



**Submission to**  
*The Workers' Compensation Act*  
**Committee of Review**

November, 2015



Saskatchewan  
Building Trades



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**by the**  
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**Contents**

**Who We Are** .....1

**Introduction** .....2

**Recommendation 1: Focus on Prevention** .....3

**Recommendation 2: Invest in WCB Employees** .....5

**Recommendation 3: Focus on Productivity and Client Service** ..6

**Conclusion** .....7

**Appendix: Saskatchewan Building Trades Affiliated Unions** ....8

## Who We Are

The Saskatchewan Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council represents the construction unions of Saskatchewan. We are organized by trade, each trade having a union affiliated with the Building Trades. We are:

- Boilermakers
- Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers
- Carpenters
- Electrical Workers
- Elevator Constructors
- Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers
- Iron Workers
- Labourers
- Millwrights
- Operating Engineers
- Painters and Allied Trades
- Plasterers and Cement Masons
- Plumbers and Pipefitters
- Sheet Metal Workers

The Saskatchewan Building Trades is an organization composed of affiliated unions representing about 7,000 organized construction workers in Saskatchewan. The Council is affiliated with the Building Trades Department, AFL-CIO, that has over 400,000 members across Canada.

Saskatchewan Building Trades members build major industrial and commercial projects such as hospitals, power plants and mines. Our members have worked on all of the biggest construction projects in Saskatchewan in the last decade. We built the boom.

The main purpose of the Saskatchewan Building Trades is to promote and assist all construction workers and their families in achieving a high standard of living. The Council also promotes the education and training of workers in the construction industry. We take great pride in saying that our members are the highest skilled construction workers available and we back up what we say with our actions. Our affiliates have spent millions of dollars in the last few years on training facilities and programs. We also make large investments in safety but we know we can do more.

## Introduction

In 2013, Saskatchewan held the second highest workplace injury rate in Canada. While a decline in injury rates in 2014 is a welcome development, Saskatchewan continues to have higher incidents of injury than most other provinces in Canada. The Building Trades believes governments, employers, workers and unions should work together to achieve injury rates at work that are lower than present levels and lower than the national average. To quote Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) Vice President of Prevention, Phil Germain:

*“The most recent Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (AWCBC) statistics show the national time loss injury rate average at 1.65 percent. While comparative data differs somewhat, Saskatchewan's time loss injury rate is almost twice the national average at 2.41 percent. Other jurisdictions in Canada are also improving their safety records just like we are but we have a lot more ground to cover.”*

Reducing injury at work is beneficial first and foremost to workers and their employers but also for co-workers, families, and communities. The economic cost of workplace injury is tremendous. To put it in perspective, a 1997 study in the United States indicated:

*“The total costs of occupational injuries and illnesses appears to be considerably larger than those for Alzheimer disease and are of the same magnitude as those of cancer, of all circulatory disease, and of all musculoskeletal conditions. These costs are high in part because so many people are at risk.”<sup>1</sup>*

Imagine the benefit to Saskatchewan families and communities if we could achieve *Mission: Zero*.

<sup>1</sup>Leigh et. al. 1997: *Occupational Injury and Illness in the United States: Estimates of Costs, Morbidity, and Mortality*

## Recommendation 1: Focus on Prevention

The Saskatchewan Building Trades believes that efforts to reduce workplace injury must be the primary goal of the Workers' Compensation Board and also of unions, governments, employers and workers. We are aware that the responsibility for safe workplaces is a shared responsibility. It is a responsibility that the Saskatchewan Building Trades takes seriously and one we pledge to redouble our efforts to achieve – in partnership with employers and the WCB.

As an organization, the Building Trades spends a lot of time and money on safety but we can do more. Industrial and commercial construction as a category was second only to healthcare in registered claims with 1,386 claims in 2014. We have work to do. We are willing to do the work and we ask the WCB and employers to also do more to ensure that Saskatchewan workers are not injured on the job.

We recommend that the WCB further enhance public education efforts to create a culture of safety in Saskatchewan. WCB's efforts at public education must be matched by further enforcement activities conducted by the appropriate agencies, including inspections and penalties to offending organizations. In a 2015 study, the Institute for Work and Health:

*“...found strong evidence for the effectiveness of inspections with citations and penalties in reducing injuries and moderate evidence that inspections without penalties have no effect in reducing injuries. They found moderate evidence that the first inspection has the largest impact on compliance rates, with the impact of second, third or subsequent inspections being substantially lower.”<sup>2</sup>*

We urge the government to increase money spent on education, enforcement and inspection by 10 percent every year that Saskatchewan is worse than the national average for workplace injury. Once Saskatchewan's workplace injury rate becomes lower than the national average, funding could remain static or be reduced as appropriate.

In order to build support around a culture of safety and to move Saskatchewan meaningfully toward *Mission: Zero*, the Saskatchewan Building Trades recommends that the WCB hold a Workplace Safety Summit involving key safety partners to chart a course toward zero workplace injuries in Saskatchewan. Employers, unions, regulators and educators should all attend so that they may chart a common course to a Saskatchewan safer for workers.

<sup>2</sup>At Work, Issue 81, Summer 2015: Institute for Work & Health, Toronto



In support of a Workplace Safety Summit, research could be prepared in advance on key areas, including:

- the annual economic and human cost of injury to the Saskatchewan economy and society;
- best practices for enforcement and inspection;
- strategies to identify and respond to high risk workers and employers;
- research on effective tactics to reduce injury among high risk workers and in high risk workplaces; and
- options to most effectively assist workers to recover from injury and reintegrate into the workplace.

We all know that Saskatchewan can lead instead of lag when it comes to workplace safety. The time to act is now.

## **Recommendation 2: Invest in WCB Employees**

The Saskatchewan Building Trades recognizes that workplace injuries are often tragic events and that dealing with the consequences requires a great deal of skill and competence on the part of WCB employees. The Saskatchewan Building Trades, our affiliated unions and partner employers invest a great deal of time and money in ensuring members of the Saskatchewan Building Trades are the highest skilled and most productive tradespeople available in the labour market. We know – and our employers know – the skill level of our workers is directly related to the ability of an organization to deliver exceptional outcomes. We think the same holds true for the WCB.

As such, we recommend that the Workers' Compensation Board further invest in the development of highly skilled workers who are extremely committed to their clients. If Saskatchewan is to make a substantial and lasting move from high to low rates of injury, we believe the WCB will have to continually enhance its effectiveness as an organization. One of the best ways to ensure that an organization can deliver on its goals is to invest in the capacity of its people, processes and information systems.

### **Recommendation 3: Focus on Productivity and Client Service**

The Saskatchewan Building Trades supports understanding workplace injury prevention and mitigation from a productivity perspective. Obviously maintaining worker productivity is best done by avoiding injury in the first place. An important secondary goal to reducing the incidents of workplace injury is to further improve WCB's ability to deal with injured workers in a manner that respectfully maintains and promotes maximum worker productivity.

When injury occurs, we believe that the WCB should focus on helping workers to recover and contribute to the workplace to their highest capacity as soon as they are able. In our experience, workers are happiest when they are at work in situations that reward their skills and challenge their abilities. The WCB plays a key role in helping workers return to productivity after injury occurs. We recommend that the WCB evaluate their processes and actions against the standard of how well they contribute to restoring or adding to maximum worker productivity.

For example, instead of rushing workers back to the workplace in a diminished capacity, that does not contribute in a meaningful way, the WCB should investigate other options. Priority should be given to further training or retraining injured workers to ensure they can contribute productively when they do return to work. Cooperative efforts from employers, workers, unions and the WCB will be required to facilitate such a transition.



## Conclusion

The opportunity exists for unions, governments and employers to work together to make meaningful changes in the lives of workers and thereby benefiting our economy and our society. In Saskatchewan, we are wasting valuable human resources by not doing more to eliminate unnecessary workplace accidents.

The safety of our workplaces and the health of our workers are unique issues in which we all have common cause. Our shared contributions of goodwill, coordination and a modest investment will reward the men and women working in Saskatchewan in a way that few investments can.

The Saskatchewan Building Trades urges the government to work with us and employers to make a difference.

## **Appendix: Saskatchewan Building Trades Affiliated Unions**

Additional information on our affiliates, and web links, can be found at:

<http://www.saskbuildingtrades.com/about-us/our-affiliates/>

### **Boilermakers**

International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Local 555  
350 Solomon Drive  
Regina, SK  
S4N 5A8

### **Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers**

Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers, Local 1  
1645 Reynolds Street, Box 3885  
Regina, SK  
S4P 3R8

### **Carpenters**

Construction and General Workers, Local 180  
1866 McAra Street  
Regina, SK  
S4N 6C4

### **Electrical Workers**

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 529  
#10, 3703 Kochar Avenue  
Saskatoon, SK  
S7P 0B8

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 2038  
1920 McAra Street  
Regina, SK  
S4N 5R1

### **Elevator Constructors**

International Union of Elevator Constructors, Local 102  
1794 St. Matthews Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB  
R3H 0A5

### **Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers**

International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers,  
Local 119  
E – 444 Quebec Street  
Regina, SK  
S4R 1K7

**Iron Workers**

International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental & Reinforcing  
Iron Workers, Local 771  
1138 Dewdney Avenue East  
Regina, SK  
S4N 0E2

**Labourers**

Teamsters, Local 395  
1515 Park Street  
Regina, SK  
S4N 2E5

**Millwrights**

Millwrights, Local 1021  
3730 Kinnear Place  
Saskatoon, SK  
S7P 0A6

**Operating Engineers**

International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 870  
Box 1112  
Saskatoon, SK  
S7K 0E9

**Painters and Allied Trades**

International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, Local 739  
168 Higgins Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB  
R3B 0A8

**Plasterers & Cement Masons**

Operative Plasterers & Cement Masons, Local 222  
#42, 4004 – 97th Street  
Edmonton, AB  
T6E 6N1

**Plumbers & Pipefitters**

United Association of Plumbers & Pipefitters, Local 179  
402 Solomon Drive  
Regina, SK  
S4N 5A8

**Sheet Metal Workers**

Sheet Metal Workers' International Association, Local 296  
1355 – 11th Avenue  
Regina, SK  
S4P 0G8