

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES: **HEALTH & SAFETY**

Our Right to a Safe and Healthy Workplace

Workers have the fundamental right as human beings to work in a workplace free from harm. Even more we have the right to health, the highest state of physical, mental and social well being.

Power

In our society it is the employers who control where we work, if we work, how we work, and whether our work is healthy or hazardous. As we grapple with problems such as repetitive strain injuries, back injuries, boredom, monotony and stress among our members we confront many issues which employers see as their prerogative, as “management's rights”: the choice of

materials, chemicals, processes; the pace of work; harassment by supervision; shift work; excessive overtime; and the entire design and power structure of the workplace system.

We need to shift the balance of power away from the employers and towards workers. We risk our lives, our limbs, and our health in the workplace. By contrast, the employers' only risk is profit.

Change the Power Relations: *Our Workplace Base*

- The union health and safety committees must develop their own agenda for health and safety improvements before meeting with management as the joint committee.
- Joint union-management health and safety committees must have the power to make decisions, not simply to make recommendations to management. Worker majorities are needed on the joint committees to ensure that the health and safety needs of our members are addressed without blame or influenced by Behaviour Based Safety programs.
- Our health and safety representatives must have the power to shut down unsafe equipment to ensure that our members are protected.
- We need to expand the scope of issues discussed by the joint health and safety committees. They should include Ergonomics as well as emerging sciences such as Nanotechnology and the manufacture of nanomaterials.
- Laws must be vigorously enforced so that workers are protected from hazardous chemical exposures in the workplace.



Three Rights + One

In our Canadian occupational health and safety laws, three rights are emphasized:

The **right to know** about hazards of the workplace, especially chemical hazards;

The **right to participate** in health and safety activities, especially joint worker-management health and safety committees; and

The **right to refuse** hazardous work.

Workers demanded these rights through workplace struggles. We won these rights through the leadership of the New Democratic Party Government in the Province of Saskatchewan in 1972. Since then these rights have spread throughout the nation. These rights must be strengthened.

The plus one is the **right to no retaliation**. You cannot be fired or disciplined for participating in Health and Safety activities. That includes no employer coercion, intimidation, discipline or reprimand.

Health and Safety

Environment with a fence around it

We must challenge management's claimed prerogative over production and insist that toxic substances used or produced in the workplace be eliminated or replaced by Green Chemistry products which are less harmful to the workforce and to the environment.

Green chemistry is the design of chemical products and processes that reduce or eliminate the use or generation of hazardous substances. Green chemistry applies across the life cycle of a chemical product, including its design, manufacture and use.

Our rights must be expanded to include:

Community rights to know about workplace emissions;

Environmental issues in joint union-management committees either as separate joint environment committees, or as an expanded role for the joint health, safety and environment committee; and

Our right as workers to refuse to pollute.

For both health and safety and environmental issues we must share our experiences as well as learn from workers and trade unions in other countries.