

## NOTES

### WorkSafeBC Hearings

My name is Karen Abramsen.

Thank-you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today. I will be speaking on the changes to the working alone and the young worker training regulations. I am speaking on behalf on myself and the North Okanagan Labour Council. The North Okanagan Labour Council recently passed a resolution supporting the changes to WorkSafe BC to implement a regulation that addresses potential violence that workers face working alone late at night.

I am including in my written submission, the specific resolution that the NOLC passed as well as the planned follow up that we planned to take to ensure the regulations are implemented.

*BECAUSE surveys of gas station workers in British Columbia show us that late night workers face the very real threat of violence, injury and death; and BECAUSE there are well-known solutions recommended by health and safety agencies, supported by police, and already implemented by some employers in the gas station and convenience store industries, and are widely supported by employees based on their own experiences; and BECAUSE the current BC health and safety regulations do not adequately protect these workers; and BECAUSE it is WorkSafeBC's responsibility to protect all workers in British Columbia; THE NORTH OKANAGAN LABOUR COUNCIL supports the B.C. Federation of Labour in demanding WorkSafeBC to implement a regulation that addresses the potential violence workers face working alone late at night and that would require employers to:*

- \* keep the doors locked between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am;*
- \* employ two people between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am; or*
- \* install physical barriers and/enclosures made of bullet-resistant material; and*
- \* implement a 24-hour pay before you pump policy for all gas stations throughout the province.*

*THE NORTH OKANAGAN LABOUR COUNCIL will also make presentation to and seek the support of the local MLAs, MPs, municipal councillors, and local government officials and call on the government to ensure that WorkSafeBC implement these regulations.*

This is one of the reasons I am here today.

The second reason is because I am a worker rep on the EI Board of Referees and we have heard cases from young women who have quit jobs due to lone worker safety concerns.

One particular appeal involved a young woman working alone at a private liquor outlet. Although the employer had staff in bar next door the security camera had not been functioning for some time & she was being harassed by a particular customer. She tried to explain her concerns to the employer but was brushed off. As a result she quit and was then denied benefits because the regulations regarding her safety were not strong enough to support her concerns when she tried to approach her employer. With the new proposed regulations, I believe the employer will have to take her concerns more seriously.

Also, I was recently at a private liquor out let on Queensway Ave which is close to downtown and can attract questionable clientele. She was alone at 10:30pm. When I asked the very young woman about this, she advised me there was a emergency button and that the police would be there quickly. In my mind I thought... if you get to the button and if the client doesn't have a weapon.

In closing, on behalf of the North Okanagan Labour Council, I would like to thank the Board for putting the regulation forward and while it is a great first step, we would hope even more protective measures for workers in these high risk worksites.

*As noted in our resolution we would like to see:*

1. 24 hour pay before you pump
2. the Board to also change the violence regulation to make employers
  - a) lock the doors after 10:00 –6:00 or
  - b) provide workers with a bulletproof physical barrier or
  - c) have two people on during the late night shift

We also want to acknowledge the work that WorkSafe BC has done in gas stations inspections and improving enforcement.

Also, we are pleased to see the introduction of the Young and New Worker Regulation that is also an important step in improving conditions for these workers.

At our National Day of Mourning, I am always sad to hear from parents & family of young workers who have been killed on the job. These deaths can be prevented with

better on the job orientation to safety and training in safe working practices. Many employers won't do it unless forced to by WorkSafe BC. All workers are entitled to know what the hazards are on a job, and the employer has a responsibility to provide them with this information.

This proposed regulation states that an orientation must occur prior to beginning work to inform workers of their rights and potential risks. Three items that have been excluded from this list and are to be covered in the second week or as soon as practicable (in section 3.23 (3)):

1. The employer health and safety program,
2. WHIMIS information and
3. Contact information on the Health and Safety committee.

I would like to recommend that all of the 3.23 (3) a, b and c be moved to 3.23 (2) as I see no reason to exclude these very important aspects in workers safety.

The unfortunate death of one of these young workers, Grant DePatie, who worked alone at a gas station late at night was preventable.

Some suggested amendments to the proposed regulations might include the provision that the current language be changed to "an employer must require that customers prepay for petroleum products" prepay should be in all service stations for 24 hours, and not just urban areas".

And many incidents of Gas and dash occur during the day. The transaction occurs when individuals put petroleum into their vehicles and then instead of purchasing the goods, they leave without payment.

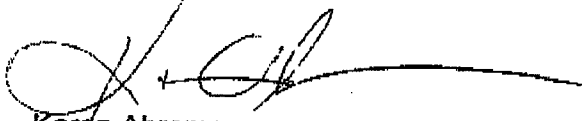
When a gas and dash occurs the workers will likely feel responsible for the loss. Even though employers may have a no chase policy, the message the employee might ultimately feel is that it is somehow their fault.

The 24 hour pre-payment regulation is designed to prevent any gas and dashes from occurring. The result of requiring prepayment will take away any illegal requirement that employers will put on workers to chase after the customers who commit theft.

While pre-payment, whether it is 10:00 pm - 6:00 am or 24 hour, is a step towards making gas stations safer, it does not address all of the reasons that people are being faced with violence and fear in the workplace.

I would like to thank the Board for acknowledging that this is not enough and for considering that it is not just the gas-and-dashes that puts workers at risk. There are numerous hazards that are facing late night workers. I look forward to seeing the regulations that are going to put forward in the New Year that will ensure the safety of all late night workers. Having two people on shift at all times would also lessen the risk to the workers. It would serve as a deterrent as well as having a second person present if something were to happen.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen Abramsen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen Abramsen

North Okanagan Labour Council