



Re-Opening the Economy with a Health and Safety Lens:

Since the COVID-19 virus forced us to retreat to our houses, we have come to recognize our front-line health care workers as heroes, and the workers who have kept our grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations, and women's shelters open as essential. As we begin to discuss the re-opening of our economy, it is critical we understand the importance of strong occupational health and safety rules. Workers need a guarantee that their health and safety will not be compromised and that proper health and safety pre-conditions – social distancing, cleaning and hygiene regime, access to adequate PPE, etc. - will be in place when they return to work.

Going forward it is important that employers and government:

1. **LISTEN** to workers: Workers have a right to know the hazards in their workplace. They also have the right to participate in decisions that affect their health and safety.
2. **ENGAGE** with unions: Unions are dedicated to worker safety. Unions are in touch with front line staff in ways that employers and government regulators are not.
3. **STRENGTHEN** Workplace Health and Safety Committees: These joint employer and worker committees are key to addressing work site health and safety issues. Let's make sure they are actively meeting, just like the law says.
4. **EMBRACE** the precautionary principle: The foundation of workplace OHS is to err on the side of safety. This is especially important in the time of a pandemic when COVID-19 can be so easily transmitted.
5. **ENSURE** properly approved PPE is available: No one should have to work without the necessary, certified personal protective equipment.
6. **COMMIT** to upfront inspections: Service NL OHS branch should be engaged in doing upfront inspections to ensure work sites are in compliance with COVID-19 public health directives.
7. **END** industry self-regulation: The Government of NL has to get tough on employers who do not implement public health directives and ensure safe workplaces.
8. **AMEND** the Labour Standards Act: Workers need job protection if they have to self isolate or take care of family. Government should include seven (7) paid sick days, and an additional fourteen (14) paid sick days during the event of a pandemic crisis. Eliminate sick notes for all workers.
9. **MODERNIZE** Workers' Compensation coverage: Should a worker contract the virus it should be treated as a presumptive illness and they will automatically receive workers' compensation.
10. **RE-INFORCE** the right to refuse unsafe work: The fundamental right to refuse unsafe work has to be respected. No worker wants to transmit the virus to their family.

“Worker safety is non-negotiable.”

**- Mary Shortall, President of the
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour**

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