

Bruce Zevallos, paralegal, shared the details of a landmark legal victory on behalf of two public health nurses who developed severe, chronic illnesses from chemical exposure in the workplace. After moving into a newly constructed building, the nurses spent fourteen months breathing in high levels of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). Specifically, these were chemical fumes caused by a toxic breakdown of carpet tiles and by moisture seeping through the concrete floor. Although management initially dismissed the strong odour as normal off-gassing, the nurses' health rapidly deteriorated from respiratory irritation to severe dizziness, heart palpitations, and neurological issues. They were eventually forced to stop working entirely and were diagnosed with overlapping conditions, including Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS).

Winning the case required overcoming heavy resistance from the employer and builders, who attempted to withhold internal records. Using the tribunal's legal framework, Zevallos forced the disclosure of hidden documents proving that management was well aware of ongoing moisture problems, elevated chemical levels, and matching health complaints from other staff members. During the evaluation of the case, the judges applied a legal standard stating that the workplace chemical exposure must be a significant factor, but need not be the only factor, contributing to the illnesses. The judges ruled in favour of the nurses by looking at the entire record, noting that both women were twenty-year veterans with clear medical histories whose symptoms began after they entered the building and peaked when a closed-window policy trapped the toxic air within their working environment.

The legal team also successfully defeated the common defence argument that MCS is merely psychological. They relied on decades of research from environmental medicine expert Dr. John Molot, whose thorough reasoning convinced the judges that the nurses' symptoms were legitimate and work-related. Ultimately, these decisions set a historic milestone in workers' compensation by marking the first time the tribunal explicitly recognized the specific biological and nervous system pathways damaged by chemical fumes, creating an international roadmap for using modern science to protect disabled workers and offering potential to protect the rights of those affected by MCS.