

# Know your union



## Who's got your back?



## Know who to call



Have a workplace issue?  
Got a question? Contact your union.

### Union Steward/Workplace representative:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (cell): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (work): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Health and Safety representative:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (cell): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (work): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Keep this pocket guide to Unifor handy.  
Together, we can make workplaces safer and fairer.

## Every industry, every type of work

Unifor represents workers in every major industry and sector of the economy. Diversity is one of our greatest strengths. We are the largest union in the private sector, and we also proudly represent public sector workers. Unifor members work in fishing, forestry, health care, retail, mining, telecommunications, office and professional work, construction, transportation, energy, auto, manufacturing, security... and the list goes on. Each industry has its own issues, but we all want healthy and safe workplaces, dignity and respect on the job, and a decent wage so we can care for our families.

**315,000+**  
Unifor members

**700+**  
Local unions

**6,000+**  
Unifor Stewards

**Hundreds and hundreds**  
of workplaces



**Everywhere:** Unifor represents workers all across Canada. Whether you're in St. John's, Kitimat, Yellowknife, or anywhere in between, you are connected to a network of people who actively care about workers' rights.

# Be part of it!



## 10 things you can do to get to know your local union

- Attend local union meetings.** This is where decisions get made and priorities set.
- Attend an event** sponsored by your local. For example, an International Women's Day event (March 8th), an info session, a United Way fundraiser, a workshop on Building Respectful Workplaces, Labour Day.
- Join a committee.** What issues matter to you? Health and safety? Women's issues? The environment? Pride? Committees connect the dots between the workplace, the union, and our community.
- Read your local union newsletter** and check out the local website. Contribute a letter or an article if there's an issue or opinion you want to see covered.
- Check out the **Unifor national website** to find out what workers in other parts of the country are saying and learn about campaigns on workers' rights and social justice.
- Follow your local and national union on **social media** to stay updated on the latest news, events, and actions as well as help amplify the work being done across Canada.
- Consider becoming a steward, or **run in an election** for another position in the workplace or local.
- Take a union course.** We offer one day, three-day, and week-long programs on a whole host of issues, from bargaining, to human rights, to health and safety and much, much more. See [www.uniforeducation.org](http://www.uniforeducation.org) for course descriptions and schedules.
- Talk union.** Ask questions about how the union got started in your workplace. What was it like before the union? What difference has the union made? How has the union itself changed over the years? What could we do to make the union better, stronger, more relevant?
- Read your **collective agreement**. Read your local union by-laws. Read the Unifor Constitution. If there's something you don't understand, or something you don't agree with, find out more about it. If you still don't like it, get involved to try and change it. If you do like what you read, get involved to support it and make it even better!

## Local union meetings: why should you go?

It's your union, and these are your meetings. Be part of the decision-making process, find out what's going on, meet people from other departments or workplaces, share your concerns and get information about workplace and community issues.

Union meetings are held regularly (usually once a month). If you're not sure how to participate, sit with someone who can explain how things work, or check out "11 Points for Meetings" at [www.unifor.org/en/member-resources](http://www.unifor.org/en/member-resources).



**Hey bro...** Heads up: lots of unrelated people in the union call each other "brother" or "sister". Why? First, because historically union organizers needed to protect workers' anonymity and keep management from spying on union meetings. But perhaps more importantly, at the heart of it, we care about each other.

## Hey hey, ho ho, what's with all the protests?

Most union activists would rather spend their free time doing something other than carrying picket signs, and facing police lines.

But our experience tells us that if we hadn't raised our voices and made some noise, then we would not have been able to successfully win a national health care program, end child labour, stop discriminatory gender-based pay, or win a public pension plan. Without people power and protest, we wouldn't have the eight hour work day or 40 hour work week. We wouldn't have safety regulations for dangerous occupations. We wouldn't have worker's comp for when people get injured doing their job. All that we have, we've had to win. And it's worth making noise about.



# The bigger picture



## Unions build strong communities

*"High rates of unionization lead to greater income equality, lower unemployment and inflation, higher productivity and speedier adjustments to economic shocks."* —World Bank Report

**That's right, when unions are stronger, it benefits all workers.**

Workers who are paid decently can afford to participate in the economy, creating more jobs and paying more in taxes to support public services like health care, schools, police services, roads and public transport. This benefits everyone – union and non-union.

Unions are the only reason many industries have high wages and benefit packages – we set the standard that lifts wages for non-union members.

By negotiating good wages and pensions unions helped create the rise of Canada's middle class.

### Did you know that in countries where the majority of workers are unionized:

- There is less of a gap between the rich and the poor, and better quality and access to education and health care for all.
- There is high (and in some cases higher) productivity.
- Workplace mortality and accident rates are lower, and wages are higher right across the board (for union and non-union workers).
- They score highest on the "world happiness index"—UN Human Development Index

The evidence is in: If we want to increase income equality and social equality for all then we need strong labour rights. Governments that want to turn back the clock on workers' rights are clearly siding with the 1%.

## Go global

Connecting with other unions in our community and in our world is a big part of what makes us stronger and smarter. Together we can monitor multinational companies, track industry changes, and share resources and strategies.



Discover what workers in other countries who do the same job as you (maybe even for the same employer) are saying and doing about workplace issues at [www.unifor.org/international](http://www.unifor.org/international) (**Tools & Resources**).

## Committed to social justice

Our union's roots are in the workplace, but our broader focus is on our communities. We call on governments at all levels to:

- Strengthen **labour laws** so workers have the tools we need to challenge employer discrimination, favouritism, exploitation.
- Improve **human rights laws** so that all workers, whatever our race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, age and national origin can be free from discrimination in employment, housing and access to services.
- Improve **transportation** and **food safety standards**, and **environmental protection**.
- Stop exploiting **migrant workers** and instead create a fair immigration system (workers deserve citizenship and full access to labour and employment rights).
- Improve **public education, health care, childcare** and **eldercare**.
- Provide proper funding for **low-income housing, shelters**, income support for **people with disabilities**.
- Close the gap** between the rich and poor. Increase the **minimum wage**. Tax the rich.
- Protect **Canadian jobs** through meaningful investment and infrastructure (and stop exporting our raw materials and jobs!)

# Your union

An owner's guide



## What do I need to know about belonging to a union?

- With a union, you have more rights on the job, are more protected against employer favouritism and discrimination, and are likely earning more money than you would be if you didn't have a union. These things probably matter to you.
- Being part of a union gives you a voice in the workplace (and in the union). This guide will explain how to use your voice (and your vote).
- You're paying dues. You should know why it's worth it.

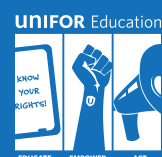
## Unifor. A union for everyone.

Unifor brings a modern approach to unionism: we are taking the best from our history and pushing forward to make the most of the future ahead. We advocate for all workers—employed and unemployed—because together we are stronger.

*"All workers need safe and healthy workplaces, decent time off the job, a living wage, job security, and the chance to retire in dignity. And, they need respect and fair treatment from their employers. Working together, we can make sure that what workers need, is in fact, what they get."*

—Jerry Dias, Unifor National President

# You are the union!



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## What's a collective agreement?

### A collective agreement is a contract that does two things:

**1** It improves on the bare minimum set out in basic employment law. It outlines wages, benefits, vacation entitlements and includes fair processes for things like shift scheduling, promotions, transfers, and more. It replaces employer favouritism and secrecy. In most cases unionized workers earn more than non-union workers in the same industry and are more likely to have negotiated benefits such as medical, dental and pension plans. We call this "the union advantage".

**2** Your collective agreement includes a process – the grievance process – that we can follow if the employer doesn't live up to what's written in the agreement. Without a union, workers are on their own if they have a workplace problem.

### Collective bargaining: how does it work?

When workers are represented by a union, employers are legally obligated to negotiate a contract with the workers' representatives.

Every contract has a term – often it's three years. **Toward the end of a contract, your elected Bargaining Committee will ask for your input** on what needs to change in the agreement. They might call a special proposal meeting or conduct a survey.

The union will also conduct a **strike mandate vote**. This is a vote to determine how strongly the membership supports the union's contract demands and their Bargaining Committee.

**Unifor staff help by providing information** on other collective agreements, on industry trends, and on the employers' finances. The local also reviews past grievances to see what areas of the contract need improvements.

**Your bargaining committee enters into talks with the employer.** During negotiations you won't get a play-by-play of everything that's said by each side, but you will get periodic updates.

When the **union and the employer reach a 'tentative agreement'**, this is brought to a special membership ratification meeting and workers vote on whether to accept (ratify) it—in which case it gets printed up and distributed to all workers—or whether to reject it (in which case the Bargaining Committee returns to the negotiating table or possibly goes on strike to force a better deal). In industries where workers don't have the legal right to strike, Unifor has developed effective strategies to achieve a fair deal for workers.

**Over 98% of all contract negotiations in Canada are settled without a strike.** Nobody wants to go out on strike – a strike only occurs when workers in a workplace decide together, for themselves, that enough is enough and a strike is the only option. At Unifor 10% of our dues money goes toward a strike fund. The fund is ready to support you and your family if the employer locks you out or if you and your coworkers have to strike to win a fair settlement. A Unifor member on active payroll when a strike begins and who participates in strike activity may draw weekly strike benefits of \$300 per week.

For over a hundred years the collective bargaining process has enabled workers to have a say in their working conditions, to stop employers from discriminating against some and favouring others, and to ensure workers take home a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.



### Find out what your contract says about:

- Your rights to training, transfers and promotions
- Your rights if you are terminated or laid off
- Your benefits, pay rate, and entitlements
- The introduction of new workplace processes or technology
- Your rights if you are injured or sick
- Your rights to time off the job ...and much more.

### Decent jobs or the race to the bottom?



We've all heard it: "government workers get benefits the rest of us don't have", "teachers get too much paid sick time", "autoworkers and energy workers are overpaid"... Rather than use these industries as the benchmark for what we all deserve, the logic seems to be "If I can't have it, you shouldn't either".

The choice for working people is clear: jump on the corporate bandwagon and demand cuts to pay and benefits for those who hold good jobs—and get swept up in the race to the bottom—OR, join the growing movement of people who believe that we all have a right to a decent job including real time off to spend with our families.

Do you want to join the campaign for decent jobs for all, or get swept up in the race to the bottom?

## What's a grievance?

### How the grievance process works

If you have a workplace problem, you don't have to solve it on your own. When the employer doesn't live up to what's written in your contract, contact your union about whether it makes sense to "file a grievance". A grievance is an official objection to management's action (or in some cases, inaction). Some of the most common grievances are about overtime, job transfers and promotions, shift scheduling, and discipline.

The grievance process means employers have to justify their decisions.

Every collective agreement outlines the steps to follow when filing a grievance.

### Here's a typical example:

**Step one:** a discussion is held between the grievor, the union and the supervisor to try to find a quick, informal solution to the problem. Many workplace problems are solved this way.

**Step two:** If there's no satisfactory resolution, the union fills out a grievance form that outlines the problem, how it relates to the collective agreement, and says what the union and the worker want done about it. Often getting the problem down in writing is enough to get management to agree to a resolution.

**Steps three (and four in some cases):** If management doesn't fix things when they receive the written grievance, then people higher up in the organization (on both sides) get involved to try to find a solution.

**Final step:** If there's still no resolution, the issue may be referred to an Arbitrator, an independent third party that both sides agree to.

**Our goal is to resolve issues at the earliest step** and to find solutions that not only fix the problem, but prevent it from happening again.



## Union dues

### We get what we pay for

We all share in the benefits of a good collective agreement, so it only makes sense that we share the costs of building a strong union that can negotiate and enforce that agreement. Union dues are split between the local and national union—the majority stays with the local.

### Our dues pay for:

- **Expert staff** in pensions and benefits, legal and research so that we are well-equipped at the bargaining table.
- Our meeting halls and offices so that we have our **own places to gather**, independent from our employers.
- **Educating** our stewards/workplace reps, health and safety reps, activists and leaders so that they can be effective and strategic.
- **Holding our meetings and conventions** (yes, there is a cost to democracy, but it's worth it!).
- Communications – so we can make sure the **voice of working people** is heard in our communities, in the media, and with policy makers.
- Ten percent of the national dues money goes toward **helping workers join our union**. This makes sense because all workers deserve the benefits of belonging to a union and because we are stronger when more of us are organized.
- Ten percent of the national dues money goes directly to our **strike defense fund**. We pool our resources so that we can take on employers when we need to!

**P.S.** Union dues, just like professional dues, are tax deductible.

### Not yet a Unifor member?

Call our organizing department at **1-877-495-6551** or email us at **organize@unifor.org** to find out how to get a union or community chapter started.



## Health and safety



### Unions protect your right to a safe and healthy workplace

If you have a concern about workplace safety, equipment hazards, unsafe practices, workplace violence, or stressful conditions, contact your health and safety representative.

Workers who have the protection of a union don't need to be afraid to speak out when they see workplace dangers, or experience work-related injury or accident; we have the resources and expertise we need to identify workplace hazards and we have the clout to demand changes.

### Your right to refuse unsafe work

The right to refuse unsafe work starts with **the right to know**. You have the right to know information that could affect your health or safety in the workplace. You have the right to training and information on machinery, equipment, working conditions, processes and hazardous substances. For example, you have the right to information about chemicals you are using or exposed to while you work.

You have **the right to refuse unsafe work** if you think you are in danger, or your work endangers someone else. It is illegal for the employer to discipline workers for refusing unsafe work.

### Here's how it generally works:

You report the problem to your supervisor and say you are "exercising your right to refuse unsafe work."

Notify your union representative as soon as possible.

Your supervisor has to investigate and attempt to fix the problem.

No other worker can be assigned to do the job unless they are told about your refusal and the reasons for it.

If you don't feel like the problem is fixed, and you believe there are still reasonable grounds to refuse, then your union rep will guide you through the next steps.

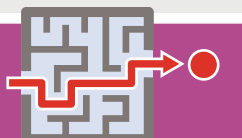
Your right to refuse is protected in law, and your rep knows the laws and processes that need to be followed in your province. They also know what to do if the employer attempts to discipline you for exercising your legal right to refuse.

It takes courage to stand up and exercise your right to refuse, but it may be the only way to protect yourself, and could even save your life.

Workers also have **the right to participate**. Get involved by reporting unsafe conditions, voicing your concerns, becoming a health & safety rep or taking part in a Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee.

Unions today remain committed to defending health and safety legislation so that all workers – whether they have a union or not – can exercise their right to healthy and safe workplaces.

### Laid off? Going on leave? Injured at work? We can help.



If you need to access employment insurance or worker's compensation, don't go it alone. These are income security programs that workers and unions have fought for to make sure we can look after ourselves and our families in times of need. Both EI and Worker's Comp are increasingly bureaucratic processes. If you need them, we want to help make sure you get access: contact your union rep for support.

## Harassment, bullying and violence at work



By law you have the right to a harassment-free workplace, and your employer is responsible for ensuring this is the case. Our union takes harassment seriously: we hold management accountable for investigating and resolving workplace harassment issues and we negotiate training policies and workplace advocates.

Harassment is not a joke. It is cruel and destructive behaviour against others that can have devastating effects. Harassment – particularly that based on sexism, racism, homophobia, disability, gender identity/expression or religion – is contrary to our basic union principles of solidarity and equality.

If you experience workplace harassment, bullying or violence please bring it to the attention of anyone in the union you feel comfortable talking to. This could include a steward or workplace rep, a member of your women's or human rights committee, a women's advocate. They will help get a process going that will stop the harassment.

### The goals of a workplace harassment process are to:

- 1 Stop the harassment
- 2 Make sure it doesn't re-occur
- 3 Repair damage (to the degree this is possible)
- 4 Make changes to promote respectful workplace environments

**Unifor Human Rights Department:**  
1-800-268-5763 ext. 8494