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**THE UNITED FIRE FIGHTERS OF WINNIPEG**

Local 867 of the IAFF

Presentation to the Public Hearing on the Workers Compensation Act  
April 14 2004

(Sent by Fax)

## **UFFW PRESENTATION TO THE PUBLIC HEARING ON THE WORKERS COMPENSATION ACT**

The United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg represents approximately 880 firefighters, medical responders, fire prevention, training officers and mechanics in the City of Winnipeg.

In addition to fighting fires, these men and women are responsible for medical interventions, hazardous materials responses (including but not limited to chemical and biological disasters) also technical rescues (high angle, trench and water rescue).

As fire fighters serving the community, we generally are the first to respond to emergencies and are exposed to a multitude of known and in many cases unknown dangers to our health and well being. Many disabilities received while in the work force creep up on us silently such as cancers, respiratory ailments, spine and joint degeneration. Others are more sudden and visible such as amputations and physical deformities. Our quality of life is greatly reduced. Forgotten are many of those who sacrificed their health as part of the workforce. There is also an impact that goes far beyond the physical disability.

Therefore it is time that Workers Compensation Act be reviewed and changed to recognize the true sacrifice made by workers.

The following area some of the concerns that the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg would like to address:

### **1. Occupational Disease**

The Workers Compensation Act requires proof that the workplace has been the dominant cause of the illness before accepting responsibility. Fire Fighters are repeatedly exposed to carcinogens and toxins at any given fire, be it a garbage can or a chemical warehouse. Years and years of exposures take their toll, usually resulting in shortened quantity and quality of life.

There are Fire Fighters who have diagnosed with an occupational disease but because the illness has spread the dominant cause has yet to be determined if at all.

In most cases autopsies must be performed to determine the “dominant cause” before responsibility is accepted under the Workers Compensation Act.

**We believe that there must be some recognition by the Workers Compensation Act when the occupational disease cannot be determined as the dominant cause but is a contributing factor.**

## **2. Impairment Awards**

Fire Fighters who suffer an injury resulting in a permanent disability are compensated on a flat rate basis and the amount is then reduced for workers over the age of 45 by 2% a year for every year up to a maximum of a 40% reduction of the award. This amount does little to compensate for the scarring, loss of body parts and body functions. Those burdens are worn permanently 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

There are new young recruit who loss a finger in a training accident and was given \$500.00 compensation. That loss to such young individual is not fair compensation.

**We therefore believe the impairment awards are not fair compensation and must be changed to reflect the loss incurred by the worker. Furthermore the benefit reductions of 2% per year for workers over the age of 45 must be removed.**

## **3. Surviving Spouse Benefits**

Under the Presumptive Bill 5 there have been Fire Fighters who have died and their claims accepted.

The surviving spouse is given a wage replacement for 5 years after the death. In the one recent case the surviving spouse was under 50 years of age. The fact that the surviving spouse not only has to deal with the tragic loss an sacrifice of their loved one, but will have to deal with the concerns of her financial security in the future.

**We believe that the 5 year limit on benefit payments for a surviving spouse must be removed.**

In closing

There is an old saying “ a fair days pay for a fair days work”.

All we are asking for is “fair compensation for the injuries and losses incurred at work”.

Thank you,

Submitted by Robert Labossiere

UFFW Secretary Local 867 on behalf of the proud members of UFFW