

2016 Health & Safety/Injured Workers Advocacy Conference

October 25-29, 2016

Crowne Plaza, Niagara Falls, ON

First let me thank the Local for the opportunity to attend my first 2016 Health & Safety Conference. It was well-attended with a full Convention room and lots of interesting stories. Some of the highlights over the few days were:

- Elections took place for 2 Members at Large for the Health & Safety Committee with Keith Fiering and Felicia Forbes being elected; as well as 2 Members at Large for the Injured Workers Advocacy (IWA) Committee (Debbie Smith and Jim Johnston being elected).
- It was discussed that “ODRT” was now defunct being replaced with “Prevention Link” as of September 16, 2016. Transition is under way.
- I joined in with the Health & Safety Intro workshop with Kim Monette as the instructor. Unfortunately, we had no materials sent (inadvertently sent to Quebec) and no projector. This actually proved to be a benefit to the group as great discussions took place; different scenarios and causes/results were discussed over the next few days. Ultimately, the instructor could get a .pdf of the course available and sent it to all participants.
- Some factors discussed in the course contributing to workplace injuries could include but weren’t limited to physical (noise, vibrations), psychosocial (violence, mental illness, work loss), ergonomic (repetitive movement, speed, positions), chemical (exposures to inhalants, absorption, etc.), biological and safety issues.
- A critical and commonly used area of the Ontario Health & Safety Act (OHSA) is Article 25.2h: *taking every reasonable caution*. Defenses can be obtained by going to other Locals and asking for “best practices” and tailor to your own local’s needs. Try and bargain better wording into your contracts to prevent injuries.
 - If your “business” wishes to open doors; it must be safe. Undue hardship should not have to enter into it.
 - Always follow up incidents with documentation (either e-mail, report it, etc.).
 - Encourage reporting (ie: every 1,000th report submitted gets a pizza party)
- A 50/50 draw was also held during the conference with funds going towards the Niagara Health & Safety chapter
- Emphasis on the 3 basic rights: Right to know, Right to Participate and Right to Refuse. A length discussion on the Right to Refuse took place as this can be dicey issue. Steps to follow were noted as Reporting the issue to the Supervisor, the Supervisor must work with you but if worker insists they are still unsafe, refuse and call a Union Rep. The Union Rep, Worker and Supervisor work toward a resolution. If there can be no resolution met, call the Ministry of Labour. Meanwhile, call the Joint Health & Safety Committee Member to try and resolve while waiting for MOL. Worker should be offered “meaningful” alternative work.
- The Friday morning plenary focused on workplace violence and refusing work. Sometimes, it can be as simple as asking the worker what would fix the issue (sometimes they are not listened to).
- The Health & Safety Intro workshop continued by discussing multi-sites (must apply to MOL for Multi-Site Committee). This can result in less representation as Rep can only represent those “on site” for single locations as opposed to multi-site). An Employer does not have the authority over how the Committee will function and inspect the workplace. If a worker conducts duties in a space; it IS a workplace and must be inspected.
- A minimum Health & Safety meeting is **quarterly**. Management is to allow up to 1-hour for a worker to prepare for the meeting. The Minimum meeting quorum is 1 member per side (1 member from the Union; 1 member Management).
- Meetings cannot occur any date beyond 90 days. Any further is a violation!

One morning session speaker that stuck with me was Shannon Willis who spoke to Working and Living with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Shannon works as an EMS employee on an ambulance and related her upsetting story of a police officer being shot around the corner from their station-house. She went on to relate (while in tears almost the entire time) how her and her partner on the job were affected at work, with their home-life; their marriage, their whole way of life. The unbelievable lack of support and understanding from her superiors was astounding. It wasn’t until Shannon could

meet and speak with yet another therapist 3 years after the incident did she begin the path to healing. She noted at the beginning of her talk that although she was probably going to cry through her whole story, it was a healing process to her and please bear with her. What an incredible story of strength.

Although I found the conference helpful as a building-block of information, I felt it was lacking in providing the tools needed to combat problems. I heard the previous year's conference was quite helpful in that area so I am hopeful the next conference proves more information in that area. As it was mentioned at the conference, don't teach me *how* to be the victim, teach me how to help/prevent the victim.

Yours in solidarity,

Marg Lemoine
CUPE Local 973