



Steward News

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Introduction - The Committee

The Article 29 Wildfire Sub-Committee (Wildfire Committee) reviews and resolves union-related matters through regular meetings between the employer and union. From the union side, the BCGEU-appointed committee members are:

- **Dimitri Vaisius** - *Co-Chair of the Wildfire Committee and Local 2001 First Vice-Chair and steward, Wildfire Officer - South Island Fire Zone*
- **Sandra Johnston** – *local 1211 First Vice-Chair and steward, Dispatch Supervisor PGFC*
- **Riel Allain** – *local 2010 steward, IA Crew Leader (Parattack) - Fort St. John*
- **James Ritco** – *local 2009 Steward, Wildfire Technician-Boundary Fire Zone*
- **Nathan Sharp** – *BCGEU Staff Representative*

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Do you have a matter you would like to bring forward? Contact your Wildfire Committee by email Wildfire@bcgeu.ca.

The union Wildfire Committee members represent the three components (6, 12, 20) within the BCWS.

The Committee's scope encompasses matters such as (1) workplace issues affecting either party, (2) correcting issues causing grievances or misunderstandings, (3) resolving issues from local OH&S committees, (4) organisational health concerns relating to recruitment and retention, (5) discussions on how to improve service to the public, and (6) any issue, other than a specific grievance, that relates to the maintenance of good relations between the employer and the BCGEU. If you are having issues or concerns in your local that we should be aware of, please contact us by email (wildfire@bcgeu.ca).

From the employer's side, current membership includes Rob Schweitzer (co-Chair), Yana Stratemeyer, Dave Flemming, and Mary Myers.

Recent Topics

These are the issues the were are discussing or addressing at the committee:

1. Seasonal Regular Status

There are ongoing issues related to the Seasonal Regular offer process. For instance, offers are not provided within the recall timeline, seniority hours are unclear, and overall process ambiguity. There are committee members working

with the employer to improve this process for future offers.

2. Is Seasonal Regular Status Right for You?

While we cannot speak to your specific case, or that of a member, there are certain advantages to seasonal regular status:

If you are currently K status: Accepting seasonal regular status means that the whole of the Main Agreement applies to you (the same as regular full-time employees), unlike auxiliaries. This includes vacation days, sick days, short-term illness and injury benefits, long-term disability benefits, all types of leave, access to the Pacific Leaders scholarship, and precedence over auxiliaries for recall and seniority (like winter deployments and contract extensions).

However, you should be ready to complete the 6-month contract, not doing so would disqualify you from receiving long-term disability benefits. The employer may also be more reluctant to approve early layoff (for school) than they would for auxiliaries.

If you are currently M status: The advantages of accepting seasonal regular status are less obvious than if you are K status – since M status grants you many of the benefits of a regular status employee. However, M status auxiliaries remain lower in seniority than any

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seasonal regular employee (for winter deployments or contract extensions, this becomes relevant). Further, M status does not grant long term disability benefits, educational leave, or access to the Pacific Leaders Scholarship.

There are advantages to M status, however: vacation days can be rolled over from one year to the next. Further, if you are to accept winter work in different branch or ministry to BCWS, you would maintain your M status in your new auxiliary position - this is not the case as a seasonal regular status employee.

Remember that to retain your M status, you must work a minimum of 1200 in 26 pay periods (just over 8 months of work). Otherwise, you go to Partial M status where you retain the equivalent to K status and vacation entitlements.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list covering applicable to any case, but should help you provide members with a better idea of what to expect.

3. Benefits During Winter Work

It was brought to the Wildfire Committee that there was a loss of benefits for long term auxiliary employees (i.e. Seasonal Regular, M or K status) while working for FNLROD during the winter in auxiliary positions. Several grievances were filed. Based on the language in the MOU 35, we believe

that a successful outcome for these grievances is likely.

4. ETO Bank Imbalances & Payouts

Most staff across the Province are still experienced several issues with their Earned Time Off (ETO). This includes miscalculated ETO within My Time and Leave. Revisions were made in 2020 to allow staff to withdraw up to 35 hours of negative ETO.

For full time staff, it is encouraged that prior year ETO accumulated in 2020 is used as time off. The intent of the bargained language in the Component 20 agreement is that employees can take time off with their banked ETO (rather than take no time off and receive a large payout).

Also, a reminder that the employer can make an employee to take time off if their ETO bank is above 70 hours.

5. Initial Attack Start Time Misinterpretation - Resolved

In 2020 there was a misinterpretation relating to Initial Attack Crew shifts and start times that did not align with the Hours of Work provision in the Component 20 Agreement. This issue was resolved, but does not go without recognition that hardship was caused to employees. If future interpretations of hours of work language does not align with the appropriate component agreement please notify the Wildfire Committee.

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6. WFX-Fit Test

The Saskatchewan Court of Appeals found the WFX-Fit test to be discriminatory towards women and older men. They found there was no evidence to suggest that those above the cut-off time (largely women and older men) “are incapable of performing the work of a wildland firefighter in a safe and efficient manner.” Accordingly, the union suggests that if members were to fail the WFX-fit test in the upcoming year, they should grieve as this test has been found to be discriminatory by a Canadian Provincial Court of Appeals. For the interested, read the decision [here](#).¹

7. COVID: Hours of Work Provisions (MOA)

The Memorandum of Agreement related to Hours of Work for ETO employees while working from home has been extended until April 30th, 2021. This MOA offers the option to shift to a 7 hour/day ETO schedule if working from home. A reminder that this MOA does not force work units to switch to a 7 hour ETO schedule, but merely offers the possibility to switch if mutually agreed to. If an employee agrees to this temporary schedule, all hours worked in excess of 7 should be paid at overtime rates.

8. Other business

¹ If link does not work. google search the following: SGEU v Saskatchewan (Environment), 2018 SKCA 48

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IDIR extensions: The Office of the Chief Information Officer prevents IDIRs being extended past the contract end dates for security reasons. Both the union and the employer know this is a problem for membership who, as a result of this policy, can no longer access their Time and Leave portal or their e-diaries. The employer will attempt once again to seek exemptions from this policy for affected members.

E-diaries and payroll: As an ongoing issue, the union reminded the employer of ongoing delays and errors in the processing of e-diaries and payroll. We expect an update from the employer at our next meeting.

Meeting minutes: The minutes from the article 29 Wildfire Sub-Committee are available on the intranet once they have been approved by both parties (which occasionally may take time).

9. Hours of work Schedules for Dispatchers

Dispatchers are being asked to switch to 7-day coverage year-round. This was asked last summer due to COVID then pulled back in the fall. The employer is wanting to standardize schedules throughout the province. Potential options and a proposed framework are being proposed to the union.

10. Next Meeting

The next Wildfire Committee meeting with the employer is scheduled in the first week of March. If you think something should be on the agenda, let us know (wildfire@bcgeu.ca)!

For reference, at minimum we have four pre-scheduled meetings with the employer per year. In addition to those, we schedule further meetings as necessary.

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