



national
union

report

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

June 25, 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 and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

We acknowledge and recognize the harms and crimes of the past.

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

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

Occupational Health and Safety Officers Video Conference
June 25, 2020
1:00 p.m. EDT

Participants

BCGEU/NUPGE

Patrick Coghlan
Doug Kinna
Megan Scott

HSABC/NUPGE

Michael Wisla

MGEU/NUPGE

Blaine Duncan

OPSEU/NUPGE

Terri Szymanski

NSGEU/NUPGE

Paul Cormier
Lynette Jonson

NUPGE

Jeryn Daly, National Representative
Anil Naidoo, National Representative
Diane Fowles, Administrative Representative

1. Welcome and Introductions

NUPGE

The meeting began with a welcome and an agenda review. The meeting will consist of a general check-in and then focus on a few key issues. Mental health, opening of workplaces, PPE, Workmen's compensation, and safety issues will be discussed. We need to ensure that employers are opening workplaces safely, that there are protocols in place, and confirm that they are complying with OH&S standards as laid out in legislation and collective agreements.

This will be the last call before September unless something critical is happening which warrants a meeting during the summer. As we continue this work, it will be important to see how the issues we are discussing link to bargaining. Bargaining has begun in NB and will start up again in other provinces. NUPGE is hosting a meeting of our Collective Bargaining Advisory Committee on October 1, and this is an opportunity to look at what is working, and what may need to be added to our CA's going forward.

2. Cross Country check-in

BCGEU/NUPGE

BC has moved to phase 3 with an expanded reopening and allowed more travel through the province. BCGEU is working through the reopening and implementing safety plans. There are struggles with some employers, who are not involving members in reopening plans, or not having safety plans in place.

There are a range of problems that have been identified. Some worksites have no plans in place. Others seem to be inadequate, with workers questioning measures in place in one worksite as not being as good as at another. Standard things such as people exercising their H&S rights. There are also questions about what the employer's obligations are when the employees are on lay off. The case being looked into is around Casino employees, and the employer not including them in working on opening up safely.

BCGEU has completed a submission for the public consultation around COVID-19 presumption regulations and have heard from the board that there were over 400 submissions from employers. This includes some dramatic language from employers around the potential costs of presumption, and that this could be saddling the worker's compensation system with liabilities which stem from a public health crisis. The employers deem this to be not fair/not appropriate, etc.

BCGEU does not anticipate huge increases in costs or claims around COVID-19 as a result of the language that is going to be implemented by WorkSafeBC. There seems to

be unnecessary panic on the part of employers to this development. A number of our employees have SARS, H1N1, and health care workplaces have been through this in the past. We want to hear from employers on how they are working to protect employees and that they are doing all they can. This should be the employers' message, not that it is not our problem if people get sick, and we should not have to pay.

Over the next 2 weeks the board will be making its decision on the language which will be adopted around presumption related to COVID-19.

HSABC/NUPGE

As noted, BC is now in phase 3, so more things are open. HSABC is becoming more concerned about the PPE situation because as people are getting more confident, it is going off the radar. Hearing that they are out of face shields, out of gowns, etc. This has now become an issue.

Overall, the challenges are that it feels like we are doing two jobs because COVID-19 is not gone, and the regular issues are back and moving forward.

PPE remains an ongoing issue as we are now seeing disposable PPE being tasked for reuse and repurposing when these were not designed for this use. Most of the focus has been on N95's, but face shields are also an issue, and the whole infection prevention supply chain is being stressed. Wipes, for instance, are running out with some sites making their own wipes.

The supply chains are not keeping up with the demand and this is causing problems for workers trying to maintain the new protocols.

MGEU/NUPGE

MB is faring well overall; most cases have been travel related which continues to be a concern with people coming and going from different provinces delivering and picking up things

We are now in phase 3, which started Monday, but it seems that nothing much has changed. Few people are wearing masks, stores have relaxed their restrictions. Overall, there is less concern from the public which is troubling.

A number of staff returned to work, 2 days per week, in the office with a bit of a rotational standard. This includes enhanced cleaning standards in the office, not only for building service staff, but now every staff person cleans as well. We also have directional arrows to enhance social distancing, and have created routes, exit/entry points.

We are seeing reluctance from employers to have HS engaged in the planning to return to work, and committees have not been consulted to the degree which they should be consulted.

Starting to discuss having membership meetings, to this point have been doing everything virtually. MGEU had our convention booked in October. This was pushed to January. It will be 350 people, so we have to wait for public health to allow having meetings this large. We are strategizing on venues, how large meetings will be, what protocols will be for hosting those meetings, etc.

Have engaged with corrections on the use of the anolyte fogging. The employer was given an order to use only as designed. They had used it inappropriately.

On PPE, there is a new organization called Shared Health that manages health care issues extending across regions. Shared Health has taken control over ordering PPE and is being the store house for that equipment. Each of the regional health authorities must provide a two-week plan for their PPE needs. There remain concerns about PPE supply, but there is not an elevated concern.

OPSEU/NUPGE

ON is in phase 2, so restrictions are being lifted.

There is childcare in the universities and colleges, so we are working with that group doing health and safety work with those within childcare. In July, colleges will be taking back students who have labs remaining in order to graduate.

There are daily calls that ON government has implemented for stakeholders. An app is being released to do screening and contact tracing.

ON has a couple of provincial tables that the unions sit on with Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour. The evidence review table was a forum to critique the province's lack of scientific justification to downgrade PPE protections from airborne to droplet. John Oudyk did a good presentation which was released to the labour community on critiquing the province's 8 arguments for why they think COVID-19 is spread via droplet contact and not airborne. The province is ignoring short range droplet transmission.

It was brought up in discussion, that there was a recent Lancet report on the difference in using surgical, cloth, and N95 masks and the infection rate with health care workers. Clearly N95's are the most effective protection. With a 20-30% infection rate amongst healthcare workers, it is important to provide the best protection against infection.

NSGEU/NUPGE

NS is doing well, no new cases, and no active cases. The Atlantic bubble is opening on July 3 with free travel amongst Atlantic provinces.

In workplaces, there is a lot of confusion on what to do. For instance, who is supposed to do cleaning, who manages people if not within 6 feet? All provinces have legislation that the employer has to ensure adequate instruction and training, supervision, etc. Not many employers are following this legislation.

We are seeing signs posted about COVID-19, but these contain very little hard information. Hand sanitizer is everywhere, but there is very little instruction or information on the “what to do”. For instance, if given a bottle of Spray Nine, should the worker let the product sit on the surface for 5 seconds or 5 minutes? There is very little supervision in assuring administrative controls are followed. This is a huge failure.

There are ongoing issues around workplace inspections. There are remote and onsite visits going on, and they are responding to complaints, but none of the unions have had successful work refusals.

Mental Health, Opening, Collective Bargaining Process and Language

As the pandemic continues, we should be expecting an increase in mental health issues in the following months. There will likely be serious increases in people with declining mental health and full-blown mental illness.

A recent survey showed huge proportions of workers are already struggling. The numbers are in the 30-45% range. What are we seeing from employers, government, and what are we doing as unions? Are there ideas out there that are good that we can share or things we would like to see?

Expanded services is a way to acknowledge the problem, and some employers are adding benefits, but even then, there are other actions which harm people’s mental health.

What do we want to see, and how can we be connecting our own members with services, and supporting our OSH members to raise these issues in their own workplace?

MGEU started down this road last fall before COVID-19. We were going to roll out a campaign on mental health which was planned to be the theme of the convention. The goal was to take a different stance on the campaign. Have an education focus to destigmatize the issue, but then move to looking at whether your workplace is contributing to poor mental health.

MGEU has committed to it over multiple years, partnering with Canadian Mental Health association. Not just an information campaign, there will be some training involved as well.

Highlighted over the last few months by the anxiety felt by members, and it will be a welcome addition to the complement of things provided to members.

NSGEU noted that larger employers - provincial health authority, IWP, and provincial government - did provide additional, temporary mental health support and services, but they were 3-month programs and not well publicized. The health plan for the biggest employer is moving to a designated mental health benefit as a standalone benefit with no copay, not combined with other paramedical.

On opening, OPSEU is talking about how to safely open, but no firm plans at this point. Trying to embed ideas that employees have to feel safe in the plan not just a list of measures taken.

Where we can do things at the source and prevent people from being stressed and thinking about these things again. Thinking about doing in preventative way as we reopen. Also, having the supports and mechanisms along the path for things to be recognized early, and addressed early before people get too far ill or injured.

HSAAs stated that offices never really closed. They were just closed to the public. Commitment that there will not be more than 50% of the people in building at any one time.

BCGEU offices not open yet. They did a risk assessment for the office and worked with the joint H&S committee to develop a protocol which is still being reviewed. Once offices are open to staff for a few weeks, they slowly they will let officers and members in by appointment only.

BCGEU also committed to sharing electronic OHS courses and have been approved to have NUPGE Components sit in on these courses. The information will be shared with the committee on when the courses are being held with an invitation to join.



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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