



President's Message July 9, 2020 Transportation District 140

COVID-19 The Global Pandemic



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The unprecedented impact due to the COVID-19 Health Pandemic

On March 12, 2020 the World Health Organization declared the Covid-19 Corona virus a global health pandemic.

The IAMAW Canadian Office and Transportation District 140 immediately reacted to the World Health Organization global health pandemic declaration by scheduling emergency videoconferences with IAMAW Local Lodges, District Lodge 140 leaders & General Chairpersons, as well as Grand Lodge Representatives throughout Canada. As part of our continuing efforts to provide timely information and support, we continue to schedule videoconferences.

When the World Health Organization first declared a global pandemic, many of the Airlines and the Airline Servicing providers were uncertain what the impacts of this health advisory would have on their operations and, in many cases, predicted it to be a short term health advisory which they could financially sustain.

What happened in days and months following this announcement was unprecedented. Air travel was restricted and borders between countries and provinces began to close. The impacts within the air transportation sector rapidly changed, sometimes by the hour, with devastating effects to the members we service within Transportation District 140.

The majority of employers where we represent members began to serve the Union with either "Force Majeure" or "Layoff" Notices and our members were either placed on off-duty status or were laid off. The majority of our members that were laid off or placed on off-duty status were justifiably devastated with the uncertainty of the future for them and their families.

In order to assist our members, the IAMAW Canadian Office, in coordination with Transportation District 140, immediately produced a “how to” information package for our members to apply for Employment Insurance Benefits (EI) followed by a Canadian Employment Relief Benefit (CERB) information package.

Upon availability of an emergency wage subsidy program, the IAMAW urged employers to consider applying for this aid, helping both our members and businesses. In coordination with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the IAMAW lobbied the Federal Government to extend the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy Benefit (CEWS), knowing that the subsidy was a lifeline for numerous members.

The pandemic has highlighted a general lack of preparedness on part of employers which, coupled with shortages of equipment, led to long delays in accessing personal protective equipment (PPE) across sectors. IAMAW members experienced the same challenges in their workplaces, and due to the severity of concerns that were raised, we moved quickly to rectify these issues. A series of concerted and targeted actions yielded positive results, which made a tangible difference in the working lives of our members, while also making workplaces safer for other workers, as well as passengers.

As the economy slowly emerges from the pandemic, we are now beginning a “new normal” which will bring new challenges and realities, requiring us to respond quickly, creatively and effectively. Employers are gradually beginning to recall members back to work with new Employer PPE procedures. As a further adaptation to the pandemic, airports are implementing new air travel screening procedures such as thermal imaging. We are keeping a close eye on the new technological developments, as they bring both opportunities and risks. Thermal imaging is expected to bring additional work and a possibility of new jobs for our members working for Garda and G4S, which is a positive development in the midst of a serious crisis. On the other hand, we also recognize that there are legal, technical and privacy implications, which the IAMAW is learning more about and following closely to ensure passenger and worker privacy is protected.

What is unknown is how long the road to recovery will be, but one thing is certain, the IAMAW quickly adapted to the challenges and we are certainly ready for the work and new realities that are before us. Together we stood strong and got through the worst of the crisis and together we will face whatever the future holds. This will be but another chapter in the long history of the IAMAW.



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