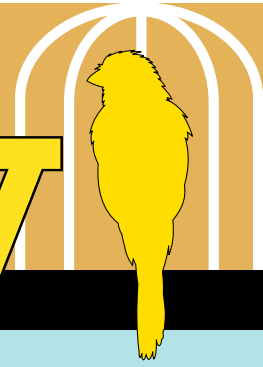


# THE canary



WINTER 2011



CONVENTION ISSUE

## CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS

### CUPE convention delegates united on health and safety resolutions

CUPE national convention delegates passed three important health and safety-related resolutions in Vancouver, setting important future priorities for our union.

Resolution no. 114-115 addresses the promotion of anti-bullying training and materials. Bullying and harassment have become a major health and safety concern for workers in all sectors and jurisdictions.

Resolution no. 258 addresses the importance of lobbying all levels of government for protection for pregnant or breast-feeding women similar to the compensation protection found in Quebec. This type of support would allow women to avoid work that would potentially harm themselves or their children without fear for loss of pay.

#### Time for governments to step up on enforcement

The National Health and Safety Committee's priority resolution, no. 121-122, called on CUPE to lobby governments for proper enforcement of health and safety laws and greater repercussions for employers who violate those laws.

Despite having some of the best health and safety legislation in the world, a lack of government enforcement prevents many Canadian jurisdictions from effectively reducing the rates of injuries and deaths at work.

Julianne Vondrejs, a delegate from CUPE 4047 and member of



Julianne Vondrejs, delegate for CUPE 4047, speaks at convention.

PHOTO BY: JOSHUA BERSON PHOTOGRAPHY

the national health and safety committee, explained the importance of the resolution.

"Flight attendants, like other workers, are injured at work. The legislation is our only protection. Who can we count on to enforce the legislation?" said Vondrejs.

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**CUPE** / Canadian Union of Public Employees



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Vondrejs also noted that governments lack an ombudsperson to support the enforcement of health and safety regulations.

### The next two years for health and safety: conference coming!

CUPE's strategic directions document for 2011-2013, "A blueprint for the future," reaffirms the union's commitment to the ongoing improvement of our members' health and safety. Adopted by delegates at convention, the document identified the following priorities:

- CUPE's health and safety staff will revise existing tools and develop new tools for health and safety activists.
- CUPE will host the 11<sup>th</sup> national health and safety conference in late 2012 or early 2013 with particular emphasis on emerging health issues in new technologies for public sector workers, safety for our communities, and protecting the environment.

Keep watching The Canary and CUPE.ca for updates on resolution implementation and for details on the upcoming conference.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** on resolutions passed at convention, or to read the strategic directions document in full, check out [cupe.ca/convention](http://cupe.ca/convention)

## ACTIVISM HEALTH AND SAFETY AWARD

# Gary Orsten wins National Health and Safety Award

For more than 37 years Gary Orsten has been a formidable health and safety activist in Alberta. In recognition of his activism, CUPE National President Paul Moist presented Orsten with a much-deserved National Health and Safety Award on November 1 at the CUPE national convention.

"This is truly an honour to receive this award from our national union, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart," Orsten told convention delegates.

He went on to remind delegates of the important role unions play in protecting workers. "Let us all remember that unions were formed mainly because of health and safety issues," said Orsten. "As activists we must remain diligent in our quest to ensure every worker has a safe workplace and goes home healthy at the end of the day."

A member of the executive of CUPE 38 (Calgary inside workers) since 1977, Orsten's achievements include serving on a tri-partite committee that vastly improved the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Code, and helping to establish the Alberta Workers' Health Centre.

"I think I'm most proud of the government committee when we came up with the new code, because it replaced some pretty bad legislation, and provided a lot of workers' rights," Orsten explained in an interview following the ceremony.

He's also taken part in joint health and safety inspections in his workplace since 1984, ensuring action was taken to deal with countless hazards. He's served on the CUPE Alberta Health and Safety Committee, on the CUPE National Health and Safety Committee, provided training for stewards and members, facilitated weeklong and weekend schools, and participated in countless other health and safety-related activities over the years.

Anticipating retirement next year, these days Orsten has been working primarily at the local level, training new advocates to ensure health and safety remains a top priority for years to come.



**Gary Orsten accepts the national health and safety award from Paul Moist.**

PHOTO BY: JOSHUA BERSON PHOTOGRAPHY

The Canary, CUPE's health and safety newsletter, is published four times a year. Canaries were once used in mines to warn mineworkers about changes in air quality. Since then, the canary has become a symbol of workplace safety, and an important reminder of dangerous working conditions. For more information on the importance of the symbol, check out [cupe.ca/canary](http://cupe.ca/canary).

Please email Troy Winters at [health\\_safety@cupe.ca](mailto:health_safety@cupe.ca) with corrections, questions or suggestions.

Find past issues online at [cupe.ca/canary](http://cupe.ca/canary)

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Disponible en français

**CUPE** Canadian Union of Public Employees

COPE 491

# Passionate discussion at health and safety forum

Almost 300 attendees packed the health and safety forum for a rousing discussion on issues facing workers. Concerns over a lack of enforcement of health and safety regulations fuelled the session, as members shared experiences from their workplaces.

Canada has some of the best health and safety legislation in the world, but a lack of enforcement keeps injury and death rates high. Approximately 1000 people die at work in Canada per year. The total number of workplace injuries is estimated to be well over one million per year.

Ensuring the health and safety of workers is at the heart of union values, and many members spoke on the importance of making sure that the issue remains a top priority for CUPE.

Several members focused on the problem of violence in the workplace, and highlighted the difficulty they face in reporting incidents of violence, often as a result of pressure from the employer.

Members also addressed the importance of recognizing psychological hazards like workplace stress as a real health and safety concern. Concrete regulations and policies need to be developed and enforced to address the issue.

The safety of young workers was another major topic of discussion,

as several members highlighted their employer's failure to provide timely health and safety education for new hires.

The discussion was led by

guest moderator Bill Chedore, the national coordinator for the Canadian Injured Workers Alliance, while National Health

and Safety Committee members and CUPE staff were on hand to answer questions.

**Ensuring the health and safety of workers is at the heart of union values.**



**Guest moderator Bill Chedore at the health and safety forum.**

PHOTO BY: JOSHUA BERSON PHOTOGRAPHY

## ***Want to know more?***

For more information on many of the issues raised in the forum, check out some of CUPE's health and safety fact sheets, guidelines and backgrounders.

To find the fact sheets, go to [cupe.ca/health-and-safety](http://cupe.ca/health-and-safety) and click on *fact sheets* in the sidebar. You can read them online, or download and print a PDF version.

### **Topics include:**

- Stress
- Working alone
- Overwork
- Critical incidents and critical incident stress
- Healthier workplaces, healthier workers
- New and young workers
- Eliminating violence in the workplace

### **Guidelines and backgrounders:**

- Effective health and safety programs
- Enough overwork: taking action on workload
- Enough workplace stress: organizing for change
- Helping ourselves – employee assistance programs
- Stopping violence at work
- Working together – eliminating the hazards of working alone

To order these guidelines or backgrounders, go to [cupe.ca/health-and-safety](http://cupe.ca/health-and-safety) and click on *resource materials*.



## Tips for new and young workers

**All workers** face a higher risk of injury in the first six months of a job, as they may be unaware of existing or potential risks. In just two years (2007-09), 124 workers between the ages of 15 and 24 years died from work-related injuries in Canada.<sup>1</sup>

### Questions to ask your new employer

To start things off on the right foot, ask your new employer to give you a health and safety orientation to your worksite. Here are some questions to ask:

1. What are the hazards of my job?
2. What training will I receive?
3. Is there safety equipment I'll be expected to wear?
4. What do I do if I get hurt?
5. Who do I go to with safety concerns?

### Is your workplace unsafe?

Though it is the primary responsibility of your employer to provide a healthy and safe workplace, we must not be complacent. Here are some signs that your workplace may be unsafe:

- Other workers are being injured on the job.
- You're working without direct supervision.
- You haven't been trained properly.
- Equipment is unguarded and/or broken.
- Containers of chemicals aren't labelled.

- Safety shortcuts are used to save time or money.
- Poor housekeeping and maintenance (like slippery floors, frayed electrical cords) are present and not fixed when reported.

### Ways to protect yourself at work

- Learn about your rights and obligations under the applicable legislation in your jurisdiction.
- Take advantage of the training you are given, learn to do the job safely, and don't perform tasks or use equipment that you have not been trained to use.
- Think the job through; know what to do when there is an injury or emergency.
- Get help, especially if you have to lift something heavy or are not sure how to do a task that may be dangerous.
- Wear the safety gear that is required to do your job safely.
- Tell your supervisor if you see any hazards or violations.
- Talk to your coworkers, friends and even your family about your job; they might know something you don't!

Other job-related factors include lack of training and supervision, unsafe equipment, stressful conditions and working too quickly.

### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Check out the full, downloadable fact sheet at [cupe.ca/health-and-safety/new-workers](http://cupe.ca/health-and-safety/new-workers)

<sup>1</sup> Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada <http://awcbc.org/en/youngworkerresourcesinformation.asp>

**OUR WEBSITE HAS IMPROVED!** [cupe.ca/health-and-safety](http://cupe.ca/health-and-safety)

• more information on workplace health and safety issues • fact sheets and guidelines on a wide range of topics • the latest health and safety news AND MORE