

* ELDERCARE * PERSONAL ATTENDANT-CARE
* REGISTERED NURSING STAFF, EN's, AIN's
* CARE OF THE DISABLED and/or INCAPACITATED

Casual, Regular or Long-term INDIVIDUAL care
QUALITY COST-EFFECTIVE ASSISTANCE
LIVE-IN or LIVE-OUT

* * * * *

MEDICO-LEGAL SUPPORT SERVICES
LITIGATION ASSESSMENTS
EXPERT WITNESS FACILITIES

9362.4225

Edgecliff office hours:
6 days a week 8.30am to 8.30pm
Sundays: 10.00am to 8.00pm