



YUSA - Health and Safety Committee July 2016 Report

Inspections

As required by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the committee has been conducting regular inspections of buildings across campus. During inspections committee members talk with members, document health and safety concerns, and make recommendations to management.

Since the beginning of the year committee members have inspected the following buildings:

Osgoode Professional Development Centre	Center for Fine Arts
Miles Nadal Management Centre	Centre for Film and Theatre
Central Utilities Building	York Lanes
Physical Resources Building	York Lions Stadium
Chemistry Building	York Stadium
Winter's College	Bethune College
Founder's College	Central Square
HNES	Vari Hall
Bergeron Centre for Engineering Excellence	4747 Keele

Health and Safety Issues

At any time there are a number of items that are being dealt with by the committee. Below are a sample of several issues that we have worked on recently. Full minutes detailing what is discussed at the Joint Health and Safety Committee are available on YU Link.

Ergonomics

Musculoskeletal Injuries and complaints of pain related to performing work duties continue to be an all too common occurrence. When we do our monthly inspections of buildings we invariably find workers who are complaining of pain that is caused or aggravated by ergonomic factors in the workplace.

I've been concerned that instead of training workers in person as to how to make their workplace ergonomically safe before they are injured the employer has instead elected to put this information online in what appears to be a cost saving measure.

This presents several problems, first most workers don't know this information is available or where to find it, and secondly and more importantly, reading a website is never going facilitate learning as effectively as having someone there to help you in person. The employer has advised us that they have limited resources to deal with this issue. It has been our perception that the employer is often reactive, rather than proactive when dealing with musculoskeletal injuries.

In response to this, at the Joint Ergonomics Committee, YUSA has put forward a proposal to have staff in every area trained in ergonomics and to have this person act as a first point of contact for workers in that area. While we are still working on the details we are hoping to start a pilot project in September.

The goal is to have people trained in every area who can proactively advise people on how to set up their workstations and adjust their chairs and advise workers how to get additional help if necessary.

Psychological Health and Safety

For over a year the YUSA Health and Safety Committee has pressed the employer to update its health and safety policy to include psychological health and safety. I'm happy to report that in May, the Board of Governors approved changes to the policy that were reviewed by the committee. While this is a high level policy document it's an important first step to have the governing body of the university formally recognize psychological safety of workers as a priority.

This year several members of the committee completed training regarding how to implement the Psychological Health & Safety Standard in the workplace. We are seeking to develop our competency in this area so that we can contribute effectively on policy decisions.

We have met with the co-chairs of the Mental Health Steering Group repeatedly and stated that we want to be active participants in this process and be involved at the decision making level. Currently there are no union officials involved with this group, however management has indicated that more union involvement will be incorporated going forward.

There has been a concern that mental health related efforts would be directed primarily at students, however management has indicated that they strongly agree that any efforts on this front must include support for both staff and students. I have repeatedly and strongly conveyed the importance of having union participation in the formulation and execution of any policies or efforts that pertain to mental health and I am hopeful that we will be allowed greater participation into these efforts in future.

Fume Hoods

Fume hoods are devices that are used mostly in laboratories to suck any vapours from chemicals away from workers and vent them outside the building. Several years ago investigation and recommendations made by YUSA committee members resulted in all of these devices being inventoried and a program be put in place to ensure these devices are checked each year by an independent testing company to ensure that they are functioning properly. All fume hoods should have a sticker on them indicating when they were last tested for airflow. If you find a fume hood that was tested more than a year ago please let us know so we can follow up.

YU Link

Recently most of the university's documentation related to Health and Safety on the old "Department of Occupational Health and Safety" website was removed for migration to YU Link.

After many fruitless and frustrating searches through YU Link we were surprised to discover that much of that information was never moved and so is currently inaccessible.

A cornerstone of the Occupational Health and Safety Act is that "Workers have the right to know" and yet here we have a case of information pertaining to health and safety being removed and made inaccessible. We have raised this issue and received assurances from management that this information would be restored. However we are disappointed that this migration was not done with more forethought and planning that would have ensured that the community have uninterrupted access to this information.

We have also requested access to the contents of the old site so that after the migration is completed we can check to ensure that all the information moved over and nothing was missed or omitted.

Central Square Podium

The employer has been engaged in a multi-year project to renovate the podium above central square. Part of this work has involved applying hot tar to waterproof the roof. Unfortunately for workers in central square this has on many occasions caused strong odours to permeate their offices, and the work in general has resulted in noise and vibration. An additional complication arose when as a result of the work, water entered the building and a significant mold problem arose that required abatement and repair.

We have raised this issue repeatedly at our joint meetings with management, and I have also met on site with the project manager as well as workers in the area.

When work is being done with hot tar the employer has advised us that:

- Air intake vents (which are located on the roof) that are located near the tarring are shut down, and covered with a tarp.
- The tar cooker is placed at a location downwind of any other intake vents
- Workers in the area are notified when work will be done

This has been an ongoing and difficult issue to deal with as despite these measures there are times when fumes still enter the building. If workers in the area still experience issues they can contact us and we will investigate.

York Lanes – Renovations

Two large renovations projects have recently been done in York Lanes:

1) A large portion of the bookstore has undergone renovation, however the bookstore has remained open during the renovation. For workers in the bookstore this has meant being in close proximity to construction work that creates noise, dust, and vibration. It is our understanding that all CPM members were relocated to other areas or buildings for the duration of the construction while YUSA members have had to continue to work in this area. Management has informed us of the following:

- Workers that have identified as having respiratory sensitivities have been offered to be relocated to other areas, and if further workers come forward they will also be relocated
- In instances where work has created excessive noise the constructor has been told to stop work and perform it after hours. If any worker reports to their supervisor that excessive noise is being experienced then that work will be stopped.
- Management has requested wet wiping and mopping from facilities to deal with dust and also made an effort to seal off areas where work is being done.

2) The exterior sheathing of the building was refurbished. This resulted in loud hammer drilling and associated noise and vibration that occurred directly adjacent to YUSA members' offices. The notification describing the work indicated only that there would be "general noise" and some workers did not receive a notification before work was being done.

York Lanes is managed by the York University Development Corporation which is a wholly owned subsidiary of York University. The committee has made a number of recommendations to YUDC to ensure that workers in their spaces receive the same protection as other areas on campus and are awaiting their response.

Indoor Air Quality Testing

If the employer is conducting testing of indoor air quality (humidity, temperature, volatile organic compounds, etc.), the Occupational Health and Safety Act allows for a union representative to be present at the beginning of the testing. If you are aware of testing that will be conducted in your area and you want a union representative present please let us know!

Finally, I would like to thank my co-chair Paula Gowdie-Rose as well as committee members Sandy Bell, Scarlett Farquhar, Wanda Hollingshead, Nicole Joseph, Mathew Kensett, Amber Pennington, Zanita Shamselarijani, Krystina Strickler, Dan Tilling, and Kimberly Wilson for their tireless efforts to create a safer workplace.

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