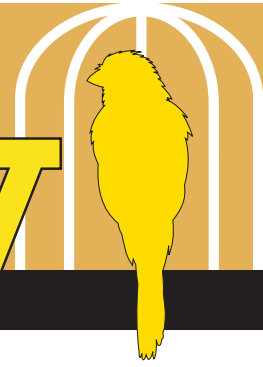


THE canary

SUMMER 2015



LEGISLATION AIRLINE SAFETY

New regulations put flight attendants and passengers at risk

The Harper government is pushing through regulations that will leave flight attendants at greater risk of injury and make air travel less safe for Canadians.

Since 2013 Transport Canada, in a significant reversal of previously held positions, has granted exemptions for airlines to reduce the ratio of flight attendants (FA) to passengers. The exemptions

provided to Sunwing, Air Canada (including rouge), Air Transat, Canadian North and Canjet allowed for the companies to change the operational ratio of 1 FA for every 40 passengers to 1 FA for every 50 passenger seats, despite Transport Canada's admission that the new ratio would impact passenger safety. Since the new attendant to passenger

ratio has been implemented many flight attendants have reported a significant change in their workloads. It has been noted that with a decrease in staff there has been little or no decrease in workload.

CUPE has undertaken a campaign and a number of legal challenges to overturn the exemptions. Mark Brancelj, president of CUPE 4055 (Sunwing flight attendants), who launched the first legal challenge, states that "as flight attendants, we are safety professionals. We are trained to respond to every emergency on a plane. Having fewer flight attendants puts everyone on the plane at greater risk during an emergency, including our members. This is a fight we need to win."

Continues on page 2



INSIDE

2 ASBESTOS



Ban asbestos: Health Canada reversal makes Harper government's position untenable

3 WORKERS COMPENSATION

New PTSD compensation bill in Manitoba

4 SAFE@WORK

Critical Incident Stress

Ban asbestos: Health Canada reversal makes Harper government's position untenable

In mid-2014, the Harper government's omnibus budget Bill C-31 added language to the Hazardous Products Act (HPA). Rather than banning asbestos, the additions to the HPA explicitly laid out how asbestos can be sold

in or imported to Canada if certain minimal requirements were met. Many products containing asbestos, like car brake linings and pads, are still regularly imported into Canada, with imports of asbestos products to Canada

actually on the rise.

Meanwhile, Health Canada has removed references that downplayed the risk of exposure to asbestos, making their new apparent stance on asbestos much stronger, and more closely aligned with World Health Organization standards. The new language removes suggestions that chrysotile asbestos (the type of asbestos the government previously defended as safer) was "less potent", and that "significant quantities" need to be inhaled to be dangerous. These changes put the Harper government's continued public support for the substance in a particularly poor light.



Continued from page 1

In June the Harper government threw away all pretense that the new ratio was simply a change of heart at Transport Canada and gave the airlines a pre-election gift (valued around three million dollars per year) by making the ratio the new legal standard for the entire airline industry, exceeding what had previously been proposed by Transport Canada. The published regulatory change

did not appear in the Canada Gazette – Part I, where new regulatory changes are pre-published to allow for public input. Instead a regulatory change that reduces the health and safety protections for all people who fly on Canadian airlines is being forced through without debate.

"We find this railroading of legislation unacceptable," said CUPE National President Paul Moist. "These rules are

unprecedented anywhere else in the world, they hurt the health and safety of our members and flight passengers and we are in the process of examining all of the options we have to overturn this regulatory change."

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Check out our Flight Attendant Ratio Fact Sheet at cupe.ca/1in40
■ Troy Winters

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.

Editors: Wes Payne and Troy Winters

Please email Troy Winters at health_safety@cupe.ca with corrections, questions or suggestions.

Find past issues online at cupe.ca/canary

Subscribe to the email edition at cupe.ca/subscribe.

CUPE | Canadian Union
of Public Employees



Though Health Canada's change in position is welcome, these changes alone are not a solution to protect workers. The real issue lies in both federal and provincial regulations, which are often weak or go unenforced, leaving workers at risk. Without stronger regulations and better enforcement, asbestos will continue to be a problem for workers.

Asbestos continues to make CUPE members sick. Members working in maintenance (general, electrical, plumbing, HVAC etc.) are at higher risk. Even after materials are removed, they go to landfills that are poorly setup to deal with

large-scale disposal. As a result, workers get exposed when bags get ripped open or resurface after they have been buried.

CUPE continues to call for an outright ban on the import, export, or use of asbestos within Canada, along with just transition programs that see an equitable shift away from the use of asbestos with jobs or training for those who continue to live in areas affected by the asbestos mine closures. Furthermore, CUPE calls on our government to actively support the inclusion of chrysotile asbestos to the hazardous chemical list covered by the United

Nations Rotterdam Convention. Inclusion of asbestos in the convention would help protect workers both here in Canada and abroad by making it more difficult to import and export the deadly product.

"The legacy of harm caused by asbestos is significant," said CUPE National Secretary-Treasurer Charles Fleury, "it's the largest cause of workplace death in Canada and we know there is asbestos in many schools, hospitals and public buildings where CUPE members work. The continued import of these products will harm workers for decades."

■ **Troy Winters and Wes Payne**

LEGISLATION **WORKERS COMPENSATION**

New PTSD compensation bill in Manitoba

On June 30, 2015, the Manitoba government passed Bill 35 which amends the Workers Compensation Act to recognize post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a work-related occupational disease. This law follows a similar change in Alberta that provides presumptive Workers Compensation coverage of PTSD for first responders.

CUPE members, led by our paramedics, are lobbying in many provinces (including New Brunswick, PEI, Ontario and BC) for similar changes in legislation. Jason Woodbury, a paramedic and current PEI representative on the National Health and Safety Committee address the severity of the issue. "Too many current and former CUPE members are suffering from PTSD from job related incidents. This has caused many to contemplate, and far too many others to attempt or succeed in taking their own life," he said. "Seeing a great victory like the one in Manitoba will give us the encouragement to keep fighting for changes to our own compensation systems. We need to help those that have helped us."

Critical incident stress and PTSD are significant problems for many CUPE members, not just first responders. While CUPE advocates for programs such as peer counselling and paid time off following critical incidents to stop the development of PTSD before it starts, it is encouraging that the Manitoba government will be helping all workers who have suffered mental injuries as result of their work.

Legislative victories for workers such as those in Manitoba and Alberta demonstrate the kind of change that is possible when a government stands with working Canadians. To see more of this kind of change that benefits working Canadians, we need to elect our party, the NDP, in the upcoming federal election.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Check out our new fact sheet at cupe.ca/health-and-safety/critical-incident, or contact your regional CUPE health and safety specialist. Read the entire text of the bill at gov.mb.ca

■ **Troy Winters**



Critical Incident Stress

What are critical incidents and critical incident stress?

Critical incidents are abnormal, shocking or traumatic events that occur while a worker is on the job. Critical incident stress is a term used to describe the normal reactions of workers who experience or witness critical incidents.

First responders

Many CUPE members work as paramedics, police and security officers, firefighters and dispatchers, child protection and social service workers. These jobs put workers at a high risk of experiencing critical incident stress.

Following critical incidents, workers are often not afforded the necessary time off in order to take care of their mental health. It is common for first responders to be actively discouraged by their workplace culture from expressing their feelings or asking for help on and off the job.

Reactions to critical incidents

Symptoms of critical incident stress can vary significantly between workers. These symptoms include shock, denial, anger, rage, sadness, confusion, terror, shame, humiliation, grief, sorrow and even suicidal thoughts. Employers often shift the blame and responsibility for critical incidents to the worker as being an event beyond their control.

Systemic causes for critical incidents

Poor safety procedures may lead to the occurrence of critical incidents. Understaffing and poor safety procedures can increase the likelihood of violent outbreaks by clients. Poor working conditions, excessive workloads and overtime can increase safety hazards.

What can be done?

1. Identify the problem

Recognize that critical incidents are a serious health and safety hazard. If a critical incident can occur in your workplace then critical incident stress is likely to affect workers.

2. Preventive actions

- Refuse unsafe working conditions and unnecessary overtime
- Conduct a full review of work organization and conditions that lead to critical incidents
- Conduct regular workplace inspections to identify critical incident hazards
- Demand that employers take action on improving working conditions
- Insist that employers manage work processes and organization to minimize or remove the possibility of exposing workers to critical incidents

3. Dealing with a critical incident

- Implement a workplace critical incident stress program
- Create a critical incident and critical incident stress policy
- Keep critical incidents and critical incident stress issues on the health and safety committee agenda until they are resolved
- Negotiate contract language where legislation does not provide for specific critical incident and critical incident stress controls
- Sponsor CUPE education around the issue of critical incidents and critical incident stress and its effects

FOR MORE INFORMATION Check out the critical incident fact sheet at cupe.ca/health-and-safety/critical-incident

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE! 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