



# CENTRAL ONTARIO BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION TRADES COUNCIL

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VIA E-MAIL

March 20, 2020

Minister Monte McNaughton  
Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development  
14<sup>th</sup> Floor, 400 University Ave.  
Toronto, ON  
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Dear Minister McNaughton,

As you know, the Central Ontario Building Trades (COBT) is the largest local Building Trades Council in Ontario with many of my affiliate local trades being the largest trades not only in Ontario, but in Canada. My office has been fielding literally hundreds of phone calls from our members on active jobsites who are concerned about their health in the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic and the number of calls has been escalating each week. Our Reps have witnessed first-hand the lack of sanitary working conditions our members are being exposed to and a **two week pause** is required in our industry to create safer working conditions for our members and to help us to get out in front of this deadly virus.

Site washrooms and wash-up facilities get overrun at the best of times, let alone in today's current conditions with COVID – 19 where our facilities are unable to keep up with the new demand and recommendations that Health Canada mandates, including hand-washing for a minimum of 20 seconds and using hand sanitizer of at least 60% alcohol content. In light of these new measures, we're using more soap than ever and we know the country is in short supply of hand sanitizer, making the ability to get them replenished almost impossible. Some sites have no running water, let alone hot water. Other sites don't have enough sinks to meet the new demand of renewed hygiene. Sadly, in this day and age, we have some sites that only have porta-potties that are also being taxed beyond their capabilities.

Social distancing is also next to impossible to achieve on our jobsites where we have hundreds and hundreds of workers with systems that interact and overlap with everyone needing to access the same areas to effectively do their jobs or run their material. Not to mention, how do you implement social distancing on a hoist or inside an elevator jammed with tradespeople?

It's easy for those who are not on the front lines and not working in these conditions to say workers have the right to refuse unsafe work, however, we also know this legislation is rarely used in a union environment and even less so for those workers who lack representation for fear of reprisal. Offering this as a solution is not solving the problem or protecting our workers. As leaders, we must do better than this. Let us remember, our workers are returning home, potentially exposing our families and loved ones, along with others within our communities and businesses.

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COBT & AFFILIATES SUPPORTING DIVERSITY IN THE TRADES  
THROUGH HAMMER HEADS



Our office orchestrated a conference call on Wednesday of this week with COBT Business Managers where we discussed our industry being shut down and, obviously, as construction workers ourselves, none of us wants to see a situation like this arise, however, everyone on the phone understood the dire situation that our members are facing and, at the end of the day, we all agreed that the protection and the health and safety of our membership was the most important thing.

In light of that, a **temporary or two week pause**, just like we have on many sites over Christmas and New Year, will give employers a chance to clean, replenish and restock clean-up facilities and, also, to create **New Policies**, clean-up facility schedules to meet the new demand and other appropriate measures including social distancing policies, staggered start and stop times, lunches and breaks, among others, to be implemented immediately to protect the health and safety of our workers to prevent the spread of this virus. As always, we need to work in conjunction with your MOL Inspectors to ensure that safe working conditions for all workers are being met in these uncertain times. Unions in Quebec and British Columbia have taken a stance with government to scale down work on all jobsites; major American cities are completely closing down. By taking these preventative measures now, we can put our city in a safer position to weather this virus so that a full lockdown may not be necessary.

Construction sparks our economy and we must keep our workers safe so that they can keep working in both the short-term and the long-term. By implementing new measures that protect our workers now, they can continue to help propel our economy forward in the aftermath of COVID – 19. We have seen what has happened in U.S. cities when they have not reacted or been slow to react and the death and spread of this virus which has resulted from that. How can we allow this to repeat itself in Ontario, the driving force of Canada? We must stand together as Canadians and help protect all of our citizens. The time to act is now.

Sincerely,



James St. John  
Business Manager / Financial Secretary

cc: Premier Doug Ford

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