

# IMPORTANT UPDATE



IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR UFCW LOCAL 401 MEMBERS

## STRIKE AND PICKET PAY INFORMATION FOR ALBERTA SAFEWAY EMPLOYEES

After more than a year of face-to-face negotiations with Sobeys, the company continues to offer little in the way of a fair deal for its hard-working Safeway employees in Alberta. In fact, the company continues to seek major concessions that would worsen things for Alberta Safeway employees while also pushing to introduce a discount FreshCo banner. Check out our website for an extensive listing of updates on our bargaining process so far: [gounion.ca/safewaybargaining](http://gounion.ca/safewaybargaining)

It's time to take a stand. Below is some key information about strikes, picketing, and picket pay specifically for Alberta Safeway employees. If you have any questions about this information, please reach out to your Union Labour Relations Officer at 1.800.252.7975 or [ufcw@ufcw401.ab.ca](mailto:ufcw@ufcw401.ab.ca).

### WHAT IS A STRIKE?

Strikes usually come about as part of a legally-protected process called “collective bargaining.” This is where a group of workers – represented by a union – negotiate with an employer about their terms and conditions of employment (i.e. wages, benefits, hours, etc.), all of which are set out in a “collective agreement,” sometimes called a “union contract.”

A strike is a step in the negotiations process whereby workers exercise their legal right to stop showing up for work until their employer takes their issues and concerns seriously.

Strikes and strike votes are also ways to show workers’ resolve, strength, and unity at the bargaining table. They are often a last resort, after conversations between the union and company at the bargaining table have reached an impasse. While 95% of union contracts are resolved without a strike, sometimes such actions are necessary in order to achieve our bargaining goals. In Alberta, union members can only vote to strike after a mediator has been involved in the process.

In a unionized workplace, it is your legal right to strike, and you cannot be penalized by your employer for participating in a lawful strike or picket line. When a strike is over, you have the right to return to your job.

### WHAT IS PICKETING?

Lawful picket line activity can involve many things. Among them, you have the right to stand in front of your workplace and other places connected to your employer’s business (eg. non-union Sobeys stores). You can engage with customers of the business and encourage them to support you by not shopping at stores operated by your employer until you get a fair contract. It can take some courage to picket, but it’s your right.

You have the right to carry a sign and “demonstrate” to get your message out to the public. You have the right to talk to your family, friends, and neighbours about supporting you. The public, customers, and the union community can boycott your employer’s business until a deal is reached. You have the right to tell the public about what it’s like doing the work you do and why you should be better appreciated by the company you work for.

Picketing is not all doom and gloom. Picket lines can and should be fun. Most importantly, you will find such activities build support and solidarity among co-workers for years afterwards. Leaders and friendships emerge. We find common cause, get to know each other better, and learn to stand together. Strikes can often build a stronger union.

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### CAN THE COMPANY LOCK US OUT?

While unionized workers have the option of a strike to achieve their bargaining goals, employers have a similar tool: a lock out. Normally, this involves the employer stopping employees from working by shutting down the business until employees accept the company's demands. This is often seen as a bully tactic used to pressure employees to accept concessions or takeaways.

A strike vote can sometimes be viewed as a "self-defence" against a lock out. A strong strike vote can deter any appetite the company has for a lock out because they become aware of the resolve and unity of employees to achieve their bargaining objectives.

### WHY STRIKE?

Just the act of taking a strike vote can make employers think twice about ignoring the concerns of employees. Just knowing you are willing to walk out can remind an employer of the pivotal role workers play in the success of any business. There is no business without the work you do.

If we can't reach a fair contract – even with the assistance of a government-appointed mediator – we will take the decision to strike back to you. This is done through a secret ballot vote and is a process regulated by the Alberta Labour Relations Board. A strike vote must pass by a majority of those who vote.

Prior to any vote, we will have union meetings (with consideration for physical distancing) to explain the issues in dispute. It is imperative that everyone affected participate in these meetings and votes.

Remember, a successful strike vote does not always lead to strike action. Sometimes just taking a strike vote is enough to push a company to get serious in bargaining. But we must prepare for the worst. An actual strike is a real possibility.

### STRIKE PAY AND BENEFITS

A strike involves sacrifice. It's not just about picketing. There are often financial difficulties as well. Generally, it is our goal to offer a strike benefit that is close to what you are taking home while at work. It shouldn't be more than that amount, but it should be close. The bottom line is: we want to support our members if they have decided they want to stand up.

When it became clear that Sobeys was not moving on its major concessions in bargaining, we started preparing for the possibility of a strike with Sobeys. In October 2019, we conducted a Strike Pay Needs Assessment survey of Alberta Safeway employees and received thousands of responses.

We also established a Strike Pay Committee comprised of Safeway union members, who would consider the needs outlined and put together a strike pay system that they felt was both fair and feasible. That strike pay committee met over a number of months and developed a recommendation on what picket pay for Safeway employees should be. That was later endorsed by the UFCW Local 401 Executive Board, an elected body comprised of UFCW union members from across Alberta.

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### ***What is picket pay?***

Our Strike Pay Committee has recommended, and our Executive Board has endorsed, the following picket pay amounts and picketing requirements in the event of a possible strike at Safeway in Alberta:

<b>Status</b>	<b>Picketing Required</b>	<b>Picket Pay</b>
Full-time	5 x 8-hour shifts	\$440 per week tax-free
Part-time (32 hrs/wk)	4 x 8-hour shifts	\$352 per week tax-free
Part-time	4 x 6-hour shifts	\$264 per week tax-free

It's important to remember that picket pay is not a wage, nor is it taxable. What you get is what you take home. The purpose of picket pay is to assist you in replacing your income as much as possible while you take your stand. If it is not enough, often union members find other jobs to help supplement what they receive from picketing.

### ***Do I have to pay any of this back? What about union dues?***

No! You will never have to pay back any of the strike pay, and you will not have to pay union dues while on strike or while locked out.

### ***What about special situations?***

A strike can be a scary thing, but your union representatives are here to discuss, confidentially, any concerns you may have. We want to make sure you understand your rights, and we'll make all reasonable efforts to help you out. Financial problems that came about before a strike are not covered, but our view is that no union member should lose their home, be unable to pay their rent, or suffer any undue hardship as a direct result of a labour dispute.

### ***What about my benefits?***

We recommend that you stock up on any prescription drugs and have dental work done prior to the start of a strike. However, we will pay the cost of any necessary dental, emergency prescription, and/or life insurance premiums for those who qualified prior to the beginning of the strike.

## **PREPARING YOUR FINANCES**

While a positive strike vote doesn't mean there will be a strike, it is wise to prepare for the worst-case scenario. Planning for a strike or a lockout will ensure you're not scrambling at the last minute to make arrangements.

The picket pay we provide as a union far exceeds that of most other unions, but maybe it's not enough to keep things going. It's good to prepare now.

Things you can do to prepare:

- **Start saving money now.** You'll get picket pay if you picket, but it may not be exactly what you would normally earn. You'll be happier if you've saved a little to offset the difference.
- **Don't make any major purchases** – if at all possible – until the threat of a strike or lockout has passed.
- If you must make a large purchase, try to find ways of **prolonging payment** (i.e. financing) until after a strike or lockout is settled.

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- **Contact your bank and creditors in advance** to let them know you may be going on strike. Most will be happy to accommodate you by making arrangements for lower payments or interest-only payments in the event a strike or lockout occurs.
- Most businesses and banks know that you will not be on strike forever. **Remember your strength as a consumer!** They don't want to lose your business and will often do whatever it takes to keep it, just as long as you are upfront with them about what's happening.
- Never ignore a creditor, and you will be fine. Thousands of UFCW members have walked picket lines across North America and not one has lost their home as a result of a strike or lockout.
- If you need assistance dealing with creditors, we can help. We are here to help you take a stand for yourself.

## NEVER CROSS A PICKET LINE

A strong picket line is critical for a strike to be successful for workers. A decision to strike is also a democratic decision that should be supported and not betrayed.

That's why, as a union, we put our resources towards supporting each other to stand together and stand strong when we need to.

But we all have different situations and sometimes different perspectives about things. Some may want to picket 50 hours per week. Some only 20 hours per week. Some may not be willing or able to picket on a regular basis. Some may not picket at all for whatever reason. That's ok!

You can still support your co-workers who will picket by doing any of the following:

- You can stay at home until the dispute is over;
- You can get another job until the dispute over;
- You can get another job AND picket when it's convenient for you until the dispute is over.

There are other options, too. Let's talk about your situation to see if we can work together towards an accommodation that respects and helps our collective bargaining objectives.

## ONE THING IS FOR SURE, THOUGH...

### YOU DO NOT NEED TO CROSS A PICKET LINE TO MEET FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS

Never cross a picket line, especially your own. A "scab" is a person who either:

- unethically works at a workplace despite an ongoing strike or lockout;
- crosses a picket line; or
- steals the job responsibilities of a striking or locked out worker.

The stigma of being a scab often follows people around even at other jobs, and scabs are susceptible to fines and other penalties. Crossing a picket line violates union rules, and those who do so could face serious repercussions.

Having said that, this is YOUR union and YOUR picket line. YOU are key to its success. Together is how we work to achieve better wages, benefits, and conditions of employment. We only win if we stick together!