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Building Trades reiterate need to adhere to COVID-19 workplace safety protocols

(Toronto, ON) “In recent days, we’ve seen an uptick in COVID-19 construction worker infections, and this is concerning” said Patrick Dillon, Business Manager of the Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario. An outbreak at the Michael Garron hospital construction site in Toronto has resulted in 15 construction workers testing positive for COVID-19, prompting contractors to send workers home.

“These latest infections should remind everyone involved that workplace safety protocols must strictly be followed by all parties including owners, contractors, and workers, with visible and robust enforcement from the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development,” stressed Dillon.

“At the beginning of the year, when the construction industry was declared to be an essential service, we established COVID-19 workplace safety protocols to keep workers safe and to keep jobsites open,” explained Dillon, adding that “our message was, and continues to be, that workers who have legitimate concerns about getting infected should stay home. Having said that, the expected vaccine against COVID-19 should not deter people from wearing masks, practicing physical distancing, and maintaining good hygiene on worksites.”

“While every single COVID-19 infection is worrisome, overall numbers show that Ontario’s construction industry has largely contained the spread of the virus,” said Dillon, explaining that “in the last month, the province has seen close to 50,000 new infections while there have been 70 reported cases of Building Trades workers testing positive for COVID-19 in Ontario in that time, accounting for 0.1% of cases. Thanks to the diligence of our workforce and proactive steps taken by employers, we’ve seen reasonable success. This is contrary to some TV reports suggesting that construction is ranked second, behind the manufacturing sector, in the number of COVID-19 cases.”

“The feedback we have received shows that the minimum requirements outlined in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* are not sufficient to ensure safe workplaces, especially during an infectious pandemic like the one we’re seeing,” noted Dillon. “Industry should adhere to maximum, not minimum requirements, such as those outlined in our safety protocol, including immediate disclosure when an infection takes place.”

“Numbers can escalate very quickly and we must do better by continuing to co-ordinate our efforts with employers, government, and public health authorities. We all have a major responsibility to ensure worker safety and to minimize the spread of the virus in the construction workplace,” concluded Dillon.

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