



HEALTH
&
SAFETY

UPDATE

CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

FALL 2010

FIRST NOVA SCOTIA HEALTH AND SAFETY AWARD



Brother Dave Dort, President CUPE 227, accepted the award on behalf of Shawn at convention, and presented it to him at a ceremony back at their workplace.

The first Health and Safety award was presented in Sydney N.S. at the CUPE N.S. Division convention. Brother Shawn Taylor, CUPE 227 was awarded the honour for improving awareness and safety of confined entry, and the right to refuse unsafe work. Brother Taylor's work has forced investigations at his workplace that have corrected union identified H&S issues, increased training for JOHS Committee

members, improved the information flow regarding H&S issues to the membership, and changed the way his employer communicates with the union on H&S matters. The employer now seeks Brother Taylor's input and advice on H&S issues before they make decisions. We congratulate Brother Taylor on all his fantastic work in keeping our members' workplace healthy and safe.

SASKATCHEWAN HEALTH AND SAFETY CONFERENCE

During the week of April 21-24 in Regina, Saskatchewan, 62 CUPE members came together for a three-day conference entitled, "*What is Happening with Health and Safety in Saskatchewan Today?*". Over the three days, members participated in workshops covering a refresher in OHS legislation, the State of CUPE Members' Health, Infectious Diseases and how to ramp up our health and safety activism. The conference also examined new and emerging issues including the potential

health and safety and environmental dangers of nanotechnology and the waste products produced by their production and use. The conference also saw the passing of the Health and Safety torch in Saskatchewan, as long time OH&S activists and provincial H&S committee chair Pearl Blommaert and staff advisor Jacquie Griffiths participated in their last H&S conference. As they move on to the next stage of their activist careers, we wish them the best of luck and thank them for their years of activism.

CUPE MEMBER DIES IN CRANE FAILURE

On May 12th, Brother Gilles Létourneau, Section locale 4239 du SCFP of Saint-Léandre died when a crane moving cargo collapsed at the Port of Matane. Two other CUPE brothers were also injured in the incident. We extend our condolences to the family, relatives and colleagues. Brother Létourneau was married and is mourned by his spouse Francine and sons François and Guillaume.

FLU SEASON IS COMING, ARE YOU READY??



Last year was the first year the world experienced the new H1N1 flu. H1N1 flu virus (also known as the Swine Flu) is a respiratory illness that causes symptoms similar to those of the regular human seasonal flu. It is still too early to know if H1N1 will return this year, or if we will face a new strain. Most people have no or little immunity to these new forms of influenza. CUPE members should know that H1N1, or any other form of influenza has the potential to be a significant work hazard. If you or your co-

workers are in frequent close contact with the public (one meter or less) then the potential for transmission is significantly increased and you should consult with your Joint Health and Safety Committee to determine what your workplace influenza/pandemic plan is.

PLANNING FOR INFLUENZA OUTBREAK

Due to last year's H1N1 outbreak, many workplaces have already developed pandemic plans. They include guidelines on

what to do if you get sick with the flu and how this will impact your sick days. CUPE members who sit on Joint Health and Safety Committees or who act as health and safety representatives should request a meeting specifically to review their workplace pandemic influenza plans. CUPE members should note that employers are legally responsible for protecting their workers from all work-related hazards, *including* exposure to infectious diseases like H1N1. As such, members of the Joint Health and Safety Committee should bring up the following issues:

- Ensure that plans protect the health and safety of workers if a new influenza outbreak develops into a pandemic.
- Ensure internal and external communication plans are up-to-date and will work if an emergency is declared.

Workers and employers should work together to ensure that everyone is well informed and understands their rights, roles and responsibilities. CUPE members can help by informing your membership at your next meeting or newsletter.

INFLUENZA PREVENTION

The best way to avoid transmitting or contracting any form of influenza (or exposure to many other viruses) is to follow the basic infection prevention methods:

- Avoid transmission by coughing and sneezing into a tissue or your arm, not your bare hands. If you use a tissue, dispose of it as soon as possible and wash your hands.

- Consider immunization. If you are interested or curious about vaccines, you should call your doctor for an appointment or check with your local public health service center on vaccination clinic locations and times. Immunization is a personal choice that should be made between you and your physician. *You should not feel pressured to get an immunization shot by your supervisor or employer if you do not want one.*
- Common surface areas should be clean and disinfected. Doorknobs, light switches, telephones, keyboards, and other surfaces can become contaminated. Regular cleaning and disinfecting of these surfaces with disinfectants can help stop the spread of the virus.
- Wash your hands frequently. While there is no conclusive evidence that hand washing will actually prevent the transmission of H1N1, following proper hand washing techniques such as washing your hands often with soap and warm water for *at least 20 seconds* can help to remove bacteria and viruses, and may help in the transmission of other virus and bacterial illnesses.

PROTECTIVE MASKS

CUPE members expected to work in close contact with people potentially ill from H1N1 must be provided with suitable personal protective equipment, including fit-tested and NIOSH-approved N-95 respirators, gloves, gowns and eye protection. Regular surgical masks are not considered sufficient.

For the general public or non health care workers, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) does not recommend the use of surgical masks to protect against H1N1. Evidence shows these are not effective in preventing the spread of influenza in the public. People often wear masks incorrectly, or contaminate them when putting them on and taking them off, which can actually increase the risk of illness.

WAGES AND PAY

Workers should not suffer financially because they have contracted H1N1 or been exposed to the threat of H1N1. Workers who are quarantined should not suffer a loss of pay nor should their sick leave or vacation entitlement be affected.

Similarly, workers who have had shifts cancelled due to department closures should not suffer a pay loss nor should they have to use lieu time or vacation time to



make up for lost shifts. In the event that your pay is docked, contact your steward or union executive.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

CUPE recommends that a workers' compensation claim be filed if members have been diagnosed with H1N1, are suspected of being infected with H1N1, are quarantined at home because of contact with someone with SARS or have been sent home because their workplace has been closed due to SARS.

For further information on pandemic planning, check out the CUPE Pandemic Influenza Fact Sheet for information on the spread of the disease and guidance on preventing exposure to viruses such as H1N1.

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YOU ASKED US... ASBESTOS IN CANADA



There is a great deal of confusion about the state of asbestos in our country. Many CUPE members are unaware that even though asbestos has been banned as a building material in Canada for decades, the Canadian government still supports the mining and export of this dangerous material to other parts of the world. On May 12, a broad coalition of labour leaders and union activists, politicians, world renowned experts, asbestos victims, researchers and health care providers rallied on Parliament Hill and issued a joint call to the Canadian government to ban the production and export of asbestos, and the development of transitional policies for communities relying on the asbestos mining industry.

“Asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known,” said NDP MP Pat Martin. “More Canadians die from asbestos than all other industrial causes combined yet Canada continues to be one of the world’s leading producers and exporters of asbestos. We are exporting human misery on a monumental scale and it is an international disgrace.” MP for Winnipeg centre and former asbestos miner, Martin has been leading the charge in the House

of Commons to have asbestos production and export banned. Canada is the world’s second-largest exporter of asbestos after Russia.

On the eve of the National Ban Asbestos Campaign rally at Parliament Hill, the world renowned activist Dr. Tushar Kant Joshi visited CUPE National headquarters in Ottawa. Dr. Joshi travelled to Canada to help illuminate the continued support that the Canadian government provides to the mining and export of ‘Canadian brand’ asbestos to developing countries. Meeting with CUPE Health and Safety staff at the national office, Dr. Joshi told the story of how he is fighting an uphill battle in his country to have the import and use of asbestos banned. 43% of asbestos mined in Canada goes to India. Asbestos fibers cause mesothelioma, cancerous growths in the lungs, and lung lining, but

can take 20 years or more to develop. Because of the long latency period, there is a great difficulty in convincing the media in developing countries to report on these dangers. The result is that workers in India are often given little or no protective equipment when working with asbestos material.

CUPE’s position is that there is no safe form of asbestos, and that the only safe level of asbestos exposure is no exposure. CUPE’s National Health and Safety Branch has been fighting for a complete ban on the use of asbestos, a transition for workers and communities affected by a ban, and for the removal of asbestos in public buildings since the early 1980s.

For more information, read CUPE’s fact sheet on Asbestos.

Health and Safety Update is published four times a year by the CUPE National Health and Safety Branch. If there is H&S news in your region or local let us know, and your story could be featured in an upcoming update.

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