



UNITED ASSOCIATION
of Journeymen & Apprentices of the
PLUMBING & PIPEFITTING
Industry of the United States and Canada
Local Union 170 – Affiliated with AFL-CIO-CFL

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Good afternoon Members and families:

These are certainly unprecedented times and we are doing everything within our power to support and inform you at this time of need. I am well aware that every situation is different, from some members having to self-isolate to members being asked to go to work and feel as though they have no choice. We have had young members asked by their spouse to not return home from work in fear that they may have been exposed and being fearful of infecting their children. I hear you and fully understand your concerns, and I am living it along with you. I myself had a spouse during the SARs outbreak who was a nurse dealing with it on her unit, with three children under 3, so I know first-hand the stress it brings. Whatever your situation is, we are working around the clock trying to address the concerns you are raising. While the jobsites remain open, we are lobbying government and WorkSafe BC to mandate and enforce strict sanitary and distancing protocols to ensure our members' safety.

Union's Ability to close Construction Sites

Local 170 has no legal authority to direct a closure of a workplace over the COVID-19 pandemic. We have consulted with our industry partners across Canada and with our legal team and have been directed that any closure initiated by the Local would constitute an unlawful work stoppage. Any Employer who negligently directs its employees to continue working where there is a known exposure risk could risk liability in a civil action. The health and safety refusal to work is an individual employee statutory protection. Any concerns that you may have about the worksite should be raised with the site Health and Safety representative as required under the WorkSafeBC regulations. Thereafter, the employer must investigate and must take measures if appropriate. If there is a situation that is not addressed, then you can refuse to work without reprisal or threat of termination. WorkSafeBC should be called to assess the situation and have it rectified.

If WorkSafeBC deems the worksite to be safe and you still feel it is unsafe to work given the current COVID-19 situation, you can voluntarily terminate, and apply for Employment Insurance Regular Benefits or the new EI Support Benefit. Eligibility will be assessed by Service Canada on a case by case basis.

Conference Call with Minister of Labour Harry Bains

On Friday we had a conference call with the Minister of Labour Harry Bains and many topics were discussed. We are fortunate to have this direct contact with the government which is based on the fact the we have a great relationship with Harry Bains and his staff who are doing all they can

during this Pandemic. Their advice is to listen to the health professionals, and they stated that they are making their decisions based on science. In saying that, it was made very clear that they are trying their best not to halt the economy as a whole, and that at this time, an all out ban on construction would cripple the economy. The main focus for us was to provide them information and your feedback of the actual state of sanitation on the jobsites. We made it abundantly clear that we need a **“Public Health Directive for Construction”**.

Members Helping Members

Given these difficult times, we would like to come together as a membership and help those among us who might be in need. If there is any member, or if you know of any member who needs assistance such as grocery shopping, picking up meds, a ride to a physician, etc, please contact our office by emailing info@ualocal170.com. For those older members who are not online, we have also set up a dedicated telephone line:

Member Assistance Line (778) 658-0819

Please leave a message and we will have someone contact you as soon as we are able and will try to connect you with a member who can offer a hand.

Any member who is willing and able to assist another member please leave your contact information at info@ualocal170.com, or call the Member Assistance Line above. We will add your name to our Member Assistance group and contact you if there is a member who needs some help.

It's in times of crisis, that I see the strength, generosity and resilience of our 170 members. We will get through this difficult time together.

Travel Insurance Update during COVID-19 from Local 170 Welfare Plan

There is an understandable level of concern regarding international travel, as this situation is developing daily, The RSA Travel Insurance Team have a dedicated team focused to ensure their operations and claims teams will continue to be available to serve all those insured. Please visit the Plumbers Local 170 Welfare Plan website link for more information: <http://www.plumbers.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020-03.18-Travel-Medical-Emergency-Policy-COVID-19-2.pdf>

The Union remains open

Our offices are not open for walk-ins, but it's business as usual at Local 170. All services are available and staff in onsite to help you. You can contact me and or the other representatives at any time and we are more than willing to assist you through these difficult times. We are updating our website daily, so please visit our webpage dedicated to all things COVID-19 for further information and resources. <https://ualocal170.com/covid-19-info-resources-for-members/>.

Fraternally,



A.D. Al Phillips, RSE
Business Manager & Financial Secretary