

March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**RE: Member Update Covid-19**



*Jim Noon*

BUSINESS MANAGER

FINANCIAL SECRETARY



Members,

I would like to first start off by wishing you and your family good health and safety during this difficult time. We understand every one of our members is uncomfortable and overloaded with information as we listen to news and social media reports. Our main focus remains on the health and safety of our members and their families. As many members have already left their jobsites due to either site closures, medical leave or voluntary reasons, I understand. This morning, the Minister of Public Safety used his powers under the Emergency Program Act to issue a series of ministerial orders including the release of an essential services list. Construction work was on that list and shall continue as an essential service and was defined as the following: "construction work, in accordance with PHO direction, construction firms, skilled trades and professionals, and construction and light industrial machinery and equipment rental." We have received many calls from members asking the union to shutdown jobsites. UA Local 324 has no legal authority to direct a closure of a workplace over the COVID-19 pandemic. We have consulted with our industry partners and our legal counsel and have been directed that any closure initiated by the Local would constitute an unlawful work stoppage. This means we have to continue working until the Provincial Health Officer removes construction from the list of essential services.

**Protection of Members Currently Working**

As you may be aware WorkSafeBC has currently been scrutinized by all building trades unions for not enforcing health and safety regulations regarding proper wash stations etc. We have been pushing hard every single day to invoke change and I am pleased to say it is working. Just yesterday, WorkSafeBC announced a new program called "inspectional initiative" which has been created to address sanitation on construction sites. We have also seen our sister, Robyn Hacking, write government and media on this same subject. Great job Robyn on bringing this issue to light! Also, I want to thank some of our signatory contractors for installing hand wash stations on our sites and making sure our member's safety is a priority! It is time for every jobsite to provide a hygienically sound environment for our members to work. Making hand wash stations available will ensure our members are treated the same as all other industries. I want members to know any concerns that you may have about the worksite should be raised with your employer's health and safety representative as required under the WorkSafeBC regulations. Thereafter, the Employer must investigate and take measures if appropriate to correct the issue. If there is a situation that is not addressed, then you can refuse to work without reprisal or threat of termination. Members who feel their concerns are not being heard can contact the union hall and or report it directly to the Worksafe Prevention line 1-888-621-7233.

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## New Guidelines for Construction Sites during COVID-19

The public health officer is directing employers to take all necessary precautions to minimize the risks of COVID-19 transmission and illness to themselves and their employees. This includes:

- There should be no more than 50 people in the same space in any circumstances.
- Where possible, employees should maintain a distance of two metres apart from each other.
- Post signage that limits the number of occupants in any elevator to four people at a time.
- Reduce in-person meetings and other gatherings and hold site meetings in open spaces or outside.
- Increase the number of handwashing stations and post signage that identifies their location.
- Maintain a list of employees that are currently working on sites and update this list daily.
- All common areas and surfaces should be cleaned at the end of each day. Examples include washrooms, shared offices, common tables, desks, light switches and door handles.
- Anyone with COVID-19-like symptoms, such as sore throat, fever, sneezing or coughing, must self-isolate at home for 14 days.

## Member Resources

The UA has put together a resource center for members to receive update information on COVID-19 related information. Please go to <http://ua.org/media/184421/COVID-19-Resource-Center-Page.pdf>.

Members looking for the latest information regarding Federal Government financial support can go to <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan/covid19-individuals.html>

Our staff and union officers are working to ensure questions and concerns are answered. We will continue posting information on our website and UA 324 facebook site to keep members up to speed on this ever-changing crisis. However, we will get through this and come out stronger in the end! Stay safe...

Fraternally Yours,

Jim Noon

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