

Air Quality and Respiratory Illnesses Bulletin for the CUPE BC Region 2020

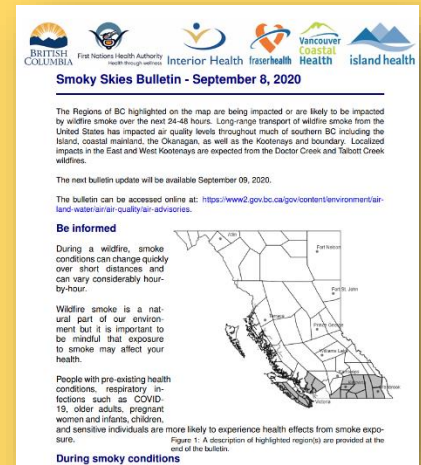
I. Introduction:

The purpose of this Bulletin is to provide resources for CUPE Locals and members to respond to air quality issues during respiratory illness epidemics and pandemics such as SARS, SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19), etc. as well as responding to air quality events related to forest fires generally.

B.C. (and the west coast of North America) have an increasing number of forest fires (wildfires) each year as per Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Government of B.C., various provincial health authorities and municipal governments. The severity of the forest fires is increasing as well.

Current air quality alerts can be accessed at the Government of B.C. Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) at:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/air/air-quality/aqhi>



II. Risks For Workers:

As per the B.C. Ministry of the Environment “people with pre-existing health conditions, respiratory infections such as COVID-19, older adults, pregnant women and infants, children and sensitive individuals are more likely to experience health effects from smoke exposure.”

Air quality affects many sectors and occupations, including those who work either outside or inside. Indoor workers may be affected due to the air intake from ventilation systems. Even short-term exposure is serious.

See the B.C. Centre for Disease Control at: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/clinical-resources/covid-19-care/clinical-care/vulnerable-populations> and <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/air/air-quality/air-advisories>.



III. WorkSafeBC (WCB) Resources and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Regulations:

The following sample OHS Regulations relate to air quality, noting that outdoor air quality is not generally addressed by legislation and the OHS Regulations:

- 3.1 to 3.4 (Occupational Health and Safety Programs)
- 3.5 to 3.8 (Workplace Inspections)
- 3.36 to 3.37 (Joint Health and Safety Committees)
- 4.70 to 4.80 (Indoor Air Quality)



See <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/books-guides/indoor-air-quality-a-guide-for-building-owners-managers-and-occupants> (general information) and <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/about-us/covid-19/general-ventilation-and-air-circulation-covid-19-faq?lang=en> (for information specifically related to COVID-19).

IV. CUPE Resources (BC and National Health and Safety Branch):

CUPE has many resources for air quality issues.

This includes the new and updated BC Region resource: “Indoor, Outdoor & Forest Fire Air Quality Guide Summer 2020”.

This Guide includes:

- responding to indoor and outdoor air quality issues related to forest fires
- risks associated with air quality
- the role of Joint Health and Safety Committees and worker representatives
- risk assessments
- employer responsibilities
- applicable legislation and OHS Regulations
- resources for filing workers compensation claims related to air quality exposure issues.

This document can be accessed from the CUPE BC OHS Committee website at:

https://www.cupe.bc.ca/occupational_health_and_safety_committee.

There are numerous other regularly updated resources on the CUPE BC OHS Committee website.

CUPE National Health and Safety Branch has many resources on air quality, HVAC systems, Fact Sheets, and materials related to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

These are available at:

<https://cupe.ca/indoor-air-quality-and-ventilation>

<https://cupe.ca/ventilation>

<https://cupe.ca/covid-19-health-and-safety-practices-0>

<https://cupe.ca/orders/indoor-air-quality-and-ventilation-fact-sheet>

Resources related to COVID-19 (this is a partial list.

New resources are uploaded regularly):

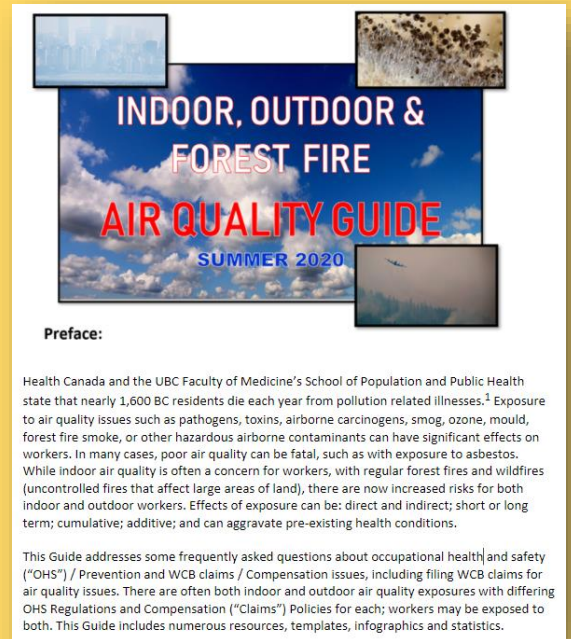
<https://cupe.ca/covid-19-health-and-safety-practices-0>

<https://cupe.ca/masks-and-facial-coverings>

<https://cupe.ca/general-health-and-safety-system-checklist-covid-19>

<https://cupe.ca/preventing-exposure-covid-19-sector-specific-resources>

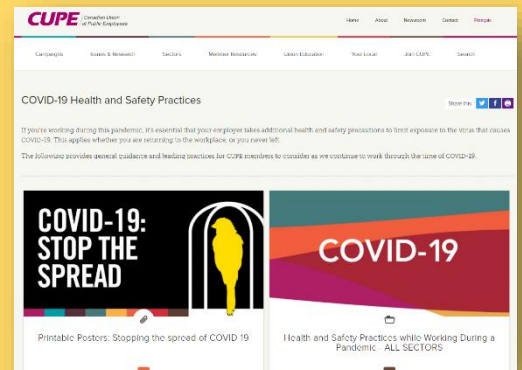
<https://cupe.ca/covid-19-cleaning-vs-disinfecting>



Preface:

Health Canada and the UBC Faculty of Medicine's School of Population and Public Health state that nearly 1,600 BC residents die each year from pollution related illnesses.¹ Exposure to air quality issues such as pathogens, toxins, airborne carcinogens, smog, ozone, mould, forest fire smoke, or other hazardous airborne contaminants can have significant effects on workers. In many cases, poor air quality can be fatal, such as with exposure to asbestos. While indoor air quality is often a concern for workers, with regular forest fires and wildfires (uncontrolled fires that affect large areas of land), there are now increased risks for both indoor and outdoor workers. Effects of exposure can be: direct and indirect; short or long term; cumulative; additive; and can aggravate pre-existing health conditions.

This Guide addresses some frequently asked questions about occupational health and safety (“OHS”) / Prevention and WCB claims / Compensation issues, including filing WCB claims for air quality issues. There are often both indoor and outdoor air quality exposures with differing OHS Regulations and Compensation (“Claims”) Policies for each; workers may be exposed to both. This Guide includes numerous resources, templates, infographics and statistics.



V. Other Resources and Links:

Government of B.C. Air quality advisories <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/air/air-quality/air-advisories>

Government of Canada Public Weather Alerts for British Columbia

https://weather.gc.ca/warnings/index_e.html?prov=bc