



SOCIETY *of*
UNITED PROFESSIONALS

COVID-19: Return-to-work at Ontario Power Generation

To: Society JHSC Representatives at Ontario Power Generation

From: Chris Graham, Executive Vice-President
Society of United Professionals, IFPTE 160

Date: May 27, 2020

Dear Society JHSC Representative,

Firstly, I hope you are well. On behalf of the Society of United Professional's more than 8,500 members across Ontario, and the more than 3,500 Society members at OPG, I wanted to thank you for your continued service to our union and your colleges as a Health and Safety Representative. I hope that you've been able to adjust, as best as you can, to this new reality we are all experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

OPG has recently sent out communications to staff regarding plans to return workers to office buildings throughout Ontario. While the Society was not part of preparing those plans, President Scott Travers and your Local Vice President Joe Fierro were able to discuss them with senior management at a recent TAC meeting. Both Scott and Joe expressed concerns about the plan, in particular the timing of the return to offices. We are encouraged to see that OPG has now modified their plans for returning workers to 700 University Avenue, but we remain concerned about the other buildings.

During the TAC meeting, senior management explained that the corporate plan is a framework to be followed and they confirmed their commitment that OPG will meet with the local JHSC at every workplace prior to our members returning to those offices. Scott and Joe reinforced the important role of the JHSC under the Internal Responsibility System and that those meetings need to involve meaningful discussions. Senior management also explained that there will be a management lead person appointed for coordinating each building, and that this lead would be in regular contact with the JHSC for the building.

I wanted to take this opportunity to remind you of the critical role you and your JHSC play in protecting the health and safety of our members.



In Ontario, Health and Safety in our workplaces' is built on the foundation of the [Internal Responsibility System](#) (IRS) between, management, unions, constructors and workplace owners, and employees. We all must do our part, not only JHSC reps, but everyone, to ensure the IRS is effective and supports a safe and healthy workplace. In addition to the workplace parties' compliance with their legal duties, the IRS is further supported by well-defined health and safety policies and programs, including the design, control, monitoring and supervision of the work being performed at OPG.

These are Workers' rights under [Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act](#):

1. The "right to participate" to be part of the process of identifying and resolving health and safety concerns. At OPG this right is expressed mostly through the efforts of the Joint Health and Safety Committees and representatives.
2. The "[right to know](#)" about any hazards to which they may be exposed. The requirements of the [Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System](#) (WHMIS) are an important example.
3. The "[right to refuse work](#)" that they believe is dangerous and, under certain circumstances, certified Joint Health and Safety Committee members can stop work that is dangerous.

The Act also prohibits reprisals being taken against workers who exercise these rights.

As Joint Health and Safety Committee representatives it is your right to participate in the discussions that lead to the decisions that are being made in your workplace with respect to health and safety.

It is the employers' responsibility to take every precaution reasonable to protect the health and safety of their employees and ensure a safe workplace – they must have a plan that promotes and adheres to strict hygiene and sanitation standards, and physical distances to the best extent possible, including any appropriate protective equipment. The JHSC has an important role to play to ensure the employer is fulfilling its health and safety responsibilities to employees. In addition, the employer also has the responsibility to ensure a safe workplace for those who may attend as a visitor, vendor, or contractor.

If you have questions, or are unsure if the proposals for the return to the workplace for those you represent are safe, you are encouraged to reach out to [Dave Romanowicz](#) 905-839-1151 x7189 (for Nuclear), or [Joel Barton](#) 905-650-8700 (for Non-nuclear) by email or telephone for assistance.



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If you, as a JHSC Representative, or anyone in the workplace, thinks it is not safe then the supervisor/manager responsible must be alerted as soon as possible so that they can take immediate action to try to make the workplace safe. If after the action is taken there is still a concern the workplace is unsafe then a Ministry of Labour (MOL) Inspector can be called at 1-877-202-0008 to make a determination. If the MOL inspector finds a deficiency they will normally order the employer to make the required changes, and then once this is done the Inspector will declare the workplace safe. Once a workplace is declared safe by the MOL Inspector employees must return to the workplace or risk disciplinary action by management.

There has never been a time in recent history that I can remember when the Joint Health and Safety Committee's (JHSC) need has been greater. Unions, through the years, have fought hard for the right to have a seat at the table with respect to Health and Safety discussions, and we must exercise our rights in order to protect them.

Your steadfast efforts and continued diligence in working to ensure a "safety first" culture helps make a lasting difference in keeping Society members, and by extension our communities', safe in the past, present, and future as we grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Do not ever feel pressured to accept any return-to-work proposals you do not think are safe. If you have concerns please voice them. If you are unsure please reach out to Dave or Joel. We all have a solemn and overriding duty as JHSC representatives to do our very best to ensure safety is never compromised, and workers return home safe and sound every single day. They are counting on us, and we can't let them down.

In Solidarity,

Chris Graham, Executive Vice-President
Society of United Professionals, IFPTE 160