

February 13, 2021

Dear Rob:

I am writing to you on this day as a personal appeal and to appeal to you on behalf of the workers at the plant.

I do not know you well, but it has been my sense that you share at least some of my concern for the well-being of the employees. You are in a difficult spot right now, undoubtedly conflicted by the choices you must make.

Yet, in my respectful view there are circumstances when leaders are left with no choice. And you are in the eyes of the employees, and through a legal and ethical lens the leader of the Olymel plant. The only choice to be made right now is to close the plant for a period of time. Certainly the only choice as well is to tell employees not to come to work.

Why?

This action, again, is not a choice but is a necessity. There is no other option. Employees clearly tell us that they are afraid to come to work and the plant should be closed. Employees just don't say this kind of thing. They want to work and have a pay cheque and to have a decent life. To admit our fears and to risk our livelihoods is extraordinary. Your employees are looking to you to respect them and to respect this difficult admission they have made. Anxiety and fear are in and of themselves a psychological and medical condition, even a disability, if you will. These employees should be allowed to stay home. They are tortured and their pain is real. Surely you cannot believe it is reasonable to ask or force them to come to work at this time?

I suppose some in your company might want to shrug this off and dismiss it and put the pigs ahead of the people. Business first, they might say. The union is just being inflammatory, they might assert. Human Resource types might question the union's survey methodology. But you know what your employees are saying. If corporate officials want to dismiss or question the validity of employee viewpoints, we wonder why they haven't themselves polled the staff or interviewed them to see how they feel? In any event, what we know is what the employees are saying. We cannot let the arrogance of the production imperative override the very valid sentiments of real human beings. People must be put ahead of pigs.

Our union believes strongly in listening to the sentiments of real people. The day before yesterday their view was objectively confirmed by a publically funded agency of the Government of Alberta whose responsibility it is to be guardians of the health of our citizens. They have told you, the workers at Olymel, and the citizens of Alberta in clear unambiguous terms that the Olymel plant is not safe. In a frightening piece of correspondence to you and the Olymel workers, they engage in a risk assessment and offer a dire and disturbing warning. They say...

“around one in five workers at the plant may be infected and spreading the virus”

They go on to say...

“Around 60% of Olymel staff hold at least one other job outside of working at the plant.”

With respect, you are not in compliance with Occupational Health and Safety Legislation and Olymel is the worst kind of corporate citizen if you do not immediately act. Your workplace is unsafe, putting your employees in danger, and your failure to act is putting the City of Red Deer in jeopardy.

You are now faced with the overwhelming sentiment of your employees and a clear unequivocal, and objective statement of dire risk made by Alberta Health Services. They are doctors and scientists.

To close is a necessity. It is not a choice. It is callous gross negligence to allow the plant to operate or to ask a single employee to come to work.

We reiterate these assertions over and over and we ask for a response to our request to meet on Thursday. Please respond, as must make immediate arrangements.

I appreciate that Olymel signs your paycheque. But Olymel also signs the paycheque of every single worker in that plant. They are risking their jobs and their paycheques to courageously ask for a plant closure without knowing what the consequence might be or what effect this may have on their future. I ask that you boldly join with me and them in our call for Olymel and the Government of Alberta to do the right thing. This need not be another Cargill. We can bring comfort to good people who are terrified. We can work to restore Alberta's confidence in this industry. No one else needs to suffer with this terrible disease. No one else needs to die.

Respectfully,

Thomas Hesse

President

UFCW Local 401