



# Health & Safety Matters



April 2009

## April 28 Day of Mourning

CUPE created the Day of mourning back in the mid-1980s to commemorate the lives of workers who had died, suffered an injury or had their health undermined while trying to make a living. The now familiar canary flags, pins and logos will appear across British Columbia, Canada, and many other countries.

Many workplaces join forces with local District and Labour Councils conducting workplace health and safety activities the week of April 28. Other areas hold a community ceremony that includes flags at half-mast, guest speakers from various communities and Labour organizations including WorkSafeBC and observe a moment of silence in the workplace or at a local cenotaph. April 28 Day of Mourning is a time to mourn but also a time to get organized and exercise your rights by getting educated and involved to help make our workplaces safer. To order April 28 resources that include posters, t-shirts, bookmarks

and right to refuse cards to assist with April 28, check with your Local for order forms sent from the National OH&S Branch, also available from [www.cupe.ca](http://www.cupe.ca) or contact Vanessa Wolff, the B.C. National Health and Safety Representative at [vwolff@cupe.ca](mailto:vwolff@cupe.ca). ■

Submitted by Marlene Kantz  
Co-Chair  
**CUPE BC OH&S Committee**

## B.C. FATALITIES ON THE RISE

In B.C., 3 workers die each week  
• 3200 work injuries are reported every week  
• 19 workers are permanently disabled every working day.

Total Fatalities: .....160  
(139 in 2007)

Occupational Disease: .....76  
(53 Asbestos exposures)

Young Workers: .....4

SOURCE: 2008 WorkSafeBC Day of Mourning British Columbia facts.

## OH&S Committee to conduct province-wide survey

Your Occupational Health & Safety Committee has heard overwhelming concerns from members across this Province. We've heard about your struggles to deal with issues in your locals concerning unsafe working conditions, violence in the workplace, working alone, and the risk that Young Workers take – just to name a few. Knowing that we have heard from just a fraction of our members, and because our workplace committees are struggling to get their voices heard in the workplace, we would like all sectors and locals to do the survey.

It's important that all locals and sectors participate in this survey – it's about your Health & Safety. The Employer has the upper hand in driving this car and we need to be back in the driver's seat.

The Health & Safety Committee developed a survey that covers a wide

range of topics that fall within the Health & Safety scope. The survey will be launched at the CUPE BC Division Convention in Victoria this April.

Drop by our table to complete the survey online. Thereafter hard copies will be sent to each local across the Province. We hope all CUPE members complete the survey either online or using the paper version. Please return it to the B.C. Regional Office.

Survey results will be published on the CUPE BC website and in an upcoming edition of *Health & Safety Matters*.

Please participate in this very important survey and have your voices heard so that we can ensure strong and healthy workplaces for all. ■

Submitted by Vanessa Wolff  
National Health & Safety Rep  
**CUPE BC OH&S Committee**

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# CUPE BC ADOPTS SCENT-FREE POLICY



At the February 2009 Executive Board meeting, CUPE BC adopted a **Scent-Free Policy and Guideline** working towards a scent-reduced environment.

This policy was adopted to protect individuals with fragrance sensitivities and to possibly prevent others from developing such sensitivities. CUPE BC is asking for voluntary cooperation towards a scent-reduced environment. Members and visitors to CUPE offices and functions are strongly encouraged to avoid or reduce the use of fragranced products, and to replace them with unscented alternatives. This is a request to voluntarily refrain from chemical-based scented products, and not a ban on scented products.

## What is the issue?

Exposure to perfumes and other scented products can trigger serious health reactions in individuals with asthma, allergies, migraines, or chemical sensitivities.

Fragrances are found in a wide range of products. Common scented products include perfume, cologne, aftershave, deodorant, soap, shampoo, hairspray, body spray, makeup and powders. Examples of other products with added scents include air fresheners, fabric softeners, laundry detergents, cleaners, carpet deodorizers, facial tissues, and candles.

We generally think that it is a personal choice to use fragrances; however,

fragrance chemicals are by their very nature shared. Chemicals vapourize into the air and are easily inhaled by those around us. Today's scented products are made up of a complex mixture of chemicals which can contribute to indoor air quality problems and cause health problems.

Some of these fragrance chemicals are known to be skin sensitizers. Some are also respiratory tract irritants, and can trigger asthma and breathing difficulties. Asthmatics commonly cite fragrances as initiating or exacerbating their asthma. Fragrances are also implicated in vascular changes that can trigger migraines in susceptible individuals. Individuals with chemical sensitivities can experience symptoms at very low levels in the air, far below those known to cause harmful effects in the general population.

Susceptible individuals can experience a variety of symptoms, including headache, sore throat, runny nose, sinus congestion, wheezing, shortness of breath, dizziness, anxiety, anger, nausea, fatigue, mental confusion and an inability to concentrate. Although the mechanisms by which fragrance chemicals act to produce symptoms are not yet understood, the impact on all those affected can be quite severe, resulting in great difficulty in work and study activities.

## What is CUPE BC doing about it?

Recognizing that chemicals, including fragrance chemicals, can negatively impact indoor air quality, CUPE BC will strive to:

- Promote the reduction of unnecessary use of chemicals, including fragrance chemicals.
- Promote the use of environmentally-friendly and least harmful products at worksites.
- Target harmful chemicals and contaminants and implement controls to effectively prevent or minimize their release into the general air as a result of building, maintenance,

custodial, research and teaching activities.

- Develop proper information and training to promote the above to CUPE BC members.

## What can you do to help?

- Be considerate of those who are sensitive to fragrance chemicals. Avoid using scented products; instead, use scent-free alternatives.
- If you do use scented products, use them sparingly. A general guideline for scented products is that the scent should not be detectable more than an arm's length away from you. Do not apply scented products in a public area.
- Avoid using products (e.g. air fresheners or potpourris) that give off chemical-based scents in your work area.
- Avoid using laundry products or cleaning agents that are scented. Air out dry-cleaned clothing before wearing.

## What can you do if you are sensitive to fragrance chemicals?

- If you feel you can do so comfortably, approach the scented person and let him/her know how you react to fragrances. Be specific about the types of physical reactions you have (e.g. asthma attacks, migraines, shortness of breath). Talk to the person in a cordial and respectful manner. Ask for their understanding and cooperation. Many people are unaware of the potential health effects of fragrance chemicals.
- Inform CUPE BC convention or conference staff or your workshop facilitator of your sensitivities, your symptoms, and the types of exposures that improve or worsen these symptoms. Ask them to help find a solution to your situation.

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# DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION

Employers regularly support the use of wireless devices as an effective way to manage work demands. Those demands increase workload, time pressures and mental stress. Using electronic equipment while driving slows reaction time by 20% and a driver using an electronic device while driving is four times as likely to be in a collision and twice as likely to rear-end another vehicle.

Have you ever been aggravated by a driver who is distracted while talking on his or her mobile telephone or texting? These drivers are InTEXTicated. It is obviously difficult to keep your mind on your driving while talking or texting on the phone. Now there is a scientific study that documents the dangers of using electronic equipment while driving. A new English study shows that using a mobile phone impairs driving behavior more than being drunk.

Direct Line, England's leading insurer who commissioned a study at the Transport Research Laboratory, is hoping their findings will lend support to a total ban on the use of hand-held mobile devices while driving. The Direct Line study, carried out over three months, involved testing the reaction times and driving performance of a panel of volunteers using a sophisticated driving simulator. Researchers tested how driving was impaired by talking or texting on a hand-held mobile phone, a hands-free phone, and when drivers had consumed enough alcohol to be above the legal drink-drive limit.

The results demonstrate that drivers' reaction times were, on average, 30% slower when talking or texting on a hand-held mobile device compared to being drunk and nearly 50% slower than normal driving conditions. According to the tests, drivers talking on a hand-held were less able to maintain a constant speed and found it more difficult to keep a safe distance from the car in front.



*A new study from England finds that driving while using a cell phone is more dangerous than driving while intoxicated.*

On average, it took hand-held mobile phone users half a second longer to react than normal and a third of a second longer to react compared to when they were drunk. At 70 mph, this half-second difference is equivalent to traveling an additional 46 feet before reacting to a hazard on the road.

Using a hands-free electronic device also proved to be a considerable distraction for drivers. In fact, participants in the study stated that they found it easier to drive drunk than to drive and use a mobile phone (hand-held or hands-free). In addition, drivers using either a hands-free or a hand-held mobile phone significantly missed more road warning signs than when drunk.

Phone company records of phone calls and text messages are irrefutable and accurate to the second; so it would be an easy matter to prove in court that a person was talking or texting at the time of an accident.

As with drunken driving, we require a law requiring jail sentence (no matter the driver's age) to be mandatory whenever anyone is an InTEXTicated driver.

We must try to stop 'Driving While InTEXTicated' and lobby for a law before more innocent people are maimed or killed. ■

Submitted by Marlene Kantz, President  
Okanagan Mainline District Council,  
Co-Chair

**CUPE BC OH&S Committee**

## CUPE BC adopts scent-free policy

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■ Consult with your physician about your symptoms.

CUPE BC is developing a guideline to raise member awareness about the potential impact of fragrance chemicals on the health, wellbeing, productivity and lifestyle of those affected. Information on scent awareness will be available on posters, web sites, information brochures and training sessions.

CUPE BC is committed to a safe and healthy environment in all CUPE offices and functions. ■

Submitted by Susan Zander  
Co-Chair

**CUPE BC OH&S Committee**



## Brother Barry Doyle – a great loss to us all

On December 19th, 2008 our movement lost a great activist, mentor and friend. Brother Barry Doyle, National Health & Safety Senior Officer, was a true inspiration to anyone who wanted to know anything about Health & Safety. Members here in B.C. who attended our last two CUPE BC Health

& Safety Conferences, had the opportunity to meet Barry. He was also one of the main planners of the National Health & Safety Conference held in St. John's, NFLD in October, 2008.

Barry was a 'down to earth' and 'what you see is what you get' kind of guy. He always spoke from the heart and if you came to him with an issue, he would not beat around the bush when he told you what he felt or how you could try and resolve it. Barry always advocated for better Health & Safety protection for workers, and it didn't matter where you worked. He was principled, dedicated and inspiring to all who worked with and around him.

When conferences and workshops were needed in B.C., I would often look to Barry for guidance and support. He was not just my Senior Officer and not just responsible for B.C., but covered most of the country from coast to coast. He would ask, "what do the members need and how do we deliver the message so they get

it." I would always tell him, "There is only one way Barry; you have to come and help deliver the message." Barry had a profound way of expressing himself so that you could see the message visually in front of you as he was telling the story. There was empathy, support, guidance and the ongoing message there that you were never in it alone. I learned a lot from Barry and I hope a lot of you that were exposed to him have as well.

His wife Andrea wants their children to know about the good work that their father did when they grow up. If he has touched you in a significant way as he has touched me, I hope you can someday share that with his children.

Barry was only 41 when he died. A scholarship fund has been established for his children, Jaimie and Tallie. ■

Submitted by Vanessa Wolff  
CUPE National Health & Safety Representative  
**CUPE BC OH&S Committee**

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## NEOLIBERALISM: TOXIC IN ANY DOSAGE

The neoliberal economic model imposes a set of [anti] values in the social, political and ethical fields that affect health and safety.

Gone are the days when the unwritten Social Contract between employers and employees granted a decent level of compensation to workers when he/she got injured. The price exerted from labour for the enactment of the Social Contract was the assurances that organized labour would not seek a fundamental and radical change in society.

By the mid-eighties and through the present time, the neo-liberal ideology has torn up the Social Contract and greatly dismantled the social safety net, transforming our workplace, society and family relationships into commodities where free market laws are ruthlessly applied.

Job insecurity, privatization, poor working conditions and higher

productivity demands result in higher level of stress and decreased levels of compensation to injured workers. The rehabilitation industry, with its professional staff, charts, lifting devices, fancy offices and recommendations to employers, are now forcing injured workers back to the workplace in the shortest possible period of time in a rubber-stamped, state-sponsored exercise that intrinsically negates the rights of workers to be convalescent and return to work ONLY when they are ready to work:

There was a time when the state agency in charge of compensating and helping injured workers was called Workers' Compensation. The same agency has morphed into WorkSafe whereby the word "Compensation" – meaning cost, premiums, money - has been eliminated altogether. The new name reflects the neoliberal ideology: go along with the market, you are on

your own, get back to work, you will not collect and if you do, it will be by a very short period of time.

Our role as trade unionists is to engage in organizing at the community level, exposing and resisting the neoliberal drive. In order to do that, we first need to be clear ourselves what is causing the problem and from there develop alternatives that can be implemented through our struggle.

The debacle of the current neoliberal economic system has exposed the myths and lies once expounded by capitalism. The consequences on the health and safety of workers cannot be solved merely by lobbying governments and agencies, only decisive militant action from the grassroots can contain and hopefully reverse the attack on working people. ■

Carlos Flores Sr.  
Member  
**CUPE BC OH&S Committee**