Solvent Linked to Suicide

Could exposure to a workplace solvent cause someone to commit suicide? A coroner in Wellington, New Zealand, says it could.

He conducted an inquest into the death of a worker in the printing industry who stepped in front of a commuter train and was killed instantly.

The coroner ruled the victim was suffering from solvent-induced neurotoxicity nervous system effects caused by solvent poisoning. Testimony at the coroner's inquest indicated the victim had been anxious, depressed and suffering from multiple health problems.

The coroner called for more research into the effects of industrial chemicals on workers.

A study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) in the United States found that organic solvents cause acute and chronic effects on the human central nervous system. Changes can include personality and mood shifts such as emotional instability, depression, and diminished impulse control, motivation, concentration, memory and learning capacity.

NIOSH says the nervous system effects of exposure to organic solvents can cause deaths and increase risk of accidental injury at work and away from the job. The institute has identified areas of research needed on solvents, including tests to determine neurotoxicity, improved monitoring of exposures, better ways to prevent worker exposure and determining to what extent solvent exposure increases injury risk at work and away from work.