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United Steelworkers union project aims to change legislation on diesel particulate exposure

Ontario mine workers are being exposed to harmful levels of diesel particulate: Ontario's Occupational Exposure Limit for diesel particulate must change to protect workers' health

SUDBURY (November 16, 2022) - The United Steelworkers Local 6500 has partnered with the Centre for Research in Occupational Safety and Health (CROSH) at Laurentian University and Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) to work to change Ontario's legislation for diesel particulate exposure in mining.

Diesel is a known human carcinogen, as such keeping exposure to a minimum is important. Currently, Ontario has the *highest* Occupational Exposure Limit (OEL) for diesel particulate in Canada, at $400\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$. Ontario mine workers are being exposed to harmful levels of diesel particulate. The USW Diesel Particulate Project is advocating for the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development to change the Mine OEL to $20\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, which is the level recommended by both Carcinogen Exposure Canada (CAREX) and the Occupational Cancer Research Centre.

Ontario lags behind the United States, Europe, and Australia in lowering its Occupational Exposure Limit, even though countries and provinces measure diesel particulate levels in different ways.

"Occupational disease and fatalities are underrecognized," said [Nick Laroche, president of USW Local 6500](#). "We know that Diesel Particulate can cause lung cancer and we know that miners have higher rates of lung cancer compared to other workers, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development needs to act to lower the OEL for diesel in mining to prevent these work-related fatalities."

There will be a townhall at the USW Local 6500 Union Hall (66 Brady St, Sudbury, ON) on December 8. Doors open at 6 p.m.; representatives from USW 6500, CROSH, and community volunteers will be available to answer or assist any WSIB requests including documenting exposures. Project and community leaders will give an overview presentation starting at 7 p.m. All are welcome to attend.

USW Local 6500 and CROSH have developed and distributed educational materials to raise awareness about the hazards of exposure to diesel particulate. They are encouraging workers and their family members to fill out WSIB exposure forms on their diesel exposure, with the goal of showing the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development the seriousness of this workplace hazard.

USW Local 6500 has representatives standing by via email and phone to answer questions and to help workers fill out the appropriate WSIB forms. Additionally, USW Local 6500 representatives are currently visiting local stores and shopping centres to raise awareness and answer questions from the public.

“I strongly encourage everyone to support the USW Diesel Particulate Project,” said Janice Martell, lead advocate for the McIntyre Powder Project. “Based on the current occupational exposure limit, mine workers can be exposed to 20 times more diesel particulate than the scientifically recommended level. Workers are urged to fill out exposure forms to protect their health.”

Background:

Diesel exhaust is made up of gas and particles. The particles are essentially the ‘soot’ of the exhaust. Diesel particles are small enough to enter the lungs during breathing and the smallest particles are able to get into the deepest parts of the lungs and can then enter the rest of the body. Within hours to days, exposure to high levels of diesel particulate can cause headaches; dizziness; irritation of eyes, nose, and throat; wet cough and phlegm; running nose and allergy symptoms; and asthma attack.

These short-term health risks can impact daily, quality-of-life for workers. Years of diesel particulate exposure can or may cause cancer; cardiovascular disease (CVD); idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF); chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)/emphysema; onset of asthma or worsening of asthma and worsening of diabetic comorbidities.

Educational materials and project details are available on the project website: www.dieselparticulateproject.com

The project is supported with funds from the USW Family and Community Education Fund.

About United Steelworkers 6500

United Steelworkers Local 6500 has proudly been representing hourly mine and mining plant workers in the Sudbury Basin for 60 years. The membership includes over 2,500 active members and nearly 6,600 pensioners. In 2020, the local opened a dialogue with Ontarian stakeholders and government officials, about the fatal health hazard of Diesel Particulate in our Ontario Mines. To date, the legislation has not changed.

-30-

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