



national
union

report

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

June 11, 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.

The office of the National Union of Public and General Employees is situated on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

We recognize and acknowledge the crimes that have been committed and the harm done.

And, we dedicate ourselves, as a union, to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Peoples in a spirit of reconciliation and striving for justice.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

**Occupational Health and Safety Officers Video Conference
June 11, 2020
1:00 p.m. EDT**

Participants

BCGEU/NUPGE

Patrick Coghlan
Doug Kinna

HSABC/NUPGE

Michael Wisla

HSAA/NUPGE

Ray Geldreich

OPSEU/NUPGE

Terri Szymanski

NBU/NUPGE

Joyce Aucoin

NSGEU/NUPGE

Paul Cormier
Sandra Mullen

NUPGE

Len Bush, Managing Director
Anil Naidoo, National Representative
Diane Fowles, Administrative Representative

1. Welcome and introductions

NUPGE

Welcomed everyone to the meeting. Noted that OH&S is critical as restrictions are being lifted across the country. Group will discuss current issues related to the pandemic, but also how to work together going forward.

The group will do a check in around the country, and then have a focused discussion on issues related to re-opening after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

2. Cross Country check-in

HSABC/NUPGE

WorkSafeBC is moving forward towards adding COVID-19 to the list of diseases which will be presumed to be caused from work, unless proven otherwise. There is a consultation which closes on June 12, and only written submissions will be accepted. The proposals, so far, are 'not terrible'. COVID-19 infections will be covered during a declared state of emergency, infections outside of this period are the concern.

On PPE, the MOH did promise new protocols for PPE, however they have still not been released. In the interim, health authorities have made their own protocols. When the provincial protocols come out there may need to be retraining on these

BCGEU/NUPGE

BC plans on going into Phase 3 from June - September if the infection numbers remain low.

As noted, the presumption language for WorkSafeBC discussion paper was released with a deadline for response in writing June 12. BCGEU is putting together a paper in response. Overall, the language, as stated by HSABC, is not terrible.

BCGEU is continuing to call on provincial and federal governments for shared costs on the pandemic response.

LifeLabs have established a COVID-19 top up for employees.

BCGEU is continuing to move forward with webinars on OH&S education. Webinars are about 90 minutes long and are material which has existed but has been condensed into a webinar format. This is basically a PowerPoint with a Q and A session at the end.

Initially, has been offered to the public service, and BCGEU is now working with co-facilitators to get these out to the members in the private sector.

BCGEU will look into whether these webinars can be more broadly shared with this group.

HSAA/NUPGE

HSAA has partnered with a safety company for an app to do staff screening. The app does not record medical information.

HSAA will share further information on the app when possible.

In general, AB is seeing the states of emergency, both municipally and provincially, starting to wrap up. Accompanying this, employers are rolling back on some of the benefits and accommodations afforded during the pandemic. Troubling is that the pandemic is being used to suspend parts of the CA's.

There will no longer be the special emergency coding for isolation requirements, so workers will need to use sick time or unpaid leave if off work. The problem is that if it is workplace exposure, WCB will not kick in until a positive diagnosis is made, so in the interim workers have to use sick time.

Single site workplaces will continue, and many employers will continue staff screening until the end of year.

The province of Alberta is pursuing PPE supplies well into the fall.

Question from HSAA

How are other Components handling workers who must go into self-isolation? And what differences are there between occupational exclusions and non-occupational?

NSGEU responded that in NS, there was a mix of responses. Some employers are providing the time off, and some workers are having to use their sick banks.

Collective agreements do not address this issue, and unfortunately some workers are then having to make the decision between not self-isolating and being paid, or taking time off.

In AB, under the collective agreements, government ordered quarantine entitles use of the sick bank to cover the time off.

OPSEU/NUPGE

Regarding self-isolation, a concern is that in some parts of the health care sector, exposed workers have been told to continue to work through the normal self-isolation, using PPE.

In Ontario, emergency orders have been extended to June 19. Daycares can open Friday June 12 but they have only been given 3 days' notice, so many won't open immediately because there was not enough time to get processes in place.

There is a general ramping up of services across the province. Courthouses are just getting plans in place for reopening. There has been talk with the Attorney General about a gradual reopening.

There has been a lot of talk about reopening universities and colleges, along with the daycares in those institutions as well.

There are concerns regarding PPE, including questions about how Ontario checks the adequacy of the PPE it sources and the suppliers it buys from. Blood services workers had masks which were found to be nothing more than dust masks. When OPSEU called the MOL about the dust masks, we were told talk to Health Canada.

Ontario is swabbing for COVID-19 in some workplaces, for public health purposes. Some employers are telling workers they must agree to be swabbed. This should be voluntary, and employers shouldn't be allowed to decide that working is dependent on taking the test.

OPSEU question to the group: Has anyone else dealt with mandatory swabbing policy by an employer? While the MOH is concerned about H&S aspect, there are also human rights issues to be reviewed, and previous cases related to individual and charter rights around these issues which are still unresolved.

BCGEU responded that a number of sites have implemented temp checks which has been deemed a reasonable screening protocol, along with questions, as long as they remain within the privacy act. The issue of mandatory testing has not yet come up, but it very likely will be an issue in the future.

HSA, on general screening, we have found our app has been well accepted. Many employers seem to have moved away from taking temperature because of the risk of cross contamination, and being unsure of the usefulness of temperature.

Some employers had screeners at the door to ensure app had to been used, but many are moving away from screeners at door and only using the app, with the results being linked to the payroll system. We now only see regular temperature checks in long term care settings, where it was mandated.

NBU/NUPGE

NB area is now currently in Orange phase. Had one health care worker, a doctor, travel outside of NB and brought COVID-19 into the Campbellton region. The doctor works in ER, as well as a nursing home, and now NB has 29 cases, with 27 of these in a nursing home. This has also led to 150 workers now self-isolating and 2 daycares closing.

The nursing home with the outbreak is a special care, private home. Some of the staff have tested positive, and half of the personnel have quit. Government has made a commitment to try to find workers for the facility. They need 24 volunteers to commit to 6 weeks. Government is having a hard time getting volunteers and are looking for volunteers, some with no training. It is a non-unionized, private facility. The facility is now providing PPE, which was not provided earlier.

NB does not have a wage top up or danger COVID-19 pay.

NSGEU/NUPGE

Province is reopening. Day cares are opening on June 15 at 50% capacity.

Provincially, NS is doing well with 4 active cases currently but no broad-based testing.

Overall, there are good outlines on what needs to happen for reopening.

The challenge is that some organizations are moving to risk assessment to mitigate the danger, but do not have the knowledge to do this properly.

Huge gap in industries where there are risk assessments being done as people who are unqualified or objective, and may not understand fully.

Many employers are getting complacent because numbers are doing ok, but they are also relying on risk assessments and may not be following proven mandates for control.

The government needs to consider mandates instead of the current looser model, and as we open up, risks will rise significantly.

With the current numbers of people working from home, we also need more discussion and guidance about teleworking.

3. Reopening – General Discussion

Staff at HSAA are working from home, and those coming to the office must always use the screening tool in advance and wear a mask.

The screening tool is easy to use. It issues a pass or fail, but personal medical data is not stored.

Part of the concern with how governments are providing guidance for workplaces is that they are treating workers in normal workplaces as though they have the expertise of those in an acute health care setting. There will be failures in infection prevention and control because of this lack of expertise and gaps in PPE use.

All public facing employees are at risk, and many are low wage employees. Governments and employers have an obligation to protect workers, and this means giving them access to proper PPE, training them on how to prevent and control infection, as well as implement necessary administrative changes to the workplace.

OPSEU has developed a checklist to hold up against policies being put in place by employers. Overall, workplaces should be inspected prior to opening, and employer's must be held accountable. This is part of what the checklist attempts to do by providing workers with a standard by which to assess the workplace, and point to areas which need to be improved in order to better protect workers.

BCGEU has different offices beginning to open. Headquarters and larger offices are challenges because of a larger number of staff. Currently, all offices are in complete lock down, and elected officers must advise in advance to get access to the office.

BCGEU is having risk assessments done by OSH members at various locations and are making sure safety is the prime consideration in reopening, not speed.

Before the lock down started it was mandated that no more than 10 members are in a meeting room at once, and we will be continuing with social distancing. There will be no large gatherings until end of 2020.

NBU are back at the office, but no members are allowed in. We are starting to look at beginning virtual negotiations and virtual projects.

4. Format discussion.

Participants would like to continue a question/resolution format as they believe it will assist to share information and be able to get feedback on specific issues.

5. Next meeting June 25