



INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS LOCAL 230

July 26, 2024

WorkSafeBC
6951 Westminster Highway
Richmond, B.C.
V7C 1C6

IBEW Local 230 Vancouver Island Submission on Proposed Amendments to WorkSafeBC and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation (B.C. reg. 296/97, as Amended) Part 20, Washroom Facilities at Construction Sites

Background

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 230 (IBEW-230) was Chartered in Victoria on February 13, 1902. For over 122 years IBEW-230 has represented inside and outside electrical workers performing construction work on Vancouver Island and the adjacent Gulf Islands. To help emphasize the historical relevance of our organization. In 1903 Baseball, Motion Picture Audio, Harley Davidson, and Orville and Wilbur Wright took their first flight at Kitty Hawk.

We are older than flight.

And, we are older than most of the Island cities and towns we illuminated, heated and powered, and we have performed this work as professional construction electricians and powerline technicians. We brought early communications via telephone to these communities as well.



Established in Victoria in 1902

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Today, our over 1500 members work primarily as diversified construction electricians. They wire the light, heat, data/telecommunications, environmental controls, security systems, and fire alarm systems in the buildings all Vancouver Islander's work and live in.

The Construction Industry in British Columbia

The Construction Industry is inherently and extraordinarily challenging; a diverse and demanding supply chain of materials and equipment, much of which is produced globally, exposed to climate and the environment, the rain, snow, heat, cold and wind. Often a couple dozen highly specialized Trades, many with four-year College degrees otherwise known as Red Seal Trades, all performing their particular part of the building construction as defined by several legally written building codes, such as the Canadian Electrical Code developed by almost 200 Canadian subject matter experts, officially gazette by the Canadian Parliament and updated every 3 years and adopted by the British Columbian Legislature. The communications alone between 12 to 16 trades all working flat out in a highly competitive marketplace is challenging enough.

The one thing that shouldn't be challenging in construction is going to the bathroom, but for half a century, construction workers have had to urinate and defecate in plastic covered chemically treated feces buckets.

Better Sanitation for the Construction Industry

The Construction Industry as an Economic Driver

The Construction Industry makes up eight to ten percent of the British Columbian Gross Domestic Product. It is one of the predominant and largest economic drivers in our Province. The work is often transient, but the workers typically are not.



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Electrical workers move between jobs monthly, weekly or even daily, but they don't become baristas, bakers or bankers when they aren't working as construction electricians, they move on to their next construction project.

B.C.'s Businesses, Government, and all British Columbians solely depend on construction workers to build out their retail, office towers, infrastructure, hospitals, schools, condominiums, industrial warehousing, and industrial projects. The IBEW-230 is primarily made up of over 1500 construction electricians, wiring these buildings and homes all residents of Vancouver Island work and live in. In every one of those buildings and residences there are flush toilets and running water, which are illuminated, heated, and vented. This is the greatest irony in the work we perform. The workers that build out these bathrooms are not worthy of a bathroom themselves.

Community and Personal Health and Safety

COVID-19 served to highlight the lack of proper sanitation on the vast majority of construction jobsites. Right from the beginning of the outbreak, Dr. Bonnie Henry conveyed the importance to British Columbians of washing their hands as a primary means to limit the exposure to the illness brought on by the virus.

(We have attached the Local 230 Newsletters sent out in late March 2020 as attachment #1, and early July attachment #2 to our membership as proof to our commitment to our members' safety, and concern for their well-being and safety.)



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As conveyed in the 1st quarter newsletter, at the time I was BC's Building Trades President, and one of the 13 Vice-Presidents of the BC Federation of Labour. I was also the Canadian Representative of the Electrical Workers Without Borders – North America. In these roles, I was receiving information from around the world and helping form decisions provincially that would help shape our Provincial response on a myriad of issues, including notably construction sanitation. So, as you peruse the attachments, please understand they were prepared in real-time with more depth than was generally understood at that time.

During the COVID-19 outbreak we had Local 230 electricians with immunocompromised children self-isolating at home for two full years, who were scared that the wrong encounter could kill their child. We had Local 230 electricians that could not hold the hand of their loved ones as they passed isolated in Island hospitals. We had Local 230 electricians with immunocompromised parents and grandparents that could not visit their families, and worse we had members who succumbed to the virus and their lives cut short.

This isolation of our members and their loved ones was driven by the anxiety and common understanding that the construction industry had no safe-guards in place to help prevent the spread of a global pandemic, mostly due to its third-world treatment of the workers that make their living in it. The complete disregard for construction workers' safety from the spread of a viral contagion like COVID-19, even though we had the SARS outbreak in 2003 shortly after the Avian (Bird) Flu in 2005, then the Swine Flu in 2009, none of these served as any warning to change how the construction industry treated the health and safety of its workers.

With all of this in mind, when the Province of British Columbia demands construction workers are deemed "essential service workers", again we need to better position ourselves before the next virus infects our workforce population.



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United Nations Declaration

Fourteen years ago, on July 28th 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a historical resolution recognizing “the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights’ (A/RES/64/292). This was supported by Canada. This Declaration was made with the recognition that many third world countries had limited safe supply to clean drinking water and sanitation. In Canada we live in what could only be recognized as one of the most progressive countries in the world, with public schools offering free education, universal health care providing for our sick and elderly, an incredible number of supports funded by our Federal and Provincial Governments, social safety nets like Employment Insurance, the Canadian Pension Plan, Old Age Security, the General Income Supplement, and so many more, one would be hard-pressed to know most of them. And yet, when it comes to the simple safe sanitation for construction workers who are responsible for 10 percent of this great Province’s Gross Domestic Product and who provide the tax base for many of these programs, domestic and global. Those construction workers receive what would only be considered as third world conditions for their sanitation at work.

That’s not irony, it’s a travesty.

They. Those. Our construction workers. They get a used plastic covered bucket to urinate and defecate in. Well, this is just no longer acceptable, not that it ever really was. Clearly, it no longer is today.



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Our 3rd and last attachment #3 includes a couple of pictures of the same plastic porta-john taken earlier this year. Feel free to imagine yourself, having the urge to sit down, you had a buddy's chili the night before while watching the game, and well, it's finally caught up to you, and as you approach this porta-john in the heat we had yesterday the smell overwhelms you, or the rain we had "earlier this year", you open the door and hope that's mud on the floor

I implore you to consider the realities of these images. Notice the black mold growing on the inside door handle. Notice the piled-up feces in the green chemically treated waste. Does this look like your washroom at work? Is this the industry you would tell your son or daughter to go to work in?

These pictures were dropped off at a WorkSafeBC office four months ago and NOTHING was done about it. No site visit, no change.

We need change.

And we need it now.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Electrical Workers, the IBEW members of Local 230 on Vancouver Island.

Sincerely,

Phil Venoit
Business Manager/
Financial Secretary



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