UFCW local 401
A VOICE FOR WORKING ALBERTA

your voice at work

**Edmonton**
ph. (780) 452.0362
toll free. 1.800.252.7975
fx. (780) 451.3099
14040 128 Ave.
Edmonton, AB
T5L 4M8

**Calgary**
Out of town
members call collect
ph. (403) 291.1047
fx. (403) 250.3412
#100, 46 Hopewell Way N.E.
Calgary, AB
T3J 5H7

**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

**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**

UFCW local 401 UNION MADE

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

March 1, 2021

**VIA E-MAIL**

**RE: Proposed reopening of Olymel's Red Deer Plant**

I am aware that Olymel has announced a potential reopening of its Red Deer facilities on March 3, 2021. I am writing to inform you that UFCW Local 401 and our Olymel union members do not feel that the Employer has undertaken sufficient measures in order to make the workplace safe for a proposed reopening at this time.

Over the past 24 hours, the union has reached out to our Olymel union members to gauge how they feel about the proposed reopening. Some definitive trends have emerged from that outreach.

Below are highlights from questions we asked Olymel employees:

- Over 75% of respondents indicated that they are **scared and/or nervous** about returning to work
- Over 80% of respondents are **unsure** if the Plant is now safe
- 75% of respondents indicated they do **not** fully trust Olymel to keep them safe
- More than 50% of respondents indicated they do **not** fully trust government officials to keep them safe
- Over 90% of respondents feel the Employer should **compensate all Olymel employees** for the temporary closure and introduce pandemic pay immediately
- Nearly 90% of respondents indicated that they have **struggled financially** during the temporary closure

While these trends are preliminary, they are the result of responses from nearly 600 Olymel union members since they became aware of the potential reopening.

Needless to say, these results make a few things clear: Olymel workers still do not feel safe at the Plant, they do not trust either Olymel or government officials to keep them safe, they have struggled during this temporary closure, and they are demanding financial support for the time during which they were not paid and going forward.

It is also important to note that well over 70% of Olymel employees feel so uncertain about the safety of the Plant, that they are prepared to exercise their right to refuse unsafe work. That is a startling statistic from workers who have been laid off without pay through no fault of their own for going on two weeks.

Repairing the Company's relationship with its employees is a key element to creating a safe workplace that everyone can be confident about reopening. It is clear to UFCW Local 401 that the Employer still has work to do in building that confidence, both with the union and with our members.

Also, disturbing to see is the Employer acting before recommendations have been made and conclusions have been reached by a number of working groups charged with the responsibility of reviewing safety at the Plant. How can anyone possibly be ready to deem the Plant safe for reopening before those bodies have provided their findings?

In order to build the necessary confidence and ensure an orderly and effective reopening of the Plant, UFCW Local 401 has developed a list of action items that we are demanding the Employer fulfill in order to regain its employees' confidence and reopen its Red Deer facilities safely.

UFCW local 401
A VOICE FOR WORKING ALBERTA

your voice at work

**Edmonton**
ph. (780) 452.0362
toll free. 1.800.252.7975
fx. (780) 451.3099
14040 128 Ave.
Edmonton, AB
T5L 4M8

**Calgary**
Out of town
members call collect
ph. (403) 291.1047
fx. (403) 250.3412
#100, 46 Hopewell Way N.E.
Calgary, AB
T3J 5H7

**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

**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**

UFCW local 401 UNION MADE

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

Our list of action items includes:

- Conduct interviews with workers to understand their perspective and seek recommendations about creating a safe workplace. We have provided a research proposal to Olymel in this regard and hope that the company will see fit to fund this endeavour in alignment with previous statements.
- Provide additional safety training, including refresher training for all employees before reopening.
- Determine jointly agreed upon triggers in the case of future outbreaks for reduced production or closure.
- Full compensation for all employees for the period of time that the Plant was temporarily closed.
- Full compensation for those employees who were forced to miss work due to anxiety related to COVID-19.
- Implement pandemic pay premiums of $4 per hour for all employees immediately, to be maintained for the duration of the global pandemic.
- Staggered start and break times to ensure effective social distancing.
- The requirement that management take their breaks in the tents setup outside for one month after they become operational.
- Increased focus and commitment on air quality in the Plant. In recent meetings convened by the Government of Alberta and Alberta Health Services, Dr. Gabriel Fabreau has stressed the importance of maximized ventilation.
- Continued monitoring of all common areas to reduce congestion.
- Additional staff dedicated to the sanitization of common touch points (turnstiles, lunchrooms, doorways, locker rooms, washrooms, etc.)
- Plant entrance:
  - Main doorway: The Plant needs designated entry and exit doors. Main doors need to have some sort of touchless operation. The Company must ensure that the distribution of masks is located outside of the Plant.
  - Turnstiles: Additional turnstiles need to be installed.
- Main hallways – Installation of curtains or dividers down the centre of all hallways to separate directional flow. Remove all bins and equipment from hallways.
- Locker rooms – Reassign all lockers to ensure spacing and compliance with guidelines taking starting times and quitting times into account.
- Lunchrooms – Protocols for distancing in all seating areas, entry ways, etc.
- The procurement of as many additional microwaves as is required in order to space them around the lunchroom and facilitate effective social distancing.
- Install barriers at the ends of lunchroom tables.
- Where distancing cannot be ensured, remove tables from the lunchroom.
- Develop renewed terms of reference for the Joint Health and Safety Committee
- Commitment from the Employer to hold daily health and safety meetings.
- Commitment from the Employer to release an additional Walking Steward for each shift to address health and safety matters at the Employer's cost.
- Document all the above in addition to new measures unilaterally adopted by Olymel in a revised COVID-19 Hazard Mitigation Plan for final review and approval at a JHSC meeting prior to reopening.

UFCW local 401
A VOICE FOR WORKING ALBERTA

your voice at work

**Edmonton**
ph. (780) 452.0362
toll free. 1.800.252.7975
fx. (780) 451.3099
14040 128 Ave.
Edmonton, AB
T5L 4M8

**Calgary**
Out of town
members call collect
ph. (403) 291.1047
fx. (403) 250.3412
#100, 46 Hopewell Way N.E.
Calgary, AB
T3J 5H7

**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

**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**

UFCW local 401 UNION MADE

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

Further, the union asserts that any Olymel union members who do not accept an immediate recall should not be subject to any discipline. Olymel union members are going through a very difficult time and the anxiety they are experiencing must be a top priority factored into all matters.

If Olymel union members do not report to work after four (4) weeks, the union proposes that the Employer and the union meet to develop a joint plan around contacting those individuals.

Ultimately, we cannot agree that Olymel's Red Deer Plant has been made safe for our members, nor to a reopening of the Plant, until our list of action items has been fulfilled.

In our many meetings since the Plant closure, we believe good progress has been made in establishing a collaborative, employee-focused approach to the safety hazard presented by COVID-19.

Nothing is more important to UFCW Local 401 than the safety of our members. There have already been too many tragic losses in this outbreak that may otherwise have been prevented.

It strikes me as short-sighted and ill-advised to abandon everyone's significant efforts and our meaningful progress by rushing to reopen the Plant before we are truly ready. I urge Olymel and government health officials to work with us in ensuring the safety of Olymel workers by committing to fulfilling our list of documented action items.

I look forward to your reply, and to our continued work on creating a safe workplace as efficiently and effectively as possible.

While urging cooperation and a collaborative approach, I feel I must end this letter somewhat bluntly. Please know that unless you can guarantee no one else will become ill and no one else will die, the rushed reopening of Olymel's Red Deer Plant and the resulting consequences will be on your conscience – and yours alone.

Sincerely,

Thomas Hesse
President
UFCW Local 401

Cc: Richelle Stewart
Chris O'Halloran
Larry Zima
Devin Yeager
Tony Evangelista