

April 23, 2020

Monte McNaughton
Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development Ontario

Ronald Kelusky
Chief Prevention Officer and Assistant Deputy Minister at Ontario Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development

VIA EMAIL ONLY - monte.mcnaughtonco@pc.ola.org, ron.kelusky@ontario.ca

Dear Mr. McNaughton and Mr. Kelusky,

As the elected leader of 85,000 members of the United Steelworkers union in Ontario, I am writing to you with an urgent request to clarify the role of the Ministry of Labour in this very dangerous time in Ontario workplaces.

Our members work in every sector of the economy, including those parts of the economy deemed essential, like health care, mining and industrial production.

We are concerned about how workplace inspections are being handled, in particular when workers exercise their right to refuse unsafe work or make complaints about workplace safety in the current environment of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The overwhelming number of field reports that we have received show that investigations are not taking place on site, but rather by phone or even video. Also, the expectation seems to be that internal workplace processes with employers and the union will somehow suffice without orders or enforcement of such orders.

I am asking you to clarify whether your ministry is directing workplace inspections and investigations to be done without physical site inspections or without writing orders to rectify problems. If that is the case, it is unacceptable to our union and its members, who are asked to come into work, possibly without adequate personal protection equipment (PPE), social distancing or protocols that ensure their health and safety. 'Guidelines' from the Ministry of Health are often not enough, and not necessarily enforced.

If a workplace is deemed too unsafe for an inspector to do their work, how is it that workers themselves are expected to go to work? Calling in the MOL is usually **the last line of defence** for workers who cannot get support and resolution through the internal joint health and safety process.

Our union is very supportive of MOL inspectors. I know the inspectors want to do the right thing to protect all workers and do their jobs as outlined in the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

I also want to remind you of the terrible outbreak and at least one death at the Cargill meat-processing plant in High River, Alberta, where a 'Face Time' inspection gave the plant a passing grade even as the disease was racing through the production line, where workers did their jobs in close proximity to one another.

I am asking that you respond to this request for clarification no later than Tuesday, April 28, which is the National Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured (and now, infected) on the job.

Looking forward to, and expecting, a prompt reply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marty Warren" with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marty Warren
USW District 6 Director

Cc: Doug Ford, Premier Ontario
James Wallace, Chief of Staff
Christine Elliott, Minister of Health, Ontario
Heather Watt, Chief of Staff
David Corbett, Deputy Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development, Ontario
Ken Neumann, USW Canadian National Director
Sylvia Boyce, USW District 6 Health & Safety Coordinator