



NEWS RELEASE

August 14, 2009
For Immediate Release

Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour (NLFL) President Lana Payne says the overhaul of the province's occupational, health and safety regulations has not only raised minimum standards, but should make a real difference in the health and safety of workers in every sector of the economy.

The review of the regulations took more than two years and consultations with government officials were extensive. The Occupational, Health and Safety Committee of the Federation of Labour which is made up of activists from a number of the Federation's union affiliates worked with government officials to ensure the new regulations not just reflected today's workplaces and the risks in them, but that the new laws provided better protection for working people.

"I would like to commend our union activists who worked vigilantly and diligently to ensure we had stronger laws, more effective laws - laws that better protect working people," said Ms. Payne.

"This is about saving lives and preventing injuries through safer workplaces and it is about ensuring workers' long-term health. The key now is education of not just working people, but employers. There must be an extensive education program and campaign to ensure everyone knows what their rights and obligations are under the law. These new regulations have the potential to transform workplaces, but there is much work to be done before that can happen."

In addition to education, enforcement and monitoring of the new regulations is absolutely critical. "We are hopeful for example that health surveillance regulations will help prevent occupational disease."

More than half of the annual workplace fatalities in the province are from occupational disease. Ninety-five people died from occupational disease in our province between 2002 and 2008. Another 63 workers died on the job during the same period.

Ms. Payne noted that the provincial government has been increasing its enforcement efforts over the past several years. For example, the number of workplace inspections has doubled from 2,100 in 2002 to 4,200 in 2008. Mandatory training of OHS workplace committees and representatives and increased enforcement have resulted in a significant increase in stop work orders being issued. The number of stop-work orders increased from 492 in 2006 to 600 in 2007 to 824 in 2008. In addition, the number of directives to employers issued by OH&S division has more than doubled from 2,906 in 2002 to 6,419 in 2007.

"The new regulations place considerable onus on employers to consult and work with OHS committees, reps or designates when performing workplace assessments and when developing procedures to eliminate and control the hazards and risks in a workplace," said the Federation President.



The 186 regulations which were 30 years old now number 518 and include new laws governing ergonomics which are aimed at reducing soft-tissue injuries in workplaces. Soft-tissue injuries account for more than 60% of all workplace injuries. There are on average about 7,500 reported workplace injuries annually in the province.

In addition, with respect to occupational disease, the Federation was successful in getting the silica code of practice included in the regulations and a list of more than 70 notifiable occupational diseases. This is critical to our efforts to prevent occupational disease in future, she said.

There were also a number of significant improvements for regulations governing a number of occupations in the construction industry, including mandatory and standardized training for traffic control employees (flag persons); mandatory certification for boom crane operators; and training for those using fall protection gear.

In addition, the Federation welcomes improvements to laws governing working in confined spaces, and for the first time, laws to protect workers who work alone and to prevent violence in the workplace.

“Getting the new laws was the first step, now the real work begins,” said Ms. Payne. “The Federation will work with the provincial government to ensure these new regulations are as effective as they can be and that means education and enforcement.”

“We should never forget that there is nothing more important than protecting a worker’s health and safety and if that means more effort is needed at communicating, at re-organizing workplaces, at identifying, eliminating or minimizing risks and hazards than what is that compared to someone’s life or long-term health.”

-30-

For more information contact NLFL President Lana Payne @ 754-1660 or 743-5343.