



**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
ufcw@ufcw401.ab.ca

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

August 25, 2020

Via Email

Sofina Foods

2126 Hurst Road S.E.
Calgary, AB
T2G 4M5

Attention: Gerry Beadle, Plant Manager

Dear Gerry:

RE: COVID-19 OUTBREAK AT SOFINA FOODS, CALGARY

As the Union for employees at the Sofina Foods facility in Calgary, the recent increase in positive COVID-19 cases among our members is of serious concern to us. We have been working with you, Alberta Health Services, and other agencies to understand the source and extent of the outbreak as well as the efficacy of the measures put in place both in advance of and in response to this troubling circumstance.

In recent months, we have learned in the worst possible ways the impact of a pandemic on food processing workers in particular. In spite of that, at least to our knowledge, there has been no independent investigation by government authorities into why this is. As a union, we are left to advocate for the safety and health of our members in the most fervent and forceful ways possible.

It has been our experience that temporary plant closures can be effective in slowing the spread of the virus in the workplace. That kind of measure genuinely puts workers' lives ahead of production needs. While we are not calling for you to close your Calgary facility at this time, there are numerous factors – ranging from the age of the facility to the lack of physical distancing possibilities, the quality of PPE provided, inconsistent use of face shields, and more – that we are closely monitoring.

Based on our experiences at other facilities, we believe there are measures that can be taken to protect employees. Without those measures in place, we may need to call for a plant closure.

With new cases reported today, we are also seeing certain red flags. For example, as you are aware, there was a breakdown in mitigation efforts that came to light through information we received today. We wrote to AHS officials asking for them to investigate these circumstances. We were gravely disappointed to hear today that company representatives seemed to express greater concern about the tone of our email to AHS than about the substance of the urgent concerns we were raising. Red flags shake our confidence in the process.

At this time, we have the following immediate and urgent questions and requests:

- Will you provide the names and phone numbers of all of our members who have tested positive for COVID-19? We need this information in order to adequately represent our members and carry out our own investigation into the circumstances at the plant.
- Will the company support WCB claims made by employees who have contracted COVID-19? Will the company work with us to ensure employees have completed their appropriate WCB paperwork, including workers' reports of illness or injury related to the workplace outbreak?
- Is the company providing pay for employees who have been told by authorities to self-isolate or quarantine due to possible COVID-19 infection?
- Can you please forward to my attention the meeting minutes of the Joint Worksite Health and Safety Committee from March 2020 to present?
- Will you agree to immediately prioritize and activate the existing Joint Worksite Health and Safety Committee, including the full participation of a UFCW Union Labour Relations Officer in those meetings and workplace inspections? In our experience, regular meetings of this committee (i.e. at least two times per week during an outbreak) with the presence of a representative from the Union can go a long way towards a worker-centred approach to health and safety that can identify deficiencies and problem areas as well as maintain employee confidence in the safety of the plant.
- Can the company provide a timeline of the COVID-19 mitigation strategies, processes and procedures that have been implemented at the plant? This would include erection of barriers, PPE, etc. as well as if these methods were mandatory or were only recommendations.
- Can the company please provide us with copies of all documents that were provided to Occupational Health and Safety that were listed in the Notice to Produce that was issued by the authorities on or around August 21, 2020?
- What is the absenteeism rate of bargaining unit employees at the plant since the outbreak has been announced? What is the difference between this rate and the usual rate of employee absenteeism? Furthermore, will the employer take a lenient approach to employee absenteeism considering the obvious anxiety caused by the outbreak?
- In light of the requests from AHS and the Company for all employees to be tested, what actions if any, does the company plan to take if any employees refuse to take a COVID-19 screening test?
- At what point would the company carry out a temporary shutdown the facility to stop the workplace spread of COVID-19?

Your responses to these questions are critical and would go a long way towards us determining our perspective on the situation at the plant and any next steps we may feel we need to take.

Notwithstanding all the processes that have been put in place and the work that all the parties have done to together, a worker was still able to attend work and interact with other members after being diagnosed with COVID-19. Unless our confidence in the safety process is bolstered by end of business day tomorrow, we will be left with no other alternative than to request the following:

1. An immediate 2-week closure of your plant to conduct a comprehensive assessment of its safety.
2. Guaranteed full compensation for every single employee during this temporary shutdown. There is no reason why workers' livelihoods AND lives can't be protected.
3. An immediate meeting with Union officials, experts, and government officials of appropriate competency and jurisdiction to design clear and enforceable rules around health and safety in your workplace.

We do not make this call without serious consideration of the consequences. The constellation of the concerns outlined above and underscored by the objective facts of recent days (spike in cases, recent incidents in spite of mitigation efforts) may lead to consider that call for a temporary plant closure.

While the concerns around contract tracing might be AHS' area, we respectfully remind you that, under the law, the employer bears the onus of ensuring that the workplace is safe. As such, it is the employer that we and the members will ultimately hold responsible.

At Cargill we said never again. We cannot tolerate another Cargill. That being said, the ball is in your court. We await your comprehensive and prompt response.

Sincerely,



Thomas Hesse
President
UFCW Local 401

cc: UFCW Leadership
Jeff Ible, Union Labour Relations Officer
Les Cowley, Vice President, Poultry Operations, Sofina Foods
Dr. Jia Hu MD MSc CCFP FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health – Alberta Health Services