



CUPE BC Occupational Health & Safety Committee Report to Convention – May 2019

The CUPE BC Occupational Health & Safety Committee (OH&S) meets regularly to discuss issues that impact CUPE workers in BC. The committee is focused on making all workplaces safer for workers in British Columbia. The committee discusses a variety of different subjects related to occupational health and safety with the shared objectives of improving workplace safety in many different capacities, including; by staying on the pulse of new legislation as it comes forward and advocating for regulation and policy changes and addressing and strategizing on current and emerging issues. The committee will continue to be committed to raising awareness for all CUPE members when it comes to workplace hazards and effective means to reduce and eliminate them. Under John Horgan and the BCNDP government, we see change to the workers advisory board and funding that will help support our injured workers and we continue to be optimistic around improved legislation which will effectively result in improvements not just for our members, but for all workers across the Province of BC.

For information on the CUPE BC OH&S Committee safety activities and resources, please check the website

at: www.cupe.bc.ca/occupational_health_and_safety_committee

Violence in the workplace

Violence in the workplace has continued to be a major issue for our members and these physical, verbal, psychological, and sexual incidents have once again continued to increase exponentially in all sectors across British Columbia and throughout the country. It is especially prevalent in the K-12 sector, but not limited to that sector. Other areas that are impacted include: paramedics, lifeguards, library workers, outside municipal workers, senior centres, SkyTrain workers and many more areas where these incidents are rising at an alarming rate. Employers are not doing enough to deal with these potentially violent situations that put all workers in BC at risk. Contributing factors include understaffing, lack of resources and ineffective policies or no policies in place to protect workers' rights to a safe and healthy workplace. CUPE BC and CUPE National

have committed to making this subject a priority. This committee will continue to encourage locals and district councils to order the 'Preventing Violence in the Workplace' kits. These kits offer great tools to strengthen our OH&S committees, educate our members, and ultimately work towards eliminating the horrors associated with workplace violence. To order these kits, please access the CUPE National website or make your request to your National Servicing Representative for assistance.

Attendance management policies

Another emerging issue is attendance management policies and the fact that they are causing an increase in presenteeism, which in turn is impacting workers by spreading many illnesses to co-workers. It is also impacting the mental health of workers due to the stresses of being on or avoiding being on these attendance management programs. The impact of having bona fide health issues scrutinized creates an unhealthy and toxic work environment. These attendance policies are disguised as supportive but in reality, they are used as a fear tactic to discourage workers from accessing their sick leave benefits. It is a workers right to have access to sick leave benefits that were fought for by our sisters, brothers and comrades that stood shoulder to shoulder on the picket lines and sacrificed so much to attain these benefits and it's time we push back against these employers from using these tactics that restrict workers free rights to access their benefits.

Conferences

The CUPE BC Executive Board approved to send two members from our committee to attend the Pacific Safety Centre-Western Conference on Safety on April 8th and 9th. Keynote speakers will discuss the importance of making safety messages stick and how to ensure they do, as well as how much mental health disorders impact the workplace and to ensure worker safety. The sessions will cover a variety of topics which include: how to demonstrate the importance of the role that supervisors play; how to create psychologically safe workplaces using a team approach, how to measure success, how due diligence is used as a defense, how to prove it and the important role it plays in the responsibilities of the supervisor; how to stop just filling out the forms and determine the true root causes of incidents during investigations; and how to improve your gut health, cognition, and mood through nutrition. Other sessions include topics on

what happens after cannabis legalization, dealing with impairment, cultural connections and considerations with regards to safety, impacts of fatigue, driver knowledge, motivation and behavior, emergency preparedness, safety strategic planning, and joint committee effectiveness. The trade show is a very important part of the conference as it gives us the opportunity to speak directly with suppliers, training agencies, safety associations, and make some great contacts that can be brought back to CUPE members, the OH&S committee and our workplace safety committees.

Thank you to the CUPE BC Executive Board for approving to send two committee members to this beneficial safety conference.

Health and safety conference strategies

The OH&S committee continues to advocate and discuss with the division strategies to hold a conference for health and safety. A conference of this nature would provide an opportunity for locals and district councils to strengthen their own OH&S committees and work towards improving safety in the workplace for all members that they represent.

Resolutions to convention

The CUPE BC OH&S Committee have submitted several resolutions to convention. In years past, many excellent resolutions were submitted that unfortunately did not reach the floor of convention. The OH&S committee will continue to prioritize and advocate for the following resolutions:

- Lobbying the government to stop employers from creating or continuing attendance management programs/policies.
- Continued opposition to mandatory drug testing in the public sector.
- Lobby the government for paid leave for victims of domestic violence.
- Lobby the Provincial government to conduct and enforce more thorough investigations on type two (2) violence.
- Lobby the Provincial Education Ministry to include mental health and safety education as part of the school curriculum.

Day of Mourning - April 28th

The following national statistics are noted from the Association of Workers Compensation Boards of Canada:

- Approximately 1,000 workers died.
- On an annual basis, workers suffer from approximately 250,000 work-related injuries/diseases.
- On a daily basis, workers suffer from approximately 685 work-related injuries/diseases.

We pause every April 28th to remember workers killed and those still suffering from work related injury or illness and who have seen their lives and livelihoods forever compromised. Take time to remember by:

- Attending a Day of Mourning ceremony in your community while encouraging others to do the same. A complete list of ceremonies for the following areas can be found by accessing the BC Federation of Labour's website at: dayofmourning.bc.ca.
- Draft a message for your local or district council's publication or website.
- Coordinate a Day of Mourning event in your workplace.
- Recommend employers and public institutions to lower flags to half-mast.
- Share the stories of workers injured and killed on the job and ensure that they are never forgotten.

An injury to one is an injury to all. As activists, we shall mourn for the dead and fight for the living.

Conclusion

The OH&S committee would like to thank the CUPE BC Executive Board for their continued support, support staff at CUPE BC and the BC Regional office staff. Tom McKenna, staff representative, has been a valuable resource and support mechanism for our committee. Tom's knowledge and experience is crucial to our function and for that we are grateful. We have also enjoyed working with CUPE National Communications Representatives, Kathryn Davies and Steven Beasley. They have provided us with their expertise in all communication related projects that we have or will be executing.

Respectfully submitted:

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John Gibson, Co-Chair
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