

WORKSAFE NB TASKFORCE REPORT: CUPE NB REACTS

CUPE New Brunswick members are concerned that the Taskforce responsible for evaluating WorkSafeNB has recommended changes that will negatively impact injured workers in the province.

WorkSafe NB Rehabilitation Centre in Grand Bay's future in jeopardy

The Taskforce is recommending annual reviews of service delivery options and results with an eye to "finding efficiencies". These are often code words for privatization. New Brunswick cannot afford to privatize another essential public service.

Drastic changes to the Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal

The Tribunal was established after years of advocacy from the labour movement to ensure injured workers could appeal WorkSafeNB decisions. The Taskforce is recommending limiting the powers of the Tribunal by changing or removing sections of legislation, which could impact its ability to rule outside of the scope of WorkSafeNB policies – even if those policies are deemed unjust towards injured workers. In Ontario, their Tribunal was tied to WSIB board policies in 1997. Since that time, labour representation on the WSIB board was reduced to 16%, allowing for employer-friendly changes in policies, and a reduction in appeals success rates. As the Taskforce itself acknowledges, "WorkSafeNB is vulnerable to special interest lobbying and political interference regarding benefits" (p. 16) – let WCAT do its job to protect injured workers.

Occupational Health and Safety changes must include workers

The Taskforce is recommending measures to increase the effectiveness of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. This is important, but it should not be done without significant involvement from workers and labour unions. We are concerned, because the process to appoint worker representatives on the Taskforce was not transparent – this sets a bad precedent for future consultations. For example, the Taskforce wants public sector employers to adopt new practices in the workplace, such as "toolbox style" meetings at the beginning of every shift to develop safety plans. The development of these new measures must include workers.

Return to work initiatives must put injured workers first

The Taskforce wants to introduce mandatory forms like Ontario's Functional Abilities Forms for Planning Early and Safe Return to Work. We know from CUPE's experience in Ontario that the focus is on "early" return rather than "safe" return. New return to work initiatives should be developed in extensive consultation and collaboration with injured workers and worker representatives.

