



Unifor5555

PRESIDENTS REPORT

The past couple of weeks have seen a significant amount of changes for all of us in our working lives. The COVID-19 situation has impacted all of us, both at work and at home. Each of our bargaining units are facing challenges unique to themselves and each Unit has an update in this newsletter.

I have been keeping in close contact with Employers as this situation develops and will continue to do so. I have also been in regular contact with our National Union. I am committed to providing as much information as possible to help members navigate this situation. That being said, this is a very fluid and dynamic situation that changes from day to day.

Right now, members in Unit 6, employed by Royal Canadian Legion Branch 163 are laid off due to the temporary closure of the Legion. Members in Unit 2, employed by Regional Medical Associates, are finalizing set up for members to work from home and schedule office work when required. Members in Units 1 and 3, at McMaster, as determined by their supervisor, have been advised to remain home and if able to do the functions of their role, or special projects as assigned are working from home. All members required to remain at home are being paid as of right now.

Ensuring members are safe, protected and that the employers continue to follow the terms of our various Collective Agreements is the main focus. I cannot predict how this situation will unfold over the coming weeks, nor predict how the employers will react to any change in direction from Public Health or the Provincial or Federal Governments. I can assure you though that your Union Representatives are all working, readily available to answer questions and provide whatever assistance is needed to members.

While I encourage members to reach out to their Unit Chairs first, you are also welcome to reach out to me if you have questions or concerns at beth.couchman@unifor5555.ca.

Together we will work through this situation.

In Solidarity,

Beth Couchman
Unifor Local 5555
President

COVID-19 UPDATE

REFUSING UNSAFE WORK BECAUSE OF COVID-19

Do employees have the right to refuse work if concerned about exposure to COVID-19?

Workers in Canada have the right to a healthy and safe work environment. Health and safety legislation requires employers to take reasonable steps to protect the health and safety of their employees.

In Ontario, workers have the right to refuse work if they honestly and reasonably believe their health and safety is in danger in their workplaces; if they communicate this belief to their supervisors; and if the seriousness of the perceived danger justifies the work refusal.

Whether a work refusal is justified will largely depend on the facts. The measures that an employer takes to ensure a healthy and safe work environment will be taken into consideration and weighed against the potential risks to workers.

The steps taken by your employer to limit the spread of COVID-19 will likely factor into whether a work refusal is considered reasonable. Such efforts might include:

- Installing hand sanitizer stations in high-traffic areas;
- Making hand sanitizer available in washrooms;
- Directing cleaning staff to sanitize high traffic surfaces and frequently-touched objects (door knobs, etc.);
- Reducing activities that require physical contact between workers and/or members of the public, if possible; and
- Recommending that employees wash their hands frequently; practice social distancing; and stay home from work if they exhibit symptoms of COVID-19.

The nature of your workplace may also factor into whether a work refusal is reasonable. In *Hogue-Burzynski v. VIA Rail Canada* [2006], the Health and Safety Officer who first investigated the work refusal determined the nature of the employee's work involved inherent risk to exposure to illness by virtue

of the fact that they serviced large numbers of the public on a daily basis. If your workplace regularly requires you to provide services to members of the public, including those who may be ill, or employs a large number of workers at the workplace at the same time, it may be determined that exposure to viral infection is a risk inherent to the workplace.

Your risk of serious complications from COVID-19 may also be relevant to the reasonableness of a work refusal. Health officials have warned that older individuals, those with certain conditions, such as lung or heart disease or individuals with suppressed immune systems are at greater risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19. It is possible that individuals at greater risk will require heightened accommodation from employers.

What about health agency advice about large public gatherings?

Public health agencies in most provinces have advised or directed that large public gatherings should be cancelled. This does not necessarily mean that large workplaces must close.

Employees should not assume that the government has given them permission to refuse work if their workplace contains a large number of employees or a large number of customers.

Public health agency directions to cancel large public gatherings may be relevant to the reasonableness of a belief that a workplace is unsafe because of the risk of COVID-19. As outlined above, when considering whether to refuse work, workers must weigh both the risks of transmission against the risks that are inherent to their work, and also the steps their employer has taken to reduce the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak in their workplaces.

If you have concerns over the measures your employer is taking or failing to take in response to COVID-19, you should raise them with your supervisor, union representatives or health and safety representatives. Health and Safety Committees should work with employers to develop a plan for minimizing the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak in your workplace.

UNIT 1 UPDATE - MCMASTER STAFF

Firstly, I hope that everyone is taking care of themselves during this challenging time. The situation we are facing is unprecedented and due to that, there is no template for how we respond. Our Local has been in frequent, regular contact with the University as well as our National Union and we will continue to update you as best we can as information comes in.

The most up-to-date information as it relates to McMaster University can be found on their COVID-19 Updates page. They have FAQs, information relating to working from home as well as the Supervisor's Guides which will help you understand the steps your department may or may not be taking.

At this point, the University wants anyone who can work from home to do so. They have also indicated that those who cannot work from home but are in roles that are non-essential during this time should stay home. Everyone will continue to be paid until April 5th. We are aware that putting that date on their communications has raised worries about what happens beyond April 5th however, as this situation is moving so quickly and changing rapidly, it would be irresponsible to try to predict what the situation will be in another two weeks.

However, we can say with certainty that ensuring our members are safe, healthy and paid are our top priorities. We have closed the office on campus but are continuing to work from home. I am available on my cell phone at 905-536-8252 or at sarah-kai.antanaitis@unifor5555.ca, and we can also arrange for video conferencing meetings if required. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out.

In Solidarity,

Sarah-Kai Antanaitis
Unit 1 Chair

UNIT 2 UPDATE - REGIONAL MEDICAL ASSOCIATES

Your Unit Chair, Linda, has been meeting with Ross regarding what steps RMA will be taking to address the COVID-19 situation. Arrangements to ensure members can work from home are being completed, with the expectation everyone will be set up on the VPN by the end of day Friday.

When you do have to come into the office to pick up work, it will be at staggered times to minimize as much as we can, interaction between co-workers. The schedule is also expected to be completed by the end of day Friday. If you are unclear on when/if you are expected in the office, you should reach out to your supervisor.

The Local has an COVID-19 Updates page with links to resources and information, as well as links to the National Unions COVID-19 Update page. Both have, or can direct you to, the information we need to take care of ourselves during this challenging time.

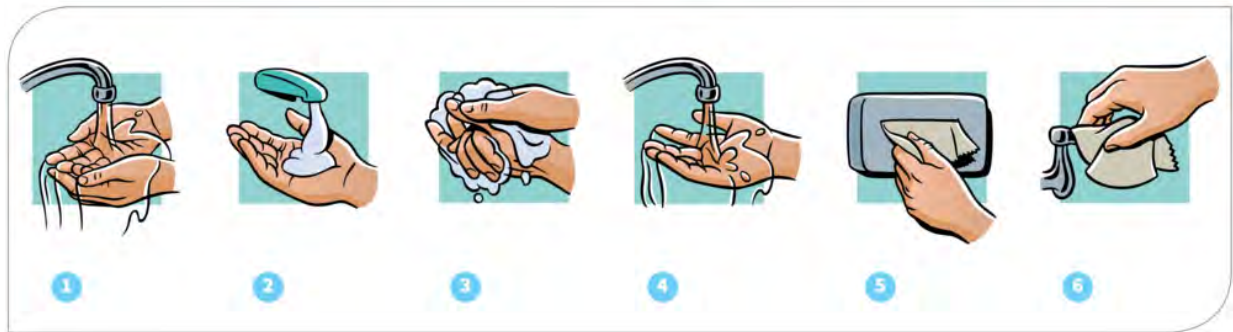
If you have any questions, please reach out to Linda at linda.ohara@unifor5555.ca or President Beth Couchman at beth.couchman@unifor5555.ca.

UNIT 3 UPDATE - PARKING

The University is taking steps to allow members who can work from home do so during this challenging time. While Parking operations is normally a campus-based job, it is possible that some work may be assigned to Unit 3 members to do at home if they are able to do so. The parking gates are presently raised on campus and the work for Parking Control Officers on campus is very limited. If you are unsure about what the expectations are regarding your schedule or if/when you are expected to report back to campus you should reach out to your supervisor.

If you have questions about McMaster's response to the COVID-19 situation, you can go to the McMaster COVID-19 Updates page. This page is updated regularly and as well as having McMaster specific updates, has resources and information to help keep you healthy and safe.

If you have any questions you are encouraged to reach out to your Unit 3 Chair, Jeremy McFarlane at jeremy.mcfarlane@unifor5555.ca, or our President, Beth Couchman at beth.couchman@unifor5555.ca.



UNIT 4 UPDATE - SECURITY SERVICES

While the University and our members are facing a challenging situation our Members in Unit 4 continue to, as always, serve to keep the McMaster community safe. McMaster is encouraging employees, wherever possible to work from home, but that is obviously not an option or expectation for our department. We will see changes in McMaster operations of the next couple of weeks and as the campus community that normally is here becomes smaller. The safety of the campus will still be a priority.

If you have questions or concerns about potential COVID-19 exposure, you are encouraged to raise them with your Sergeant. As much as possible, practice social distancing on campus and wash your hands frequently.

You are encouraged to visit the McMaster University COVID-19 website, as it is updated frequently. It also has resources, information and FAQs on best practices to keep yourself safe and healthy while serving our campus.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Unit 4 Chair, Greg Hamilton at greg.hamilton@unifor5555.ca or President Beth Couchman at beth.couchman@unifor5555.ca.

UNIT 5 UPDATE - FACILITY SERVICES

While the university is encouraging those who can, to work from home, and determining that employees doing non-essential work should be sent home, this does not apply to the majority of our workers in Unit 5. In fact, the custodial work is more important than ever. Keeping our campus clean and sanitized is a key component of lessening the potential spread of COVID-19. For our custodians servicing residence, not only do we have an unexpected short notice move out, but we also have a group of students who must remain in residence who need their buildings cleaned.

We appreciate that there is concern about reporting to work and what safety measures are in place. We have compiled a fact sheet on refusing unsafe work, which will also be posted on our bulletin boards, however, the short version is that the right to refuse is not inherent to a pandemic situation. If you have health and safety concerns related to COVID-19 and reporting to work, we encourage you to read the fact sheet, or reach out to a union representative (listed below).

If you have circumstances that are COVID-19

related (childcare due to school closures, being in a high-risk group) we encourage you to reach out to your supervisor to determine what options are available to you. If you have questions or concerns that aren't met by your supervisor, again, we encourage you to reach out to a Union Representative.

This situation is fluid, and changing daily, and each employee group is facing their own unique challenges. The most up to date information as to McMasters steps can be found on their COVID-19 website, <https://covid19.mcmaster.ca>. The Union also has information, as well as union representative contacts information on our website www.unifor5555.ca.

Union Representative Contacts

Chantelle Hankins

chantelle.hankins@unifor5555.ca
Unit 5 Chair

Emily Heikoop

emily.heikoop@unifor5555.ca
Vice President 226-208-0890 (cell)

UNIT 6 UPDATE - ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION 163

As the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 163 has closed for the time being due to the COVID-19 situation, our members in this unit have been laid off. Our President, Beth Couchman is in communication with management, however at this point we don't have an answer as to when you may be expected back at work. As you may know, the government has changed the EI requirements to help workers in situations like yours. It is important that you go on-line and start your EI application as soon as possible <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei.html>.

As you may be able to imagine, there are processing delays simply due to volume. If you need assistance with your EI application or have any questions, please reach out to your Unit Chair, Stacey Burns at stacey.burns@unifor5555.ca, or President, Beth Couchman at beth.couchman@unifor5555.ca.



MARCH 22, 2020

WORLD WATER DAY

DRINKING WATER IS A RIGHT
END DRINKING WATER ADVISORIES
IN FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES.



Dear members,

March 22, 2020 is United Nations World Water Day. This global day of awareness is aimed at focusing attention on the importance of water and the estimated 2.1 billion people in the world that do not have safe drinking water in their homes. The 2020 international theme is water and climate change.

Delegates to Unifor's 2019 Constitutional Convention resolved to participate in World Water Day to advocate for the sustainable management of fresh water. This includes putting pressure on the federal government to fulfill their promise to end all long-term water advisories in First Nations communities by March of 2021.

There are at least 61 water advisories in First Nations Communities across Canada. A lack of safe water has a clear and negative impacts the health and livelihoods of First Nations peoples and their communities.

In the spirit of reconciliation, join other Unifor members to take action now:

Click here to tweet at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and urge him to honour his commitment to ensure safe drinking water for First Nations.

Visit unifor.org/wwd2020 to learn more and share information about this campaign on your social media channels.

In solidarity,

Jerry Dias
National President

MENTAL WELLBEING SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES

Mental Wellbeing Supports and Resources

Many people are facing challenges right now and so we have compiled a list of some resources members may find helpful.

Unifor 5555 Employee/Family Assistance Plan Representative

Our EFAP Advocate can help with Employee and Family Assistance Issues such as alcohol and substance abuse, gambling or other addictions with referrals to community resources.

Kim Sardella kim.sardella@unifor5555.ca

Unifor 5555 Women's Advocate

The Women's Advocate is trained to help members who are experiencing harassment, domestic violence and abuse. The Women's Advocate is not a counselor, rather an advocate who can help Members access workplace and community resources.

Karen Sutton karen.sutton@unifor5555.ca

Confidential Cell: 905-537-3798

McMaster Employee Family Assistance Plan

Homewood Health is the Canadian leader in mental health and addiction services. With over 130 years of experience, they achieve outstanding outcomes every day through their national network of over 4,500 employees and clinical experts, and through the Homewood Health Centre—one of Canada's largest and leading facilities for medical treatment of mental health and addiction disorders. https://hr.mcmaster.ca/employees/health_safety_well-being/my-well-being/employee-and-family-assistance-program/

Ontario211 Help is only one call, one text or one chat away.

211 is a helpline and online database of Ontario's community and social services. 211 is answered and updated by highly-trained specialists who can direct you to or help you navigate social services and supports.

<https://211ontario.ca/>

tel:2-1-1

tel:1-877-330-3213



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MEETINGS ETC...POSTPONED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

Things to do while self-isolating

Read a good book - you never have time right?

Bake or Cook something special - everyday.

Do some Puzzles and play Board games.

Great time of year to start that Indoor Garden.

Start a new hobby, Knitting, Painting, Woodworking, Model Building.

You have 10,000 or more pictures on your computer or cell phone - time to organize them.

20 years worth of tax information and bills, time to shead them.

Facetime or Messenger your Parents or Grandparents - most are shut in now.

Get that garden going outside, prune, rake etc.

Clean one room in your house each day.

Clean out the winter salt from your car.

Pickup that dusty guitar and learn to play it.

Do some exercise.

Teach your children how to do their own laundry.

Have a homemade pizza and movie night.

As a last resort - try Origami.



Note: Dates, times and/or locations of events are subject to change without notice. Watch your emails or this e-newsflyer for notices of events or changes. Contact info@unifor5555.ca to check on status of events and/or to rsvp your attendance.