



**COVID-19
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
AND SAFETY OFFICERS
CONFERENCE CALL**

April 30, 2020

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

Occupational Health and Safety Officers Conference Call
April 30, 2020
1:00 p.m. EDT

PARTICIPANTS

BCGEU/NUPGE	Patrick Coghlan Doug Kinna Megan Scott
HSABC/NUPGE	David Durning Mike Wisla
HSAA/NUPGE	Ray Geldreich
SGEU/NUPGE	Tracey Sauer
HSAS	Bill Fischer
MGEU/NUPGE	Blaine Duncan
OPSEU/NUPGE	Joscelyn Ross Terri Szymanski
NSGEU/NUPGE	Paul Cormier Sandra Mullen
NAPE/NUPGE	Bernie Coffey Sobol
NUPGE	Len Bush, Managing Director Anil Naidoo, National Representative Diane Fowles, Administrative Representative

1. Welcome and Introductions

Anil:

- Next call will be done on Zoom
- This is our 3rd call - real shift, even in last 2 weeks since last call, around impacts in long-term care, group homes, shelters, homeless populations
- Shift in Canada, still community transmission but majority of cases are in vulnerable, high risk and congregate populations
- Loosening of restrictions in provinces is beginning - not coherent - different in each province
- Provinces which have not been hit as hard opening up sooner
- QC and ON hardest hit but two quite different approaches - ON is taking a more cautious approach - QC moving forward with schools outside of Montreal next week
- Not many other provinces are talking about opening the schools yet
- Generally expect opening in reverse order to what was shut down - expect large gatherings will be the last thing to come back - parks, etc. will open first, some provinces adding more services to the essential list as way of monitoring the loosening of restrictions
- Interesting to see the modifications in different plans - different wordings and changed pace, as well as, order of types of business allowed to open
- No overall national plan - Trudeau has met with the premiers but decisions being left to the provinces
- Implications for us - more workers put at risk as lock down relates, more workers on the front line
- Ongoing question of PPE which has not gone away:
 - Morphed into an ongoing issue where we try and press for proper PPE
 - Provinces either say you have it but at the level of managers, sometimes locked away
 - Some areas better than others
 - No coherent access protocols

- No real understanding of what is high risk requiring N95 vs surgical/procedural masks, when do you wear gowns, head coverings etc.
- Even though evidence suggests need to be concerned about aerosol transmission, N95 supply issues have not been dealt with
- This impacts availability and accessibility to the members
- Better and worse in different areas and not across the board
- Grievances being made and courts are also involved
- Also, what happens around impacts on worker who cannot work due to isolation... pay, claims, etc. that was spoken about on last call?
- First call we did a general check in; second broke it down into acute care, long-term care, and other sectors and it was quite dense
- Focus for this call is problem/solution - what are the key issues that have come up since the last call, if there is something you want to bring to the table seeking clarity from others on how to address the situation, if there are any curve balls thrown by your province, discussions that will help you with day-to-day challenges

Cross country check-in still, but more on emerging issues - do want you to question the group things that are challenging to you but might have been dealt with elsewhere and solutions can be shared

2. Cross Country check in, emerging issues, new problems, and solutions found

NAPE/NUPGE

Bernie Coffey Sobol:

- Just heard that the government is reopening things starting next week
- No new cases in last 10-12 days - doing extremely well
- Long-term care facility - single site only so impacting jobs
- One big issue and wondering if others have as well is social workers transporting clients in their own vehicles? Is that happening anywhere else? Long-term care facility - single site only so impacting jobs

- Expecting some stop work orders because government is stating that a positive COVID-19 person in vehicle, they will agree to clean it afterwards, but social workers don't want anyone in their vehicles - how are other provinces handling this? Are they using taxis or putting something else in place?

Paul Cormier - NSGEU:

- Issue that community services members have raised - employer not responding, letters sent to Minister, and about to put complaint into Ministry of Labour, Department of Labour just asking for them to answer their concerns and questions posed - huge issue there
- What other organizations have that our employers don't, is a good hazard assessment process that takes into consideration what controls are in place. Are they adequate?
- When members have ideas outside, public health is suggesting it is a fight with the employers
- Nothing specific in suggestions but deputy sheriffs who will be transporting those without money to testing will be wearing safety glasses, surgical masks, and have the people wear surgical masks - no physical barriers
- Members need to tell them to engage health and safety committees to look at what all the job paths are, what are the hazards, what are the controls
- COVID-19 is one of the hazards so how are we going to control that?

Doug Kinna - BCGEU:

- Child protection social workers still transporting kids in their car when there isn't a government vehicle available
- Do have a cleaning protocol which will pass along if he can get it in writing

Bernie Coffey Sobol:

- Would like to get a copy of the NS complaint
- Trying to get to a common understanding so people can get around but so everyone feels safe while they do their job
- All of this is happening, and the government is announcing they are opening up

NSGEU/NUPGE

Paul Cormier:

- We represent Cape Breton Regional Police and the emergency response team members were complaining about the surgical masks if they get into certain situations - talked to the employer - some went out and bought their own half face, air respirators, and got tested on their own - employer originally said no but is now accepting them - just shows again the lack of discussion as the concern was around surgical masks being ripped off too easily - the half masks are better protection
- Long-term care - outbreak in one the biggest long-term care facilities - Northwood
- Acute care nurses from NS Health authority have gone and reports are that it is not surprising that so many have passed away as a result of COVID-19. When new staff were brought in to deal with crisis, had to go to the media with their concerns about infection control practices, PPE not being worn properly, dementia patients mixing casually with other patients and roaming from one area to another
- A lot of fatalities since outbreak - 1 or more residents per day
- Everybody wanted to work through this together - stakeholders, union to come up with solutions, and work through this
- We were quieter than normal to try and be collaborative, now we are getting engaged and going to the media
- As much as there is some backlash around going public, it is effecting change and is what got things moving as fast as it did to keep our members safe
- Everyone was taking cautious approach because of the pandemic, but as unions need to start getting a bit more public and get more vocal for our members and not worry so much about who we may offend

Sandra Mullen:

- Communication with members has been the key
- Working hard to work with every sector via town halls, conference calls
- Trying to get information back to membership
- Jason has been getting results
- On communication with members, pushing town hall with every sector - people are contacted - have had at least one a day for the last 3-4 weeks - only one of those has been non-COVID based - everything else was around the workplace and COVID

- The communication has been really beneficial - certainly EROs are busy working with the members
- Every time Jason talks to a sector, he gets thanked for the work he is doing by the frontline members
- Seeing the benefit of this engagement

OPSEU/NUPGE

Terri Szymanski:

- PPE issues:
 - Have been court cases in Ontario
 - Nurses' Union (ONA) went to court and SEIU went to the OLRB (Ontario Labour Relations Board)
 - Reaffirming the rights of health care workers doing point-of-care risk assessment to get the PPE they need
 - This in turn causing province to panic about supply
 - All unions onboard, that province is not doing enough about ordering manufacturers to produce PPE needed before starting talk about stewardship and conservation which are risky measures
 - And province needs to investigate availability of other respirators with better or equal protection, used in industry
 - Mandating all sectors to do cohorting, not just long-term care sector, and mandating and enforcing H&S
 - Some of the labour board settlements and court cases have included that inspectors have to go to sites once a week for two months, and go to joint committee meetings
- OPSEU represents many of these inspectors
- Inspectors have been working remotely for the most part but now orders for inspectors to go out to sites
- Premier has been on TV saying that long-term care facilities hadn't been visited for a long time so now health inspectors facing going out looking at LTCF

- Are the inspectors you represent, whether in H&S enforcement or health inspections of LTCF, going out into the field? How are you doing enforcement?
- Also, Occupation Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) has looked at all the surveys which France and other places compiled of COVID and workers' experiences. They put together a Health Care and General Sector Survey. So far, Canada-wide, over 3400 responses have been received to talk about the workers' experiences. They collaborated with the unions over the content for that survey. OPSEU proposed things such as how many employers have infectious disease plans, whether people were trained or fit tested, etc., questions of interest to OH&S and workers' experiences.

Joscelyn Ross:

- Pandemic pay for front line workers announced earlier this week - \$4 per hour
- Originally didn't include some important frontline workers - paramedics, respiratory care workers, etc. but has been somewhat rectified in last 48 hours. Still ongoing conversations of other frontline workers who were left out of this pandemic pay. Should be for the next 8 weeks. Focused on workers in communal settings and people who care for the vulnerable. Big discussion on who should be eligible.
- Announcement, in political sense was putting a good spin on the work and trying to reward those, but unfortunately the very broad and open phrasing from the government has led to a lot of questions on who qualifies and who was left out

Anil:

- Variations on this across the country. It will be an ongoing discussion around who gets top up pay. Going into bargaining, how will this impact bargaining, how long will it last, as we open the economy, will others be in line for this pay?
- Push back on deficits and calls for cuts is somewhat quiet but happening and will increase, parliamentary budget officer released estimate of \$250B federal deficit.
- Not just the federal deficits, but provinces will have their own funding challenges and cuts to public service is already being pressed in some provinces.
- The inconsistent top-ups to pay puts pressure on each component as to why they got this but we didn't - out of component hands as it was a provincial government decision
- Back to inspection issue - Cargill doing remote video inspections of packing plant south of Calgary
- On court cases and cases going to OLRB, will these have implications of those for other provinces – have others gone to court or their provincial bodies?

- Relatively good outcomes - courts have pushed back and given workers more rights in terms of accessing PPE and have put employers on notice

Terri Szymanski:

- Suggestion that everyone read them as other things that are helpful.
- Alison McGeer - witness for employer - admitted that the change in Ontario downgrading of N95 to surgical masks was partly because of supply issue
- Also, employers talking about community spread
- Judge said in paragraph 7 that it defies reason that if health care workers pass this on to patients that patients can't pass it on to health care workers
- Ontario stats - 14% of COVID positives are health care workers - 20-50% in long-term care
- Shows us that there is a problem in health care. Was speaking to the Ministry of Labour and saying that is unacceptable

MGEU/NUPGE

Blaine Duncan:

- Enforcement - the officers are members - restrictions on their activities - not out in field as much - particularly with province starting Phase 1 opening on Monday
- Hard time getting employer to understand over the last month and a half, who will be the watchdog - conservation officers and public health workers being given mandates for enforcement but Workplace Health and Safety hasn't received a mandate enforcing public health orders which is problematic when there is a return to the workplaces
- Struggle still with changing landscape re: PPE requirements
- Institutions - employers are telling employees they can have PPE but can't use it - when you think you might need it you have to consult with managers to make final determination
- Ability to make point-of-care risk assessment is not being given to the worker
- Concerns around community workers and implementing right to refuse
- MB - intending on implementing austerity measures and laying off in the public service so that may be playing into the realities of a chill around people wanting to make noise around the conditions and concerns that they have

- Corrections continues to be a challenge but employer is quick to respond, not always as wanted to – employer has pulled back on N95 respirators - in the pandemic planning it says they may be available and you may or could use them but not definitive on when required - after that in the plan it states that fit testing is not required for N95 - CPR practices have changed and there will not be any intubation to cause aerosol generation but reference to dental practices doesn't say how AGPs will be avoided. Will employer outfit with N95 and fit test the masks? Waiting for response
- Fogging machine usage in corrections - using a fogging machine with an analyte solution to spray down aggregate space in institution
- Now moving to spraying down individuals with this as well. Can't find any information on it with regards to this being used on porous surfaces or on individuals. All the literature is on nonporous, hard surfaces without occupancy. Employer has made reference to potentially use this as a way to disinfect individuals who come in contact with COVID or suspected of COVID. Is anyone else dealing with similar circumstances?

Anil:

- PPE -concerns around fit testing and training around how to properly use
- In acute health care settings, PPE is routinely fit tested and training also routine
- Not doing same level of care - to not fit test N95 and to be wearing one that does not fit properly is potentially dangerous and puts the worker at risk
- Question on whether employers and governments are letting supply dictate use rather than adhering to the precautionary principle and the evidence

Joscelyn Ross - OPSEU:

- In corrections in Ontario, no fogging to our knowledge
- Seems completely ridiculous
- Has posed questions out to members

Bill Fischer- HSAS:

- Fogger in ambulances after an aerosol generating procedure has taken place in them. but specific instructions are workers have to be well away from the vehicle
- Hazmat will use foggers to first task clean but they are in full respirators and 100% sealed off

- Would want to see some literature because everything they have seen says no to direct contact except incidentally and in small amounts

SGEU/NUPGE

Tracey Sauer:

- Opening up SK, many people moving about like a long weekend, stores are full, and there is no social distancing. Small communities are the same.
- 2 outbreaks in northern communities right now (La Loche and Lloydminster)
- Broadcast calls go out for additional staffing as they have exhausted their staffing levels for nurses, RNs, LPNs, etc.
- Lloydminster, reporting they don't offer new staff proper orientation to the facilities and people are worried because they don't know what they are getting into
- Lloydminster - they waited a few days before announcing - concern re: proper PPE and training before being redeployed into those facilities
- LTC - now cohorted - link that all workers who work in health care have use, do the check, and see if safe to work - and supposedly required to show screening to an OH&S worker and/or a supervisor - but they often aren't there so not monitored
- Supposed to have temperature taken but no one taking them and just starting to get thermometers on sites in some areas
- Say you are supposed to do the screening when you go to work and when you leave but it isn't being done
- Unions have asked for engagement with OH&S committees in those facilities but struggle to get answers
- Stale-dated masks to be put into circulation if supplies run short but no indication they will be used as burn rate has not been too high
- Home care – workers unsure what PPE they are allowed to use
- Continuous masking in effect but people getting very sore and having some difficulties
- 4 masks per day and can take off for breaks and lunches only, some are 12 hour days
- Every facility and every manager seems to be doing something different

- Just finalizing joint statement of principles for protecting the health and safety of health care workers, patients, clients, and residents. Will be a joint statement with all health unions: HSAS, CUPE, SUN, SGEU, Health Minister and SHA. Hope this will be of some help
- Have a lot of issues with cohorting
- One of main concerns is cohorting of LTC staff. Believe it is a good thing but some of the LTC facilities are integrated with acute care facilities, and some of the acute facilities have been deemed as COVID-19 hospitals
- Don't understand how you can have a COVID-19 hospital in an integrated facility with LTC. Feel they are defeating purpose
- Increased testing
- Push in La Loche. Will be doing home-to-home testing because of the outbreak in the area
- Have suggested who they should be doing testing on - staff, long-term care facilities, and residents before general population

Anil:

- Cohorting and screening are issues across board. Everyone is doing differently - is it trained staff before going into work, etc. Issues will be with us for awhile
- Austerity issues in MB. Should all be watching what the government is doing, may be taken up by other provinces. AB has done a few things already

Bill Fischer – HSAS:

- Joint statement on PPE between the unions
- Hoping for best, prepare for the worst
- A lot of members from community programs reassigned to test sites. 3 weeks ago had 4 test sites but now up to 50 test sites
- Obstacles getting OH&S committees set up at the sites. Bringing in people without awareness or training in PPE about N95, concerns on them being fit tested and taught how to doff/don.
- Concern is with community programs starting up again - where will PPE come from?
- SK opening up in Phase 1 including dentists and chiropractors. Many may not open up because they can't get PPE
- What will be the PPE be for other places, such as hair stylists.

- Regular OH&S issues continue but difficulty getting employer to resolve - back injuries, violent patients, etc. - incidents are still going on and regular things are still happening but are now being pushed back as suggest not having enough time to deal with anything beyond COVID-19
- Testing - changes have gone through with the College of Paramedic who can now do testing
- People who can't get to a test site, did want them having to use transit to get to the test sites so they do have paramedics who will go out and do the testing when required. Has to be approved that person doesn't have the ability to get to a test site
- Hoping it cuts down on e.g., some of the social workers were taking to test sites and hoping it gets more people done this way
- Issue is that it is a burden on PPE as they require a full set of PPE for each visit
- Outbreak in far north. Waiting to see if there is a supply chain issue in La Loche as there is 100 more staff up there

Anil:

- Testing issues will be ongoing.
- Expansion of testing and tracing is critical to containing the virus.
- Normal case load not gone away, they have just been bumped. What will be the implications if patients don't get dealt with in a timely manner because of COVID-19? Increase in mortality numbers being seen in other places, as well as, increased complexity of conditions
- Do not think this is ramping down even though we are opening up? It will just bring up a host of other issues we have to resolve going forward.

Anil:

- When you open up and get outbreaks, how will the provinces deal with this - locking down? QC is opening rural first and then Montreal
- Is La Loche primarily a First Nations Community? This is the biggest outbreak for First Nations

Tracey Sauer:

- Part of the issue in La Loche is communication. English is not the first language of all there. Many speak Dene or Cree
- Need a lot of interpretation to enable them to understand what is going on. Fortunate that many of the stewards speak the native language

- Language barrier is a huge factor

HSA/NUPGE

Ray Geldreich:

- Several outbreaks in past weeks related to a meat packing plant and extended to LTC
- A lot of these are because those who work in the meat plant and LTC are from the same families. Many are temporary foreign workers who tend to live with other workers sharing small apartments with 2-3 other couples who also do the same type of work. Has led to a resurgence
- Government says cases are well under projections but less optimistic than a week or so ago
- Concerns - employers have narrow criteria for determining occupational relatedness of a COVID case in an employee
- Employer will only deem occupational if exposed to COVID patients in course of their duties and can site where they didn't wear PPE in one of the interactions
- Argument is the PPE is the least effective method of control and there will be failures with PPE but employer still has restricted criteria for deeming infection is work/COVID related
- Biggest issue right now is ensuring members get claims reported and accepted
- Ongoing PPE questions. Complex when sourced one manufacturer to supply material, one to put together, and then shipped to AB. Managing the logistics is challenging. Shipping itself a challenge as only get limited amounts on planes. Becoming the biggest challenge to get and source PPE
- Employers looking at changing who requires gowns and how long they wear the gowns. Another area of friction right now.

Anil:

- WCB exemption - reverse onus. N95 is the least protection for airborne. Other and better masks out there that aren't being utilized. If N95 not properly fit tested and doing the right training, can't presume they are doing the job they were designed for. Disturbing they are asking workers to document when they could have been infected. Probably something others will be dealing with and we may need to figure out a more coherent strategy around this instead of just doing place by place.

- Thanks go to Ray for sending mental health link. Everyone has received.

Ray Geldreich-HSAA:

- Mental Health Commission tool have some targeted COVID mental health resources that people can use. Many members have been trained in Mental Readiness and Working Minds program so it is a refresher of those concepts they have been trained in and putting them in a COVID or emergency context. High number of members who have received intro training to this deem it is a good thing to promote to membership

HSABC/NUPGE

Mike Wisla:

- Cases overall are down
- Primarily focused in the chicken processing plants and federal prisons
- Interesting discussions in media as both are federally regulated
- Outbreak in acute care which highlighted the lack of communication with health authorities and unions. Getting only bits and pieces of specifics of these outbreaks
- More concern re: social distancing impacting infections as more people return back into the workplace.
- More messaging re: practicum students being placed back into the work sites from training institutions. Little rooms with additional number of people, can't maintain social distancing. What is happening in other places? Only specific programs right now but will expanding as more students are at that time in their training and education

Ray Geldreich - HSAA:

- Quite a bit of discussion about practicum students
- Worked with health region on a provincial guidance document on when/when they can't, be in the workplace. Will send that as it is good overview.
- Most cases, if social distancing is allowed for the pandemic can be a good learning experience depending on the students
- Assessed on a case-by-case basis

BCGEU/NUPGE

Doug Kinna:

- Poultry plants - very close to downtown east side - workers were temporary foreign workers - they do a lot of fraternizing in downtown east side fraternized - at a number of worksites - with people in Oppenheimer tent city/camp - concern that COVID will explode in that community which is probably most vulnerable outside of seniors
- Provincial government, Vancouver and Victoria put in legislation to shut down Oppenheimer Park in Vancouver, and Topaz Park in Victoria - secured hotel rooms for all the people living in those area
- All will be tested before they go into their rooms
- Both sites in community social services, our health sector and one certification covers 22 ward sites. There is shortage of PPE. Problem with tenants who are supposed to self-isolate but don't know why. Tenants will leave their rooms and wonder around and not wear
- Social control plan created by employer with no consultation with the OH&S committees
- Represent 50 meat inspectors so do have members who could be exposed

Megan Scott:

- Stake holder meeting with WCB yesterday
- Board of Directors of Compensation Board is moving forward with process and expediting the process with COVID-19 presumption for occupational diseases - won't happen quickly (will take 6 months instead of 1 ½ - 3 years). Pushing for the government to intervene to make the change
- PPE - health authorities not huge issues but facing shortages and push to conserve PPE particularly in private LTC where workers get one mask per day when realistically may have to doff that mask and get another one
- Community Social Services - many of the members provide direct care and are facing shortages of PPE - no access to health care sector's supply of PPE
- Moved to Level 5 of PPE management strategy which is health authorities are now looking at alternatives to N95 and reprocessing N95s because that particular item is in short supply

Anil:

- Presumption issue is moving - every province will need to deal with this and not just leave it to WSIB as workers' risk being abandoned
- New issue - sanitization, reprocessing N95 and if there are more outbreaks and waves of infection, then every component, workplace will be increasingly dealing with this issue on N95 masks and other PPE in short supply
- Reality is that domestic production not up anytime soon and questions on quality going down as more global manufacturers get involved to take advantage of the demand and increased prices they can command
- Question of testing not only of stale masks but masks coming from unclear suppliers to make sure they are certified and pass the expected ratings

3. Housekeeping

- New format interesting, it gave you a chance to target issues, look at solutions, and share strategies on these issues. We hope this is beneficial for you
- Any documents mentioned will be sent to everyone who was on this call and you are asked to share them with anaidoo@nupge.ca for distribution

4. Next Meeting

- May 14, 2020 - 1:00 p.m. EDT via Zoom



NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

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