Benzene is an organic chemical that appears naturally in crude oil. It has a long history of use as an industrial solvent, paint stripper, degreaser and in laboratory research. Workers are exposed to benzene in many diverse industries such as printing, rubber manufacturing and marine bulk transport.

A casual observer might mistakenly believe that benzene is harmless because it is colorless and emits a pleasant aromatic odor. In fact, many people used benzene as an aftershave in the late 1800s because of its sweet smell. The true nature of benzene is insidious because behind this facade lurks a deadly and dangerous carcinogen.

Reports of benzene causing aplastic anemia, a deadly disorder of the bone marrow, were first published in 1897. In the 1920s, the first of many reports of benzene-induced leukemia were published. By 1948, the American Petroleum Institute concluded that “it is generally considered that the only absolutely safe concentration for benzene is zero.” Subsequently, numerous epidemiological studies have strengthened the link between benzene and leukemia, especially acute myeloid leukemia, Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma and numerous blood disorders.

For years, the EPA has classified benzene as a “known human carcinogen” and today it is regulated by numerous governmental agencies. While society has come a long way from using benzene as an aftershave, many workers are still being exposed. In 1997, OSHA estimated that as many as 798,000 workers may be exposed to benzene in the United States. All of them may be at risk.

Benzene-induced leukemia and lymphoma may take years or even decades to fully develop and manifest. As a result, many of the workers who die from benzene-induced cancer are retired at the time of diagnosis, years removed from their last exposure. The five-year survival rate for some subtypes of acute myeloid leukemia is as low as 15% further demonstrating the insidious nature of benzene.

For further information please contact Alfred M. Anthony or James J. Tracy of the Mass Tort/Class Action Team at 1-732-855-6097 or 1-732-855-6054.