

Environmental issues front and centre at National Conference

Environmental issues were centre stage at the CUPE National Health and Safety Conference in Ottawa in October 2012. The conference theme was “*Defending Our Workplace, Our Environment, Our Health*” and the program contained a strong environmental tone.

Approximately 200 CUPE members took a new workshop entitled “Environmental Health/Environmental Workplace Action” that gave participants an overview of today’s pressing environmental issues. The workshop linked these issues to both worker health and steps that can be taken in CUPE workplaces to ease workers’ negative impact on the planet.

Sister Carolyn Unsworth from the Hospital Employees’ Union in British Columbia was a panelist in a session called “Celebrating our Successes.” Unsworth gave an impassioned talk to the 500 conference delegates. She described her work as an environmental activist within CUPE by focusing on both her workplace initiatives to cut waste and shrink the carbon footprint at the hospital where she works, and her international work on behalf of the CUPE National Environment Committee. Internationally, Unsworth has represented CUPE at two



United Nations climate change conference events to urge governments to develop legally-binding agreements to cut greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change. Unsworth talked about the importance of having a worker’s voice at these negotiations.

Tony Clarke from the Polaris Institute was a panellist in a town hall session at the conference. He spoke about the urgent need to act on today’s fundamental environmental issues, such as climate change, that are closely tied to water and energy issues that CUPE members grapple with daily.

National Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury also brought an environmental lens to the main stage when he addressed delegates in the closing plenary. Fleury urged all CUPE health and safety activists to take a broad view of issues that affect our health and link the health of the Earth to the health of our workplaces.

Hundreds of CUPE activists walked away from this national event with a new understanding of the environmental crisis and a new level of commitment to make our workplaces, communities, and planet healthier, cleaner and greener.

New Environment Workshop coming

Following the success of the Environmental Health/Environmental Workplace Action workshop at the CUPE National Health and Safety Conference, a new day-long educational on environmental issues is being prepared. This new course will provide a comprehensive overview of the key environmental issues that affect CUPE members at work and in our communities. The course will also spearhead actions CUPE members can take to make our workplaces greener and more sustainable. **Look for it in early 2013.**



New Enviro Action fact sheets: Workplace Environment Committees and Green Bargaining

Two new CUPE environment fact sheets have been published. The first is a fact sheet on how to set up and run a workplace environment committee to help CUPE workplaces improve their environmental record.

Workplace environment committees can take on numerous environmental issues where we work, such as recycling, composting, energy and materials conservation, and greener transportation options. Putting these programs in place via a workplace environment committee can make your work greener and more sustainable.

The second fact sheet is an updated version of the original online guide to green bargaining, which is now available in print form. It describes how CUPE locals can bargain environmental provisions into collective agreements.

The fact sheet is full of examples of green language on topics such as workplace environment committees, environmental workplace polices, climate change, energy conservation, transportation, and other issues from CUPE locals and other unions.

Both fact sheets can be viewed online at cupe.ca/environment or email mfirth@cupe.ca to order hard copies.

New CUPE Environment Policy coming

CUPE is developing a national environment policy that is expected to be in place in 2013. The policy was mandated at the 2011 national convention and has been evolving for several months with the input of the National Environment Committee and other groups within CUPE. The policy will serve as a guide for CUPE as it will outline an environmental vision for the union built on clear environmental principles. CUPE's perspective on environmental issues, such as climate change, water, environmental toxins, and greening the workplace will be spelled out in detail in the new policy.



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Enviro Action is CUPE national's environmental newsletter.

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