

FOREST FIRES

Forest fires are raging again this year, and once again, Alberta's resilience is being tested. Reports estimate that as of May 7, 122,000 hectares have been lost. More fires have been reported, like in Saskatchewan, British Columbia, also in the Northwest Territories, where roughly 25,000 residents have already been evacuated. The surrounding communities are currently on high alert, fearing the worst.

These fires undermine the air quality, making physical work even more difficult for our members at Canada Post, TransForce International (TFI), and for all workers in these areas.

People with respiratory issues could be at risk and must monitor the situation closely.

Following the devastating forest fires in Fort McMurray in 2016 and in British Columbia in 2017, Canada Post and CUPW jointly adopted an operational policy to ensure that appropriate precautionary steps are taken in locations where poor air quality puts people's health at risk, based on Environment Canada's Air Quality Health Index (AQHI):

https://weather.gc.ca/airquality/pages/index_e.html

When air quality is poor, it is important to take preventive measures. Every day, Environment Canada's experts measure the AQHI across the country and publish on their website (see link above) the quality of outdoor air on a scale of 1 to 10. The higher the number, the greater the health risk.

Canada Post has suspended mail delivery in some communities in Alberta. However, in most locations affected by the forest fires, as well as in surrounding communities, postal workers are still delivering mail. It is therefore essential to ensure that the AQHI is assessed by members of the Local Joint Health and Safety Committee (LJHSC) or by health and safety representatives to ensure that everyone is working in a safe environment.

With the participation of a LJHSC member or a health and safety representative, Canada Post will implement the measures listed below based on the AQHI.

If the measured air quality reaches 10 or above (very high risk), based on the AQHI, Canada Post will apply the following measures:

- Each day, determine the preventive measures required to keep workers safe;
- Allow workers the autonomy to decide whether it is safe to deliver the mail;
- Employees who choose to deliver the mail will be provided additional support, including face masks, water, throat lozenges, etc.;
- Employees who choose not to deliver the mail will be provided with other work (inside duties, e-learning, safety audits, etc.). They may also contact neighbouring depots to see if they need any help.

Employees who feel unsafe doing their jobs due to the poor air quality should speak to their local health and safety representative or a union member of the LJHSC.

Workers can exercise their right to refuse to work under these conditions at any time. Urban members can refer to clause 33.13 of their collective agreement, and RSMCs and private sector unit members are governed by the health and safety provisions of the *Canada Labour Code*.

Any disagreement or issue that cannot be resolved by the LJHSC or the health and safety representative should be referred to the regional office.

We urge all members to **report any incident or discomfort** pertaining to poor air quality caused by forest fires.

In Solidarity,



Marc Roussel
National Union Representative
Health and Safety

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