



INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS LOCAL 230

December 9th, 2020

Joe O'Rourke
Vice President & General Manager, VSL
825 Admirals Road
Victoria, BC V9A 2P1

Re: Mask Mandate Order

The IBEW Local 230 is following up with the Public Health Officer's (PHO) **mask mandate order** issued on November 19th, 2020, stating all British Columbians, 12 years of age and older, must wear a mask in many indoor settings – including the workplace. It has come to our attention that workplace violence and harassment has ensued in other industries relating to the new BC masking policy and is now occurring on construction jobsites. During these difficult times, we want to remind you that the Union is a resource and is here to advocate for workers' rights and safety. We **will not** tolerate such behaviour or contraventions relating to COVID-19 and the mandatory mask policy.

This order, and the law, defines a mask as a medical or non-medical mask that covers the nose and mouth. Face shields are not a substitute for a mask as there is an opening below the mouth. Exemptions to the mask order are (not including children):

- People with health conditions or with physical, cognitive, or mental impairments who cannot wear one
- People who cannot remove a mask on their own

Please note that any individual who is caught without a mask in an indoor public space or who refuses to comply with the BC mask policy can be fined \$230. Between August 21st and November 20th, twenty-five fines of \$2,300 were issued to owners or organizers contravening the PHO's orders. We are reminding you that WorkSafeBC holds employers responsible for providing signage on the mandatory mask policy and for informing all those coming into the workplace about the requirement.

Workers are responsible for abiding by the protocols and policies in their employer's COVID-19 Safety Plan, which should include the use of masks.

The BC Centre for Disease Control, BC Provincial Government and WorkSafeBC all emphasize that masks are now **required** in indoor public spaces, applying to both staff and customers. In other words, masks are not optional, but must be worn by law. We strongly advise that Seaman Managers and Supervisors follow the PHO's order, be vigilant and ensure their COVID-19 protocols are understood and being followed through effective training and supervision.



Established in Victoria in 1902

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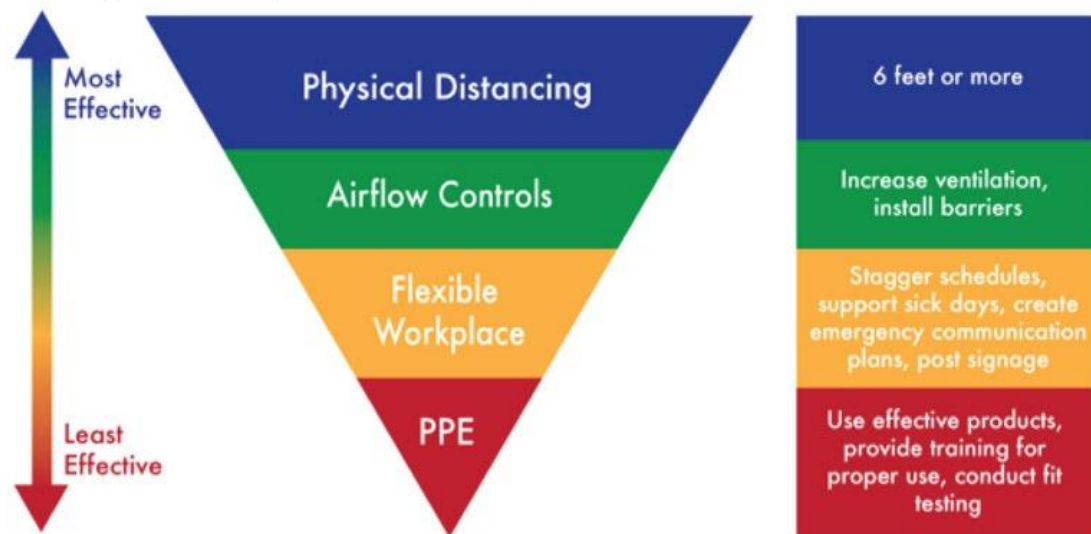
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As we have entered a second wave of COVID, employers and workers need to step up and do their part to protect themselves and those around them. It is not okay for members to be harassed for protecting themselves and their loved ones by wearing a mask. It is also unacceptable to pull down or take-off your mask in any circumstance where proper physical distancing of two meters apart cannot be maintained. The IBEW Local 230 believes that the Seaspan workforce should be masked from the moment they walk through the gates and remain masked until it is time for coffee break, lunch, or when employees have left the premises.

Work on board vessels is rarely ever isolated work. Shipyard Workers work alongside each other and do not have their individual workspaces. This is especially true for most marine work such as Seaspan where the working quarters are more confined. You cannot pass a fellow coworker without encroaching their 2-meter bubble.

Figure 1. The Pyramid of Prevention

Created by researchers in the Environment, Exposure Science and Risk Assessment Center (ESRAC) at the University of Arizona. Graphic by Rachel Larson, MEZCOPH public health student.



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The Pyramid of Prevention shows that the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and other illness is through physical distancing, as is highlighted in Seaspan's Exposure Control Plan. Knowing that masks are the last chance of defence against the virus, it is completely irresponsible and reckless to allow employees to work unmasked. Should one employee contract the virus and spread it to others, then the entire shipyard risks being shut down and forcing hundreds to become unemployed.

We are strongly urging Victoria Shipyard to be clear on the discipline to its employees who flout the proper use of masks, as well as those who bully and/or harass their co-workers for wearing a mask. We voiced our concerns in the recent past to Employee Relations Manager, Jerry Dardengo, regarding IBEW members being harassed at VSL for wearing their masks and for asking others to **mask up** while encroaching their workspace. In the 25 years of working in the Local 230 business office, I can't recall a time I recommended or "urged" an employer to spell-out the disciplinary actions to their employees in the event that they break company policy; but this is not policy, it is the law and there is just too much at stake.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this correspondence, please do not hesitate to contact me in our Victoria business office.

Yours sincerely,

Philip M. Venoit
Business Manager
Financial Secretary



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