

HOW WE MOBILIZED FOR COVID-19

By Healthy McSaferton

The week that COVID-19 warnings started to permeate our awareness, fervent online conversations were happening around the clock among activists from most work floors in our Local. We all quickly agreed that the Corporation, despite knowing this pandemic was on its way since January, had no measures in place.

The only messaging we were receiving on the work floor was to “wash your hands.” No plan was presented by management. That Edmonton facilities now have, albeit it to varying degrees, staggered start times, workstation cleaning supplies, regular cleaning of high-touch areas, vehicle cleaning supplies, and appropriate PPE, can be traced directly back to organizing done by members and orchestrated through the Local Executive.

Here’s what we did. Through our activist network, we were able to find out who was self-isolating and mobilize those members through Zoom meetings. Each of those members were assigned a few facilities to monitor, and they quickly established a work floor contact on each wave and shift at the EMPP or a specific depot. Once this information chain was established, updates were sent daily, sometimes even hourly, from a cousin on the work floor to their at-home contact.

The at-home contact then entered the information for that worksite and corresponding shift/wave into a shared spreadsheet. As a result, within a matter of days our Local Executive was able to establish a clear picture of what was happening throughout the city and identify priorities.

An active brother on the frontlines explains,

“Through the education brought for by the Taking Back Our Workfloor course, our members were able to quickly question what our employer was doing to mitigate risk to employees. As no real answers were given, we reached out to our Local Health & Safety

Officer [Rashpal Sehmy] and President [Roland Schmidt] to guide us during these uncertain times. With a better understanding that we had to demand better prevention, our actions brought forth change and concern in the faces of management. As Rashpal and Roland worked by phone and email to create the needed changes, we are all thankful for their presence and how they stood up for us all during a historic world pandemic.”

As our brother mentions, we were able to quickly mobilize and take action as a direct result of the work floor organizing classes that had been running in our Local since the middle of 2019. Each time a member takes this class, they connect with a network of active members throughout the city. Within this network, there are regular conversations about pressing issues and how we can organize to improve things now – not years from now as the grievance system functions. This is not to knock the grievance process, but it can’t be our only way to advocate for ourselves, particularly in a situation as life-threatening as a pandemic.

The arrival of C-19 made it abundantly clear that our safety is in our own hands. If we were waiting for our supervisors to ensure our workplace safety, or waiting for a grievance regarding their inaction, what might the results have been? 📄

