



**your voice at work**

**Edmonton**

ph. (780) 452.0362  
fx. (780) 451.3099  
14040 128 Ave.  
Edmonton, AB  
T5L 4M8

**Calgary**

ph. (403) 291.1047  
fx. (403) 250.3412  
#100, 46 Hopewell Way N.E.  
Calgary, AB  
T3J 5H7

**Red Deer**

ph: 403.342.0150  
fx: 403.341.3810  
#1, 4646 Riverside Drive  
Red Deer, AB  
T4N 6Y5

**Lethbridge**

ph. (403) 328.4245  
fx. (403) 320.9288  
#104, 3305 18 Ave. N.  
Lethbridge, AB  
T1H 5S1

**Brooks**

ph. (403) 501.8486  
fx. (403) 501.5144  
P.O. Box 1148  
631 - A Sutherland Dr. E.  
Brooks, AB  
T1R 1B9

**Fort McMurray**

ph. (780) 743.4190  
fx. (780) 743.8312  
#205, 9914 Morrison St.  
Fort McMurray, AB  
T9H 4A4

**Toll Free.** 1.800.252.7975

**Dental:**

1.866.961.6147

**Dental (meats):**

1.800.667.2816

**Safeway PT Benefits:**

1.866.544.9686

**Superstore PT Benefits:**

1.866.342.3513

**Pension:**

1.888.811.7227

[www.ufcw401.ca](http://www.ufcw401.ca)  
[ufcw@ufcw401.ab.ca](mailto:ufcw@ufcw401.ab.ca)

United Food and Commercial Workers Canada Union, Local No. 401

March 28, 2020

VIA EMAIL: [cflett@oe955.com](mailto:cflett@oe955.com)

**Chris Flett**  
**Operating Engineers Local 955**  
17603 – 114 Avenue NW  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5S 2R9

Dear Brother Flett,

**RE: Response to COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrates the **critical and important role our members play** in our communities and for our Unions. This is something we have always known and expressed at every opportunity for as long as we have existed as an organization.

We understand the evolving nature of the COVID-19 situation and its unique challenges, but **we would like to see all employers be proactive instead of reactive** in dealing with it. Not all employers are reacting to this crisis in the same way, and so the issues we must address differ across industries and from workplace to workplace. In general, our requests are for immediate supports for our members, a sensible approach to labour relations during this unique time, and a dialogue regarding what the future might look like as we head down this most uncertain road.

If you are already implementing elements of what we outline below, we would like to know, and of course, we would insist that you apprise your employees. If there are gaps in your approach, we sincerely want to work with you to find ways to meet them. It is our view that we simply must work through this evolving situation together.

**Supports for Your Employees**

Given the extraordinary circumstances our members are facing both at work and at home, we are asking all employers to provide the following immediate supports to all employees:

**Respect our members**

Please be kind to our members and take all necessary measures to ensure a **culture of respect** in your workplace. Every subsequent request contained in this letter is an elaboration on what we mean by “respect.”

We call on all employers to provide **immediate accommodation for employees impacted by school and daycare closures.**

We also call for the immediate **waiving of all sick note requirements** for employees. During this crisis, waiting rooms for Doctors' offices can be seen as an epicentre for community infection.

Clearly, it is hard, especially at this point, to imagine all circumstances under which an employee may want or need to stay away from work. **If ANY employee wants to stay home and not work at this time and their circumstances are unique and cannot be contemplated by any existing policy or procedures, please contact our Union immediately to have a dialogue about these individuals to ensure that the culture of respect** for which we advocate so strongly carries through for everyone.

At the risk of redundancy, we cannot help but hover around the importance of sensitivity. **It is no one's place to judge the unique emotions that any individual might have during this very stressful time, and each individual should and must be accommodated by putting the principles of humanity and decency first.**

### Proactive Health and Safety approach

We remind you that, even during this unique time, employers have legal and statutory obligations to ensure the health and safety of their employees, which includes **ensuring all employees are informed of all workplace rights, obligations, policies, and rules.**

### Financial Assistance for Employees

Employers are uniquely positioned to play a critical role in our societal response to this pandemic. As a matter of social responsibility, employers have an obligation to ensure that **no employee should have to choose between paying their bills and putting their coworkers or the public at risk.**

We are looking for the immediate implementation of financial supports for all employees over an appropriate duration of time that should be no less than the full duration of the COVID-19 risk. We propose appending the following language to the collective agreements:

#### Public Health risk Relief

*For the duration of the public health risk, employees who cannot work due to self-isolation, layoff, quarantine, personal illness or illness of a loved one, or childcare requirements caused by school closures or other circumstances related to the public health threat shall continue to receive pay as if they continued to work (through whatever combination of STD or EI benefits and employer top-up is necessary to accomplish this objective).*

### Health benefits

Access to health benefits has never been so important to so many. We are calling on all employers, including employer and/or union trustees, to instruct all benefit plan providers to immediately implement all that may apply:

- waive all waiting periods applicable to access to all benefits;
- suspend all disqualification rules relating to time worked;
- waive all eligibility requirements applicable to short-term and/or long-term disability benefits for all employees;

- extend coverage to all employee who might not otherwise be eligible for coverage; and
- create a new type of coverage that provides benefit for anxiety or stress-related to COVID-19 matters.

We are calling on all employers who do not already provide short-term disability benefits to all of their employees to immediately extend such eligibility to all employees, regardless of the hours they work.

## Sensible Approach to Labour Relations

### We have a collective agreement

Our collective agreement is as important as any law currently impacting your business. We are sure you would agree that respect for the rule of law should be upheld during this unique time.

We remind you that our existing collective agreement remains in full force and effect and that we are closely monitoring adherence to it. Where there are circumstances where we might consider some flexibility, that would only be considered by us through full consultation with the union members who we represent.

### Transparency around the sharing of information

People are currently under a lot of pressure, and we all have a job to do. Issues arising during this time frame may continue to exist well into the future. We are requesting that you share all information that may be relevant to us, pursuant to our collective bargaining relationship, so that these issues don't become on-going concerns.

### We will represent

We should advise that our offices are not closing, and our union is going to continue to represent our members. In fact, we are looking for ways to enhance our representation for UFCW Local 401 members during this difficult time.

Whether it is through visits to your workplaces, conference calls, or whatever other means might be necessary, we appreciate your full cooperation in respecting our Union's desire to be there any way we can for our members who are confronting such a unique time and unique challenges.

### Recall of employees

As per the Collective Agreement have the right to being recalled as is stated in Article 14. We are requesting a temporary Letter of Understanding to extend recall periods to no less than 12 months or whatever period is deemed necessary to cover the duration of the COVID-19 crisis and also to suspend Article 13.04 (b-4) during this time.

## Questions

At this time, we have the following questions that we hope will commence a dialogue that will be helpful for everyone:

1. **Can you please identify any of the above requests that you would be prepared to implement immediately**, and which will require further discussion? Please advise when you will be available to discuss these items.
2. **Do you have plans to close operations?** If so, will you provide the supports to employees as noted above.
3. **Will you join us in our efforts to lobby governments** to provide supports for workers through this period?
4. We understand you may be looking at offering early retirement packages? Please outline this process should an employee chose to voluntarily accept this offer?
5. Should you look at condensing the work week or cutting hours, how will you support employees who we lose income? Changing the hours of work would conflict with the collective agreement and we ask that you have further dialogue with UFCW Local 401 on this. We are concerned that this would not allow employees to qualify for EI and the reduction. No changes to the collective agreement will be permitted without full consultation with our members. These requests should be made in writing.
6. Further, should you require layoffs, when will ROE's be received, will you provide any financial or resources to employees while they struggle through the EI process?
7. Are you providing employees with EAP as many could suffer from high anxiety during this time?
8. Have you investigated any subsidized wage assistance as an organization offered by governments?

We understand the evolving nature of this situation and the unique challenges it has created. It is our view that the only way to confront the pandemic is as a social system – that includes the cooperation and functioning of all component parts (governments, employers, and unions) working in solidarity for the public good.

As a Union, we understand the challenges that you will face as an organization through this time. We are open to finding the best solutions that protect and assist our members. Please do not hesitate to call one of us for further discussion.

We continue to take direction from our members and will have our Union Representative continue to work with you on options based on that direction.

We await your reply to these urgent requests.

Sincerely,



Thomas Hesse  
President



Richelle Stewart  
Secretary-Treasurer

cc. Sam Nuako