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May 1, 2020

## **UFCW Local 401 takes legal action to stop Cargill High River from reopening amid COVID-19 outbreak**

Calgary, AB – While nearly half of Cargill’s 2,000 High River employees tested positive for COVID-19, Cargill announced on Wednesday their intention to reopen the plant on Monday, May 4, 2020. In response, UFCW Local 401 has sought a stop work order from Alberta Occupational Health and Safety and filed an Unfair Labour Practice Complaint, naming both Cargill and the Government of Alberta as respondents.

The complaints are available here:

**April 30, 2020: UFCW Local 401 calls for an Occupations Health and Safety Investigation and Stop Work Order:** <https://gounion.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/200430-Letter-Re-Cargill-High-River-Request-for-OHS-Investigation-and-Stop-Work-Order-at-Cargill.pdf>

**May 1, 2020: Unfair Labour Practice Complaint made by UFCW Local 401 against Cargill and the Government of Alberta:** <https://gounion.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/UFCW-ULP-Complaint-to-ALRB-2020-05-01.pdf>

UFCW Local 401 President, Thomas Hesse, has issued the following statements on the union’s legal moves:

*Cargill and the Government of Alberta have ignored our calls for a worker-centred approach to ensuring the plant is safe. Alberta Health Services inspection reports have not been shared with us, and Occupational Health and Safety inspections have omitted the serious concerns we have raised.*

*The whole point of having a union is for powerful, unqualified representation. One of the reasons that unions exist is to promote and defend the right to workplace health and safety.*

*It is our objective and role to use every legal avenue available to us to keep the Cargill High River plant closed until we are able to ensure the safety of workers employed there and that their voices have been heard.*

*Food workers are afraid to go to work in the current environment. They lack the economic security they need to recover, and they are terrified of bringing this illness to their families and communities. While they try to recover, their employer and government are telling them to get back to work. This recklessly endangers their lives and puts the interests of their bosses first.*

*As we bear witness to even more food worker deaths as similar meat plants across North America reopen, we consider the [Trumpean push](#) to resume production at all costs nothing less than sheer recklessness.*

*COVID-19 is a new and deadly virus affecting every person in the world. We are called upon to forget about politics and all of our traditional ways of thinking and to save lives. There is no vaccine, no treatment, and no cure. Why are workers expected to work without all necessary protections in this environment?*

The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 401 is the largest private sector union in Western Canada and represents 32,000 Alberta workers mainly in the food processing and retail sectors.

### **Further information**

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