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Welcome to the first issue of the re-vamped Health, Safety and Environment e-newsletter



Health and Safety

UNIFOR Health & Safety and Workers' Compensation Conference

On the weekend of June 8-10, approximately 100 Unifor delegates and guests came together at our Family Education Centre in Port Elgin. At the conference, they shared experiences and participated in discussions to advance our work on health, safety and workers' compensation.

The theme of this year's conference was the "Continuum of Injury – Injury Recognition, Recovery, Prevention – Saving Lives."

It was fitting that our conference opened with a traditional "smudging ceremony" as we recognize the indigenous lands of

the Saugeen Ojibway nations. This was followed by an engaging panel discussion on how representatives can implement the Occupational Hazards Identification Tools in daily work to identify occupational disease.

Over the course of the conference, we covered topics ranging compensation i.e. "Workers' Compensation 101", always a favourite - to workshops about the "Possibilities for Prevention", "Lab Analysis 101",

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Health and Safety

“Creating A Mentally-Healthy Workplace” as well as an Introduction of our new one week Workers’ Compensation Board Paid Education Leave course on medical orientation.

The conference provided excellent networking opportunities for our members as we explored the world of Optimum

Health Kinesiology with our guest Dr. Rashida. The day then came to an end with an enjoyable fire at the gazebo with our comrades.

Our weekend concluded with a casual panel discussion between recently retired activists, Joel Carr, Unifor Health & Safety Department, and Alec Farquhar., Director,

Ontario Office of Worker Advisor, sharing stories of why “Fighting Back Makes a Difference.”

Our next national conference will be on issues of the environment, to be held in the spring of 2019 – stay tuned!

Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act

On June 1, Alberta workers saw long awaited changes to the occupational health and safety landscape. In fact, it took 42 years for Joint Health and Safety Committees to be mandated for workplaces with more than 20 workers and representatives for workplaces with between five to 19 workers. The new legislation spells out the many duties of the committee or representative, including workplace inspections and the development and promotion of programs for education and information concerning health and safety. The employer has additional obligations relating to the committee, ranging from consulting and cooperating, to resolving health and safety concerns, to ensuring committee co-chairs or representatives are trained.

The amendments also enshrine the right for workers to refuse dangerous work into law. This further shifts the onus for safer,

healthier work on to employers, those with the power to implement change. The new law also adds a requirement for employers to continue to pay the refusing worker while an investigation is underway, as well as when a health and safety officer issues a stop work order.

Employers also have expanded duties to report workplace injuries and near miss incidents. Recording “near misses” is an important leading indicator; it helps employers meet their significant obligations in identifying workplace hazards. It also supports implementation of measures to protect workers’ health, safety and welfare.

Changes have also strengthened protections related to workplace violence and harassment, including prevention obligations for employers and supervisors; including domestic or sexual violence. Workers are also required to refrain from

causing or participating in harassing or violent activities.

Another key amendment is the explicit requirement for employers to adequately train workers in all matters necessary to protect their health and safety. This must happen before beginning work, performing new work, using any new equipment or moving to another work area or site.

Finally, the new law also mandates occupational health and safety reviews at least once every five years. Moreover, the review committee requires equal representation of the interests of employers, workers and the general public.

Sources: <https://www.whsc.on.ca/What-s-new/News-Archive/Alberta-legislative-overhaul-to-enhance-worker-saf>
<https://www.alberta.ca/ohs-changes.aspx>





Report from the BC Regional Health & Safety/Environment Committee

Topic: BC Health & Safety Forum
April 19-20, 2018

“Action Plans, Plans to Action”

Greetings Sisters and Brothers,

On April 19 – 20, the BC Regional Health & Safety/Environment Committee hosted an educational forum at the Unifor office in New Westminster, with support and assistance from the Unifor National Health & Safety department.

This event was the first of its kind hosted by the BC Committee, and was deemed a great success as indicated by those who participated in the two-day event. To begin with, the first day started with greetings from Jenny Ahn, Assistant to the Financial Secretary and Sari Sairanen, Director of the Health & Safety Department.

Following this, a return to work segment gave a good sense of how to prepare and what to expect when workers come back to the workforce after an injury or illness. An information sheet showing the stages of returning to work, workers’ rights and factors to consider proved valuable as a quick reference guide.

Next, a panel of members from various locals discussed how health & safety committees could be more effective. The discussion shared some of the highs and lows that committees face, and strategies that can help them overcome some common pitfalls.

Cannabis at work was the next panel discussion, which drew a number of questions about what to expect from companies once it is legalized. A lack of testing to detect the level of impairment means employers will likely be heavy handed if an employee does not indicate that they have medical authorization to use cannabis, after an incident of usage arises. Consumption will not be tolerated while a worker is on duty, regardless of it being legalized. In summary, laws are yet to be created even though legalization is just around the corner. This begs the question - what are we to expect?

A segment on the “Action Plans, Plans to Action” theme kicked off the second day. Here we discussed accident investigation, toxic substances, ergonomics, and health and safety for women. All of these topics touched

on ways to better utilize the information available, to further raise awareness about these important workplace issues.

By implementing an action plan to address various workplace hazards, we can better understand how to deal with incidences and enhance practices and procedures. Health and safety policies and regulations must be updated regularly to ensure workplaces prioritize injury prevention and worker protection.

The “Workplace Trends and Areas for Change” segment, led by the Workers’ Advisory Office, focused on bad habits that workers get used to, possibly not realizing the dangers these habits pose. Reflecting on my own experience of working the floor in a freight warehouse in the 1970s, this segment highlighted how the conditions of the warehouse, dangerous goods, and operation of heavy equipment would not be even remotely acceptable now. Back then, improvements came slowly as attitudes changed and the awareness for the need of a safer workplace environment was building. This was partly in response to the tragedy of too many workers being injured and killed because of the neglect and ignorance of companies that would not create safe guards, or provide protective equipment and education to keep workers out of harm’s way.

Today is not much different; as leaders in health and safety, we must continue to make improvements by remembering the past and the continuous effort it has taken to get where we are today, and that much remains

to be done. Workplace technologies change and health and safety standards must also change to meet the new demands that are put on the workers and the workplace environment.

The final presentation was hosted by Terry Small, an international expert on how the brain works. Terry shared the primary function of the brain, ways of boosting brain power, and the foods that best support healthy brain function. Matched with an excellent slide deck and video clips that captured the room’s attention, Terry demonstrated how the way we see things is not always the way they are. He then related this to accidents that can happen on the job, detailing how the relationship between the mind and the body can get disconnected or confused under certain conditions. This was a very interactive session as attendees took part in activities that truly challenged the brain. Terry’s information videos come highly recommended; one of which is an in-depth presentation about the session he led, titled “Brain Boosting Secrets”.

This concludes the report from the BC Regional Health and Safety/Environment Committee on the two-day forum held in Vancouver B.C. April 19-20, 2018.

Gord McGrath

Chairperson

BC Regional Occupational Health and Safety/Environment Committee





Worker's Compensation

Coming soon!

New Unifor Area Compensation Courses across the country!

The Unifor Education Department is currently working with the Health, Safety and Environment Department on developing new compensations courses for our members from coast to coast to coast.

We understand the importance of our advocates being educated on current compensation statutes, board policies and procedures that govern injured workers in the workplace.

Our new courses will provide the tools to ensure our members are properly represented.

The past few decades have seen inadequate premium rates imposed on employers; workers have seen cuts to compensation and benefits while the board's management receives bonuses. The most concerning is the board's relentless drive to push workers back into the workforce despite the medical

assessment of a worker's injury. They appear to be more concerned with meeting the labour needs of employers than providing healthcare to workers.

We must strive to offset the power imbalance between worker and employer, and compensation systems that could deny us benefits.

Watch for the scheduling of these new courses on our website.



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Worker's Compensation

Medical Orientation and Why it Matters for Compensation

Unifor compensation advocates play a very important role and are dedicated to representing the interests of workers and their families who each year, suffer the consequences of work-related injuries or occupational illnesses.

Why is medical orientation such an important topic to understand as an advocate?

The term advocate ultimately means taking care of people. Unifor compensation advocates assist and empower injured workers at any point during the claims process. This workshop provided advocates with a basic understanding of health, the factors that influence it and concepts of the compensation system.

We may not be medical experts, but we do need to understand the importance of being educated on medical terms, issues and documentation. We must master "Compensationese" to communicate effectively with the Board. We must also understand "Medicalese" to be able to decipher medical documents and effectively communicate with health care professionals.

Most workers do not enjoy dealing with

their compensation issues. Many do not understand the importance of the law or the fact the compensation boards will not hold a worker's hand through the process. There are many complexities. Many are challenged by a lack of understanding, insufficient time, or a lack of clarity regarding what medical documentation to provide to the employer.

The participants in the workshop discussed the different body systems and the injuries and illnesses seen in the workplace. There were in-depth discussions on musculoskeletal disorders such as Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS), Epicondylitis, Tendonitis-Tenosynovitis and Degenerative Disc Disease (DDD). DDD is one of the most common causes of low back and neck pain, and also one of the most misunderstood. DDD refers to symptoms of back or neck pain caused by wear-and-tear on a spinal disc.

Degenerative disc disease describes a condition of cumulative damage to the intervertebral discs. It arises from long-term wear and tear associated with mechanical overloading, ageing, or a combination of both. In the compensation system, DDD is not recognized as

caused by work. Working aggravates or accelerates DDD. Remember – the board looks for a significant contributing factor. The participants were told that to prove compensability for DDD, medical evidence must be obtained to support the effect the work duties had on the development and premature onset of DDD.

It is now commonplace in tribunal case law that for entitlement to succeed on an aggravation basis, one must be satisfied that the worker duties or a work incident changed the course of the underlying condition. Advocates must remember the "But for" test - but for the work injury, then DDD would not have been an issue. In other words, did the worker have significant symptoms prior to the compensable injury?

The general foundation of a claim is that the injury or disease must arise out of and in the course of employment. However simple these terms may be, navigating the law of workers' compensation can at times be complex.

Want more information? Apply for the Paid Education Course – Medical Orientation. Visit unifor.org/education to register.



Towards a Zero Plastic Waste Canada



In Canada, nearly 90 per cent of plastics end up incinerated, or in our landfills, lakes, parks and oceans. Once in the environment, they contaminate ecosystems, kill wildlife, and leach toxic chemicals. It's time for Canada to deal with its plastic production, waste, and pollution problem. It's time for government action.

Less than 11 per cent of all plastics are recycled in Canada. Voluntary, industry-led initiatives aren't going to cut it. As long as making new plastics from fossil resources is cheap, the costs of collecting and recycling plastics is high, and dumping plastics into the environment is "free", the problem will get worse.

Canada needs strong waste policies that hold producers responsible, keep problematic plastics out of Canada, and dramatically increase the reuse and recycling of plastics.

Now is the time for a national waste reduction strategy. One that harmonizes performance standards, measurement protocols, and definitions from coast-to-coast, and gets Canada to zero plastic waste by 2025.

Sign this petition to call for a national waste reduction strategy that harmonizes performance standards, measurement protocols, and national definitions that will help Canada achieve zero plastic waste by 2025

Visit our friends at the Canadian Environmental Law Association for more action and involvement. www.cela.ca

CELA works to protect human health and our environment by seeking justice for those harmed by pollution and by working to change policies to prevent such problems in the first place. For almost 50 years, CELA has used legal tools to increase environmental protection and safeguard communities. As a Legal Aid Clinic, CELA's top priority is to represent low income individuals and communities and to speak out for those with less influence and who receive less of a say in decision-making.

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