

What the Coronavirus (COVID-19) means for forestry workers

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ABOUT CANADA'S FORESTRY SECTOR

Canada's forestry sector generated revenues of \$69 billion in 2017. That same year, the sector generated a GDP of \$21.8 billion, representing a 1.3% share of Canada's total GDP. According to Natural Resources Canada, the forestry sector generated more than \$1.4 billion in revenue for provincial and territorial governments in 2016, contributed roughly \$24.6 billion to Canada's economy in 2017, and accounted for about 7.2 per cent of Canada's total exports in 2017. In terms of employment, approximately 209,940 people worked in forestry-related jobs in 2017.

Unifor is Canada's forestry union, with almost 22,000 members spread across 10 Canadian provinces. Unifor members work in a variety of forestry and logging occupations as well as wood product and paper manufacturing facilities. Quebec has the highest concentration of forestry membership, accounting for nearly half of overall sectoral membership, while Ontario and British Columbia account for 17 per cent and 13 per cent, respectively.

HOW THE FORESTRY SECTOR IS VULNERABLE TO COVID-19

Canada's forestry sector is vulnerable to the effects of a pandemic like COVID-19, both in terms of the health and safety of forestry

workers, and the financial health of the industry and resulting employment impacts. The global nature of Canada's forestry sector makes trade issues and the economic health of other trading partners of vital importance to our domestic industry. According to a recent Bloomberg article:

Canada's forestry industry could stand to lose the most as it is the world's largest exporter of pulp to China. It sends \$4.1 billion worth of pulp to China a year, according to the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC).

WHAT THE UNION EXPECTS FROM FORESTRY EMPLOYERS

Appropriate protective gear, procedures, and policies

Proper safety training

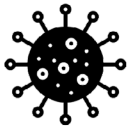
Strict personal hygiene protocol

Social distancing measures

No doctor's notes to claim sick leave benefits

Full wage replacement or other income assistance

Full benefits coverage for the duration of the crisis



“All of our forestry exports put us just under \$6 billion. That’s six times more in terms of value dollars exposed to China compared to 2003 during SARS,” said Derek Nighbor, president and CEO of the FPAC, in a phone interview with BNN Bloomberg. “We are concerned and are in monitoring mode right now.”

As we know all too well, even before the unfortunate arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada’s forestry industry faced a number of challenges including the softwood lumber dispute and volatile global markets for pulp and other products.

In addition, it is critical that forestry workers – especially those in larger workplaces – be provided with adequate and appropriate health and safety gear, procedures, and policies to keep them safe from the threat of COVID-19 infection.

HOW LOCAL UNIONS IN THE FORESTRY SECTOR CAN SUPPORT MEMBERS

Local unions must ensure members have access to adequate and appropriate health and safety gear, procedures, and policies, using a risk-based approach. This is especially important for workers in larger workplaces, where more employees are likely to congregate together. This includes proper training on a regular basis so that workers have the best available knowledge for personal health and safety in what is a rapidly changing and fluid situation.

Local unions must ensure employers and governments do not require forestry workers who fall ill or experience flu-like symptoms to provide doctor’s notes in order to claim sick leave benefits. Any employee who is responsible enough to call in sick, self-isolate or undergo quarantine should face no financial penalty.

Local unions can urge government officials to enact wage replacement policies for impacted workers, including the expansion of eligibility for employment insurance (EI) benefits, including sick benefits. Depending on the nature of their work, some forestry workers may not currently be eligible for EI, so lowering or eliminating qualification thresholds may be necessary. Forestry workers should receive full income assistance access to paid sick days, and full benefits coverage, including financial support from employers, during this time of crisis.

Unifor has launched a hub for member information about the pandemic at unifor.org/COVID19 and encourages members to check the site regularly for updates.

Subscribe to Unilink, the union’s weekly national newsletter at unifor.org/subscribe and download the Unifor mobile app on your smartphone.